

Who Cares?

**A Compilation of Human Service Issues in
Cambridge and North Dumfries**

Prepared for the Current Government Restructuring Process

Revised June 12, 2000

Prepared by Gloria DeSantis, Executive Director
Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

In Consultation with Human Service Providers
that Provide Services in Cambridge and North Dumfries

PREAMBLE

The mission statement of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries reads as follows,

As a voluntary independent voice, the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries will actively participate in building and strengthening our community through research, analysis, facilitation and education.

This paper is but one example of our work to that end. This document was prepared because we have heard very little about human service issues and community residents' quality of life questions in the restructuring discussions currently taking place. We understand that the Provincial Government has certain guiding criteria for communities to use in their restructuring processes, but we believe there are other equally-as-important criteria.

Through the variety of research projects over the years, we have discovered that service providers and community residents do indeed care about their communities and what is going on around them. The following 16 organizations believe the issues presented in this paper should be presented to elected officials for consideration in the restructuring process that is before us now:

Argus Residence for Young People
Cambridge Self Help Food Bank
Cambridge Volunteer Bureau
Cambridge Out of the Cold
Canadian Red Cross
Family Services of Cambridge and North Dumfries
Greenway-Chaplin Community Centre
Hespeler Village Neighbourhood Association
Lutherwood CODA
PATER Program (Persons Assisting in Transporting Elderly Residents)
Preston Heights Community Group
Scouts Canada
United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries
Women's Crisis Services
YMCA of Cambridge
YWCA of Cambridge

We would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have.

1. BACKGROUND

Who Cares? Actually, it appears that quite a few people care. At a variety of meetings during the past year as well as innumerable, individual discussions with local human service providers, it has come to our attention that there are human service issues from Cambridge and North Dumfries that require public discussion and resolution during the government restructuring process. Many local human service providers asked the Social Planning Council what it could do about these issues.¹ This document is an attempt to

- highlight the issues that have been brought to our attention over the past few years through our various research projects,
- offer the community the opportunity to provide feedback on these issues, and
- ensure those responsible for restructuring regional and local governments receive this information to use in their deliberations.

The first step for us was to draft this document based on recent research. The second step was to distribute this document to human service providers in Cambridge and North Dumfries; it was released at a public meeting on May 9, 2000. A notice about the document was then faxed out to 65 human service organizations. We then gathered feedback from interested organizations and asked who was interested in having these issues brought to the discussions about government restructuring. The final step was to ensure the document makes its way to the appropriate places where restructuring discussions and decisions are being made. All of this was to happen before June 30, 2000 so the timeframe for us to facilitate some public discussions was very tight.

We understand that current discussions about government reform are focusing on “infrastructure” issues with the following guiding criteria: fewer municipal politicians; lower taxes; better, more efficient service delivery; less bureaucracy; and clear lines of responsibility and better accountability at the local level.

The Social Planning Council believes that this restructuring process should not only be about creating a system of local governance motivated only by saving money, decreasing taxes and reducing the number of politicians. The Council believes that restructuring should be used as an opportunity to make changes that would benefit people living in our communities and make the Region a better place to live, work and play – especially for the vulnerable people living among us. It is acknowledged that the sustainability of both a strong social environment and a strong economy are essential here.

2. LOCAL CONTEXT AND BRIEF HISTORY

The Social Planning Council has been involved in many studies over its 12 year history. The following list offers highlights of some of the many issues with which we have struggled over the years.

- Population growth in Cambridge and North Dumfries has increased by 22% between 1990 and 2000.²

¹ “Who Cares” is also being pursued by the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo. The two Social Planning Councils have had joint discussions about community well-being especially regarding the design and delivery of human services when government restructuring unfolds in Waterloo Region. Our Regional Joint Social Policy Working Group has been the vehicle for sharing data and knowledge.

² From Regional Municipality of Waterloo Planning and Culture Department, *1998 Waterloo Region Statistical Profile: Population and Households* (1998) and *Planning Information Bulletin: 1999 Year End Population Estimates* (March 7, 2000).

- Serious questions persist about equitable per capita funding in Cambridge and North Dumfries compared to the rest of the Region since the early 1990s.
- The recent downloading of services from the province to lower tier governments and the subsequent struggle to discern how to manage this locally is obvious.
- Serious cutbacks to many human service organizations since 1994 and 1995 have destroyed many services.³
- A continued increase in demand for organizations' services was noted in data collected and analysed in 1997 and again in early 2000.⁴

Social, housing and health services account for between 44% and 52% of operating expenditures in the Region between 1994 and 1998.⁵ Thus, we are talking about a significant amount of money – money that is usually directed to the most vulnerable people living in our communities.

