

REGION OF OTTAWA CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 14 October 1998

TO/DEST. Coordinator
Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Commissioner
Social Services Department

SUBJECT/OBJET **PROVINCIAL TASK FORCE ON HOMELESSNESS**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That Community Services Committee receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the highlights from the Provincial Task Force on Homelessness Report released on 9 October 1998. An Executive Summary of the report is attached at Annex A.

BACKGROUND

The Provincial Task Force on Homelessness was established in January 1998. During the subsequent months, the Task Force's Chair met with Ottawa Carleton's Regional Chair, the Community Services Committee Chair, Social Services Department representatives and community agencies working with the homeless. Task Force members toured local programs and met with program participants. Similar forms of consultation occurred in municipalities throughout the Province.

Based on consultations and a review of existing services and programs for homeless people, the following Task Force recommendations were presented:

1. To create an integrated network of accessible, community-based services and supports to reconnect homeless people to society and strengthen their ability to stay connected.

This recommendation includes a holistic system approach to improve accessibility for people who have difficulty obtaining mainstream services such as: mental health, education, Ontario Works and correctional services.

2. To support municipalities as the local service system manager for homelessness services.

A \$4 million homelessness fund has been created to support municipalities working with community agencies and provincial ministries to develop co-ordinated strategies to achieve the following outcomes:

Moving people from the streets to emergency accommodations;
 Moving people from emergency to permanent accommodations; and,
 Preventing homelessness by supporting the retention of permanent accommodations.

3. To ensure greater emphasis on early identification and prevention of homelessness and to support the retention of housing.

Emphasis is placed on municipalities working collaboratively with communities and service providers to implement strategies that achieve outcome goals. In addition, the province will provide flexibility to current funding arrangements in order to redirect funds towards these strategies.

4. To relieve Ontario and its municipalities of the substantial social assistance costs that result directly from federal immigration policies.

A call for increased responsibility from the federal government in supporting refugee claimants, providing services and tightening of criteria, monitoring and enforcing sponsorship agreements.

5. To improve the climate for private investment in rental accommodation.

It is suggested that municipalities consider initiatives that would create a more positive climate for rental accommodation development: such as, decreasing development costs, reducing taxes for new multi-residential rental buildings, introducing a single inspection authority for building, fire and property standards, and ensuring municipal construction standards do not exceed provincial standards.

DISCUSSION

The report lays the foundation for dealing with a broad range of factors contributing to homelessness. The report reinforces the need for a maintaining the collaborative initiative between municipalities, community agencies, provincial ministries, and the private sector in order to plan, develop, and implement programs and services that respond to the needs of persons at-risk of becoming homeless as well as vulnerable persons in shelters and on the streets.

The key element for the Region of Ottawa-Carleton is the recognition of the primary role of municipalities play as the service system manager for homeless services. Already in this Region there is a commitment across community agencies serving persons who homeless through the Alliance to End Homelessness and the Social Services Department to collaborate and plan in a strategic manner to support key initiatives.

The report refers to the need for the development of housing options and increased affordable rental units. We see the province as having to take on a more active role than is stated in the report in this area.

In the end the report should be seen as a point of consolidation of efforts to date both in this community and in the province to work toward ending homelessness.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Information has been provided to community agencies working with persons who are homeless. A formal process is being considered that would facilitate provincial ministries, municipalities and community agencies to develop a common framework for implementing the recommendations and measuring outcomes.

FINANCIAL IMPL ICATIONS

Funding for implementation of these recommendations will be based on a provincial population formula that results in Ottawa Carleton being allocated \$210,000 annually. The first allocation will be prior to March 1999.

*Approved by
Dick Stewart*

ANNEX "A"

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Homelessness is a complex problem that is rarely the result of a single cause; it usually results from a combination of individual and societal failures. A common characteristic of most homeless people is that they have lost their connection to personal supports--family, employment, community and friends.

Ontario's homeless population includes single adults with drug and alcohol dependencies, post-release offenders, people suffering from mental illness, families with children and young people. Homeless people need help in re-establishing connections to networks of support that foster independence and self-sufficiency.

Ontarians are increasingly concerned about the impact of homelessness on community life, public safety and business. Solutions to address these concerns require the involvement of communities, business owners and operators, municipal officials, the police and service providers.

Current provincial and municipal funds committed to responding to homelessness are significant, totaling well over \$100 million. In addition, the province has announced several initiatives that in the longer term will contribute significantly to addressing the problems that can lead to homelessness. In the meantime, however, too much of current spending is restricted to short-term, band aid approaches to crisis situations.

