



**SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT REPORT  
SOCIAL PLANNING & ADMINISTRATION DIVISION**

**To:** Chair S. Strickland and Members of the  
Community Services Committee

**Report No:** SS-02-046  
**File Code:** S01-19

**Date:** August 13, 2002

**Subject: OVERVIEW OF "HOMELESS YOUTH IN WATERLOO REGION: A REPORT ON TWO PILOT PROJECTS"**

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

For Information Only

**REPORT:**

**1.0 The Research and Its Purpose**

The research report, "Homeless Youth in Waterloo Region: A Report on Two Pilot Projects" was prepared by the Cambridge and North Dumfries Social Planning Council in cooperation with staff at Argus Shelter for Young People and Reaching Our Outdoor Friends (ROOF). The research report summarizes the data gathered from the Youth Outreach Project funded through the Provincial Off the Street Into Shelter (OSIS) Fund and the Project Warmth temporary youth shelter funded through the Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund (PHIF). The research was undertaken to ascertain the scope of youth homelessness in Waterloo Region as well as the characteristics of this population in order to gain a greater depth of understanding and work towards improved programs and services within the Region.

**2.0 Limitations and Insights**

It is important to highlight both the limitations of this report as well as the insights that have been gained. In terms of limitations, it is possible the data may be over or under-reported as it was gathered largely from self-reports and some peer group situations. The data collection tools were in a pilot test phase and have since been clarified. Information provided by the youth was not verified (e.g. school attendance or involvement with Family and Children's Services) and some questions relied on youth's memory from a week or month previous. Youth were not randomly sampled but were either youth contacted by the Outreach Workers or youth who stayed at Project Warmth and were willing to participate in a focus group. This report simply provides a summary of the data from a limited sample and does not analyze the "why" of the data.

The research report does confirm that there are number of homeless youth in Waterloo Region. A total of 90<sup>1</sup> different youth were assigned a unique identifier from those contacted on the street or in a shelter between November 2001 and March 30, 2002. A preliminary review of the literature on youth homelessness indicates that the information gathered through this research report is similar to findings from other studies across North America.

It was found that of the youth surveyed, there was roughly a 60/40 male/female split. The greatest precipitating factor to being on the street was family conflict. Many of the youth reported that they were

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<sup>1</sup> While 90 youth were able to be assigned a unique identifier, there were a total of 45 different youth who stayed at Project Warmth during this time period and a total of 928 street contacts (598 of which were age 17 or younger) made by the Youth Outreach Workers during this time period.

not attending school, but were involved with Family and Children's Services and/or were involved with the criminal justice system. A large number had no identification. Most were staying with friends, in a shelter or in the family home within the previous night, week and month. It was interesting to note the lower levels of employment reported from those at shelters/drop-ins than those at-risk youth who attend school - 14% versus 37%. Also the average age of the school group was younger. Youth surveyed through the schools identified that at age 12, 13, and 14 they held jobs such as babysitting or a paper route which would be difficult to undertake for a young person who does not have stable housing.

The report confirms and reinforces that youth homelessness is a complex issue that requires supports along a continuum in order to provide flexibility and different options dependent on individual youth circumstances and stage of homelessness. Youth surveyed identified the following needs and desires:

- Food, clothing, transportation and showers
- Youth specific shelter (co-ed) with a harm reduction approach (low structure, flexible) in Kitchener and Cambridge
- 24 hour drop-ins and access to meals including a youth specific drop-in centre in Cambridge
- Staff at shelters and drop-in's understand street life and be well informed
- One-month stay limit at shelter
- More supports for youth who have been abused

It appears that the youth surveyed tended not to identify shelter as an immediate need because they had somewhere to stay (a friend's couch, emergency shelter, abandoned building etc.). However, this housing is often temporary, inadequate or unsafe. It is worth noting that the youth who accessed Project Warmth for longer periods of time (i.e. 20 nights or more) actually identified emergency/transitional shelter as a priority. While youth seem to be aware of services in their immediate area, the report highlighted that many of the youth surveyed were not well aware of all the services available to them throughout the Region.

### **3.0 Next Steps**

The Region's Youth Homelessness Coordinating Group (see Appendix 1 for a list of members) will use this research report to inform their continued work. In the early spring of 2003, a comprehensive report on youth homelessness that includes a literature review, further data from the projects, a gaps and strengths analysis of services in the Region, as well as recommended areas for action will be developed.

### **CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN:**

Regional support for this data analysis report addresses two priorities within the Corporate Strategic Plan:

- identifying service gaps and developing a local response
- ensuring appropriate interventions and services are in place for the
- vulnerable and at risk children, youth, adults, seniors within the community

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Both of these projects were funded under two separate provincial funds. Project Warmth (operated by Argus Residence) received \$50,666 through the Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund (PHIF) and the Outreach Worker project (supported by ROOF) received \$28,100 from the Off the Street and Into Shelter Fund (OSIS).

The PHIF was announced by the Province in 1999 as part of the package of funding to Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) to address homelessness. The Region received \$180,000 in funding under this initiative and Regional Council, over the past 4 years has approved a number of projects under this funding. Council is currently requesting that the Province increase this amount in light of the scope of the issue of homelessness in our community.

The OSIS funding, a newer addition to the Province's package of homelessness funding, was originally funded by the Province on a 100% basis or \$28,100 however the funding for subsequent years will be on an 80/20 basis. Through community consultation youth homelessness was identified as the priority for OSIS funding in 2001 and 2002.

The research report prepared by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries was funded by the Region through the one time allocation by Council to support planning initiatives at the regional level.

**OTHER DEPARTMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

This report will be shared with the Region's Interdepartmental Homelessness Strategic Planning Working Group.

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**APPROVED BY:** *Michael Schuster*, Commissioner of Social Services

**APPENDIX 1  
YOUTH HOMELESSNESS COORDINATING GROUP  
LIST OF MEMBERS**

Elizabeth Clarke  
Executive Director  
K-W YWCA

Marie Morrison  
Planning Associate and Working Group Chair  
Region of Waterloo

Debbie Clue  
SCPI Coordinator  
Region of Waterloo

Scott Norton  
Youth Planner  
Anishnabeg Outreach

Lee Fitzpatrick  
Director of Community Resources  
Waterloo Region Police Services, Community  
Relations Unit

Ron Poyntz  
Director of Operations  
Ray of Hope

James Hagglund  
Executive Director  
Salvation Army – Booth Centre

Deb Schlichter  
Executive Director  
House of Friendship

Tara Henderson  
Youth Services Worker  
Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo  
Region, Youth Services

Matt Shute  
Attendance Counselor  
Student Services  
Waterloo Catholic District School Board

Kathleen Hugli  
OSIS Outreach Worker  
c/o ROOF

Anna Soubliere  
OSIS Outreach Worker  
c/o ROOF

Lynn Macaulay  
Housing Services Coordinator  
Lutherwood CODA

Anne Tinker  
Executive Director  
Out of the Cold/Cambridge Shelter Corp

Rosanna Mateff  
Coordinator  
Betty Thompson Youth Centre/Safe Haven  
Shelter

Deb Henry  
Executive Director  
Marillac Place

Bruce Milne  
Executive Director  
ROOF

Eva Vlasov  
Executive Director  
Argus Residence for Young People