3. ISSUES IN CAMBRIDGE AND NORTH DUMFRIES

In any restructuring exercise, the following issues require careful consideration if we are indeed to move toward healthier, more sustainable communities within the region. These issues relate directly to community residents' well-being; data were collected from residents as well as human service organizations.

3.1 Ensure local people's voices will be heard (inclusivity)

Recent research⁶ showed that both community residents and service providers were concerned about any potential reduction in access to local policy making and program/service development. There is also a need for ongoing public discussions about evolving, unmet community needs and community capacities to meet those needs. Public transportation for people who have disabilities is but one example of a system under reconstruction where it is not clear how local voices can participate in this process.

There is a need to ensure the participation of diverse peoples in planning and delivering human services. Our communities are not homogenous and a multitude of voices should be supported to participate in policy and program planning activities.

3.2 Strive for better balance between prevention and crisis intervention services

Results from recent research are mixed. Some human service providers believe that with the funding cuts of 1995 and 1996 came reductions in prevention and health promotion programs⁷ and that we have not yet bounced back. Others believe that our community is achieving a better balance between crisis intervention and prevention programs.⁸ We should work to ensure that prevention programs are offered in our local communities.

³ Evidence reported in *1997 Cambridge and North Dumfries Social Services: Inventory, Impacts of Cuts and Implications* (1998) produced by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

⁴ Data collected and analysed in partnership with the City of Cambridge that resulted in *Our Common Future, Our Progress Report to Cambridge City Council* (Jan. 2000). Produced by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

⁵ *Regional Municipality of Waterloo Financial Report, 1998*.

⁶ *Our Common Future, Our Progress Recommendations to Cambridge City Council* (Jan. 2000) and the supplementary data collected from human service providers and community residents.

⁷ *ibid.*, *1997 Cambridge and North Dumfries Social Services: Inventory ...*

⁸ *Our Common Future, Our Progress Report to Cambridge City Council* (Jan. 2000)

3.3 Integrate human services with other services in a better way

Our Common Future, Our Progress research showed that community residents were concerned about how disconnected certain programs appeared to be from each other. School programs for children with special needs and their potential link with non-profit, community organizations, mutual aid groups and physician specialists was a common theme. Supports for families with autistic children was one example that was discussed at length at some of the focus groups with residents held in the fall of 1999.

3.4 Recognize the critical role of volunteers in the non-profit sector

The data collected to update *Our Common Future*, revealed incredible community capacity in Cambridge. The volunteer base for service delivery and informal care giving is strong, but some data show some strains (e.g., volunteers are 'burning out', many are caught in the 'sandwich generation' and there is much competition for volunteers). In general, human service providers thought that the role of volunteers in Cambridge over the past five years has changed, noting the following: shorter time commitments and more responsibility for volunteers; many volunteers want a short-term commitment and specific roles to enhance their skills; volunteers are often doing (or expected to do) work previously done by a paid employee; with many government cutbacks, volunteers are expected to take on staff roles; and staff must put in more volunteer hours to keep up.

Data from a 1997 study completed by the Social Planning Council showed that a number of organizations would be increasing their participation of volunteers for program delivery in order to deal with funding cuts – even though it takes time and resources to recruit, train and celebrate volunteers.⁹

3.5 Consider decentralization of human services

Eliminating duplication of services is important, yet multiple access points to services and programs are key to a healthy community. People need to have choices about services and to be able to find these services close to home. For some people, trying to get to services is a severe challenge as they juggle children, the public transit system schedule and the costs of getting around their community.

During the past few years, more neighbourhood organizations have formed and offered programs in neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood organizations are best known for their ability to mobilize community residents to identify, design and implement appropriate, neighbourhood-based programs.

Discussions in focus groups and at public meetings reinforced the important support role that neighbourhood organizations have played in the lives of many people (e.g., for parents at home full time with their toddlers, for children, and for teens) and that the City of Cambridge should continue its support of neighbourhood organizations. Concerns were expressed about the need to have the entire city served by a variety of neighbourhood-based programs. There is also a need to recognize the importance of outreach work in connecting people to services and programs.

The Social Planning Council helped to conduct another study in collaboration with Waterloo Region Community Legal Services. Many suggestions were made to enhance the delivery of

⁹ *ibid.*, 1997 *Cambridge and North Dumfries Social Services: Inventory*

legal aid services in the Cambridge area. The most pervasive though was the suggestion to decentralize legal aid services in Cambridge in the form of satellite services where people could drop in for information and advice, and/or offering legal aid services within community agencies.¹⁰

3.6 Accessibility

Although distance from services was discussed as an issue and is outlined above under decentralization, other issues of accessibility have been discussed in our various research projects.