Services for homeless people are currently variable and fragmented at the community level. Some municipalities are quite active in providing resources, while others are not. It is clear that when communities do not respond to this need, they are very likely adding to the larger problem of homelessness.

The failure of immigrant sponsorships and continuing delays in the refugee determination process result in higher social assistance costs and added pressures on programs and services for homeless people. Inadequate federal support for immigrant and refugee settlement programs makes it more difficult for newcomers to become independent and self-sufficient.

The federal government has been virtually absent from efforts to improve the climate for growth in affordable accommodation. It is essential that all levels of government share responsibility for removing barriers to the creation of additional rental accommodation, and in fostering more creative approaches to its development.

There is growing recognition that municipalities are the level of government best suited to act as the manager of the system of services for homeless people. They are in an ideal position to assess local needs, plan and set priorities, allocate resources and integrate services.

Municipalities are currently frustrated at what they regard as provincial barriers to improvements--unclear expectations and complicated funding rules that favour short-term crisis services and prevent more creative responses.

Long-term solutions to homelessness cannot be compartmentalized between the provincial and municipal levels; they must be coordinated. To build the capacity of municipalities to act as the service system manager for homelessness, the province needs to establish province-wide outcomes, address its program "silos" and provide more flexible support to municipalities.

In late May the Task Force delivered an interim recommendation to the Government--that the province should assume major funding responsibility for domiciliary hostels.

These provide housing and supports to people who might otherwise be homeless. The Government accepted this recommendation, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced on June 12, 1998 that the province will provide approximately \$14 million in funding to domiciliary hostels retroactive to the beginning of this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our consultations throughout Ontario, and based on our review of existing services and programs for homeless people, we offer the following recommendations for measures to create a more effective response to homelessness, and to improve provincial support for municipal efforts to assist homeless people:

1. **To create an integrated network of accessible, community-based services and supports to reconnect homeless people to society and strengthen their ability to stay connected:**
 - 1.1 A major priority should be strategies that reconnect homeless people to networks of support to foster independence and self-sufficiency.
 - 1.2 Service systems should be encouraged to make their services more accessible to people who have difficulty accessing mainstream services. For example:
 - Mental health reform to address the needs of individuals being discharged from hospitals;
 - The education system for youth at risk of leaving school early;
 - Ontario Works for hard to serve clients;
 - Correctional Services to link post-release offenders to community services and supports.
 - 1.3 Through the Making Services Work for People planning process, communities should consider how local agencies, including Children's Aid Societies, should respond to the challenges presented by homeless young people. A major priority should be early identification of those at risk of becoming homeless, and homelessness prevention.

- 2. To support municipalities as the local service system manager for homelessness services:**
- 2.1 Municipalities should be designated as the local service system manager for homelessness.
- 2.2 Municipalities should work with community agencies and provincial ministries to develop coordinated strategies to achieve three outcomes:
- Moving people from the streets to emergency accommodation;
 - Moving people from emergency to permanent accommodation; and
 - Preventing homelessness by supporting the retention of permanent accommodation.
- 2.3 The \$4 million homelessness fund should be allocated to municipalities to achieve those outcomes.
- 2.4 Provincial program structures and funding mechanisms should be rationalized to support the planning and management role of municipalities.
- 2.5 Provincial ministries should ensure that their allocations for homelessness services are consistent with municipal business plans and priorities.
- 2.6 The province should confirm its continued funding of emergency hostels at the level of 80%.
- 3. To ensure greater emphasis on early identification and prevention of homelessness and to support the retention of housing:**
- 3.1a Municipalities should work with their communities and service providers to identify and develop successful delivery strategies to achieve the three core outcomes.
- 3.1b Municipalities must be pro-active in reaching out to Aboriginal communities and their leaders in addressing the homelessness problems of Aboriginal people.
- 3.2 The province should provide flexibility that allows municipalities to redirect a portion of emergency hostel dollars to those strategies.
- 3.3 The relevant provincial ministries should assess the levels of service provided to domiciliary hostel clients, as part of developing a long term integrated approach to the housing needs of clients with special needs.
- 3.4 The province should assume major funding responsibility for domiciliary hostels. This was a preliminary recommendation that the government accepted and announced in June 1998.

4. To relieve Ontario and its municipalities of the substantial social assistance costs that result directly from federal immigration policies:

- 4.1 The federal government should be responsible for income support for refugee claimants, and introduce tighter sponsorship criteria and more effective monitoring and enforcement measures aimed at reducing the likelihood of sponsorship default.
- 4.2 The federal government should ensure immigrant and refugee settlement and integration programs are adequately funded.

5. To improve the climate for private investment in rental accommodation:

- 5.1 The federal government should review its housing and tax policies to improve their support for the creation of private sector rental accommodation.
- 5.2 The province should identify opportunities for facilitating increased partnerships between the private sector and all levels of government.
- 5.3 Ontario municipalities should consider the following steps to create a more positive climate for rental accommodation development:
 - Streamlining of zoning by-laws and planning approvals to decrease development costs;
 - Taxing new multi-residential rental buildings at the lower single residential rate;
 - Eliminating existing overlaps in building, fire and property standards, and consolidating regulation enforcement through a single inspection authority, and
 - Ensuring that municipal construction requirements do not exceed provincial requirements.

**PROVINCIAL TASK FORCE ON HOMELESSNESS
RECOMMENDED ALLOCATION \$4 MILLION HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES FUND**

SOUTHERN ONTARIO

Service Manager	Area Served	% of Total Population	Total Population	Allocation
Brantford C	Brant CO, Brantford C	1.1%	124,000	60.0
Bruce CO	Bruce CO	0.6%	71,000	40.0
Chatham-Kent M	Chatham-Kent M	1.0%	116,000	60.0
Cornwall C	Cornwall C, Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry CO	1.0%	117,000	60.0
Dufferin CO	Dufferin CO	0.4%	47,000	40.0
Durham RM	Durham RM	4.3%	480,000	120.0
Grey CO	Owen Sound C, Grey CO	0.8%	90,000	40.0
Haldimand-Norfolk RM	Haldimand-Norfolk RM	1.0%	109,000	60.0
Halton RM	Halton RM	3.2%	358,000	100.0
Hamilton-Wentworth RM	Hamilton-Wentworth RM	4.3%	485,000	120.0
Hastings CO	Belleville C, Quinte West C, Hastings CO	1.1%	130,000	60.0
Huron CO	Huron CO	0.6%	62,000	40.0
Kingston C	Kingston C, Frontenac CO	1.2%	139,000	60.0
Lambton CO	Lambton CO	1.2%	136,000	60.0
Lanark CO	Smith Falls ST, Lanark CO	0.6%	62,000	40.0
Leeds-Grenville CO	Brockville C, Gananoque ST, Prescott ST, Leeds & Genville CO	0.9%	100,000	60.0
Lennox-Addington CO	Lennox & Addington CO, Prince Edward CO	0.8%	67,000	40.0
London C	London C, Middlesex CO	3.6%	409,000	120.0
Muskoka DM	Muskoka DM	0.5%	52,000	40.0
Niagara RM	Niagara RM	3.7%	421,000	120.0
Northumberland CO	Northumberland CO	0.7%	84,000	40.0
Ottawa-Carleton RM	Ottawa-Carleton RM	6.7%	760,000	210.0
Oxford CO	Oxford CO	0.9%	103,000	60.0
Peel RM	Peel RM	8.0%	904,000	270.0
Peterborough C	Peterborough C, Peterborough CO	1.1%	128,000	60.0
Prescott-Russell CO	Prescott & Russell CO	0.7%	78,000	40.0
Renfrew CO	Pembroke C, Renfrew CO	0.9%	103,000	60.0
Simcoe CO	Barrie C, Orillia C, Simcoe CO	3.1%	346,000	100.0
Stratford C	Stratford C, St. Mary's ST, Perth CO	0.7%	75,000	40.0
St. Thomas C	St. Thomas C, Elgin CO	0.7%	83,000	40.0
Toronto C	Toronto C	21.8%	2,456,000	1020.0
Victoria CO	Haliburton CO, Victoria CO	0.8%	88,000	40.0
Waterloo RM	Waterloo RM	3.8%	428,000	120.0
Wellington CO	Guelph C, Wellington CO	1.6%	180,000	60.0
Windsor C	Windsor C, Essex CO	3.3%	366,000	100.0
York RM	York RM	5.6%	634,000	180.0