Data from the three major studies already cited above show that many human services are still not accessible for people with hearing impairments, visual impairments, physical disabilities, or mental disabilities (including psychiatric, cognitive and developmental disabilities). Some research participants indicated concerns about the lack of “plain language” service information. The restructuring process before us should permit us all the opportunity to work toward human service enhancements in order to maximize people’s access to services.

3.7 Outreach is an important tool for connecting people to services

For those of us working within the system of human services, there may appear to be some logic to its design, but for those who are unfamiliar with this system, attempts to navigate it can be extremely frustrating. A preliminary evaluation report included a review of some literature about the effectiveness and role of outreach in connecting people to services.¹¹

“The literature suggests that limited or non-existent networks of personal support are one of the factors undermining self-sufficiency. Outreach work play a critical role in reconnecting people to social support. Building a trusting relationship is often the first step in enabling someone to obtain other forms of support and tackle other important issues” (p. 7).

3.8 Be careful about instituting user fees

The 1997 study on the social service system and the impacts of funding cuts showed that many service providers were concerned about implementing or increasing user fees because people may not be able to pay for these programs.¹² With a persistent level of poverty despite a decreasing rate of unemployment over the last few years and questions about the nature of the jobs that are being created, concerns about asking people to pay for services – or pay more for services - appear to be well-founded.

3.9 Respect for people’s sense of community

Data collected for *Our Common Future, Our Progress* reveals an interesting paradox. On one hand people believe that attachment and sense of identity to one’s community or neighbourhood is positive because people tend to look after or “watch out” for each other. Yet others believe that this attachment creates too much competition and rivalry between neighbourhoods/communities. Twenty-five years ago, Cambridge used to be four distinct communities – Blair, Galt, Hespeler, Preston (in alphabetical order, or course). Today, these

¹⁰ *Legal Aid Issues in Cambridge and North Dumfries* (Aug. 1999). Produced by the Social Planning Council in collaboration with Waterloo Region Community Legal Services.

¹¹ *CAPACITY for Growth: Preliminary Evaluation Report* (Jan. 2000). Prepared by the Social Planning Council and Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

¹² *ibid.*, 1997 *Cambridge and North Dumfries Social Services: Inventory*

four communities have been collapsed into one city called Cambridge. Data show that Cambridge has a history of “people supporting people”.

It is noteworthy that people in every urban area naturally divide themselves into smaller communities (e.g., neighbourhoods). These smaller communities are more familiar to people. Cambridge is not so different from these other urban areas. Many Cambridge residents have said publicly, “despite these problems (concerns), I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else”.

3.10 Connection and balance between formal and informal caring

At the annual Waterloo Region Healthy Communities forum on April 29th, 2000, titled *Global Storm Local Rainbow*, there was significant discussion about the importance of both formal and informal systems of caring for enhancing community well-being. With recent changes in public policies at the federal and provincial government levels, it is critical that we not lose this balance and place inappropriate strain on informal care giving. Recent data shows that women already provide most of the informal caring in our communities.¹³

3.11 Support innovation and partnerships

When human service providers were asked if new and innovative partnerships have emerged since 1994, 71% of the 38 respondents said “yes”. Many examples were cited. Work within neighbourhood-based settings was mentioned many times. The recent work that has gone into providing human services in Ayr is an example of providing services in a rural context that has required some different approaches than what has been used in urban contexts.

Respondents were also quick to point out that partnership building takes time, resources and creative thinking. It is not something that happens easily and spontaneously. We must all recognize these complexities as we attempt to design innovative human services with new partners.

3.12 Community Mapping Processes

Community mapping processes happen regularly around us. In the number of interrelated communities which comprise Cambridge and North Dumfries, there is constant questioning about the nature of needed social change.¹⁴ Local processes grounded in neighbourhoods that seek to identify, define and resolve local issues should continue to be supported.

4. CONCLUSION

We respectfully request that the issues raised in this paper be brought to the discussions about government restructuring. The well-being, health, sustainability, and safety of our community residents are at stake.

Clearly community residents and human service providers have roles to play in government restructuring. They have knowledge of community capacities and needs which must be brought to decision-making processes. Their voices, through papers like this one, should be heard. A healthy community is not possible without them.

¹³ Statistics Canada 1996 Census data available on Zephyr mapping software at the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

¹⁴ Examples include community capacity building research undertaken in 1998 by a number of the staffed neighbourhood organizations. *Our Common Future* research undertaken by the Social Planning Council also includes data about community capacities.