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Service Manager	Area Served	% of Total Population	Total Population	Allocation
Algoma DSSAB	Algoma District, excluding Sault Ste Marie C, Prince TWP and Sault North Planning Board	0.4%	40,000	40.0
Cochrane DSSAB	Cochrane District	0.9%	97,000	40.0
Kenora DSSAB	Kenora District, excluding areas north of the 11 th Baseline	0.6%	68,000	40.0
Manitoulin & Sudbury DSSAB	Manitoulin District, Sudbury District	0.4%	40,000	40.0
Nipissing DSSAB	Nipissing District	0.8%	89,000	40.0
Parry Sound DSSAB	Parry Sound District	0.4%	42,000	40.0
Rainy River DSSAB	Rainy River District	0.2%	24,000	40.0
Sault Ste. Marie DSSAB	Sault Ste. Marie C, Prince TWP and Sault North Planning Board	0.8%	94,000	40.0
Sudbury RM	Sudbury RM	1.5%	170,000	60.0
Thunder Bay DSSAB	Thunder Bay District	1.5%	165,000	60.0
Temiskaming DSSAB	Temiskaming District	0.4%	40,000	40.0

Allocation Formula:

< 100,000 (\$40.00)
 + 20.0 for every 100,000 up to 500,000
 + 30.0 for every 100,000 up to 1,000,000
 +50.0 for every 100,000 over 1,000,000
 Total distribution will be \$4.260M.

Abbreviations:	C	City	M	Municipality
	CO	County	RM	Regional Municipality
	DM	District Municipality	ST	Separated Town
	DSSAB	District Social Services Administration Board	TWP	Township



Ontario
WATERLOO REGIONAL CLERK'S DEPT
OCT 16 1998
Received
FILE # 02 98 0060
DOC ID. # 98-2085
ACTION
TAKEN
TO

October 9, 1998

MEMORANDUM TO: Heads of Council,
Municipalities approved as Consolidated Municipal Service
Managers

FROM: Jack Carroll
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Community and
Social Services

SUBJECT: Provincial Task Force on Homelessness

As Chair of the Provincial Task Force on Homelessness, I am writing to share our final report and recommendations. I am pleased to say that our recommendations have been accepted by the government.

I also want to express my thanks to those municipalities that so willingly agreed to arrange local consultations for the benefit of the Task Force. The key findings and recommendations contained in this report reflect the invaluable input provided to us during those meetings.

During the consultation process, one theme stood out clearly — that most communities try to take care of their own, but could benefit from more tools to do so. At the same time, we heard that when people leave their home community to address their problems, the result is an increase in isolation and homelessness. We believe that the tools and incentives that we have recommended in our report, and that the government has now approved, will give you the flexibility you need to be innovative, while ensuring the accountability we all require.

The Task Force agreed with the advice from all the communities we visited, that the municipal level of government is best suited to developing local solutions to meet local needs. We heard your appeal for more flexibility in developing solutions that meet your own needs, and for the province to focus on outcomes rather than process. The province has agreed to give Consolidated Municipal Service Managers the flexibility to make local decisions on how to allocate their share of the \$4 million. As well, the province will allow municipalities to use some of the emergency hostel funding, to support the development of approaches that will prevent people from becoming homeless.

We also recognize that there is a key role to be played by the province. You will see that there are recommendations directed to provincial ministries, dealing with issues specific to the mental health, child welfare, and other service systems. Those recommendations have been forwarded to the respective ministries, for their appropriate action.

We know that more work will be needed, requiring the cooperative efforts of the municipal sector and ministries, to put these recommendations into action. Over the next short while you will hear more about how your community can participate in implementing the key recommendations.

Thank you again for the commitment you have shown to this issue, and for your continued support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. H. H. H.", written in a cursive style.

CC: Heads of Council, Partner Municipalities
Heads of Administration

REPORT OF THE
PROVINCIAL TASK FORCE
ON HOMELESSNESS

October 1998

The Honourable Janet Ecker
Minister of Community of Social Services
Hepburn Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1E9

Dear Minister:

As Chair of the Provincial Task Force on Homelessness, I am pleased to provide you with our final report.


As you will see in the report, homelessness is a very complex issue that defies a single solution. However, we believe that there are approaches which could, in both the short and long term, improve the system of supports and services for homeless people and ultimately reduce the incidence of homelessness.

I would like to acknowledge the help of my Parliamentary Assistant colleagues who made up the Task Force, including John Parker, Steve Gilchrist, Dan Newman, and Jim Brown.

On behalf of the Task Force, I want to express our appreciation for the support and input of the municipalities who helped to arrange and participated in our consultations. The Task Force could not have completed its work without their enthusiastic support of our approach and objectives, and the valuable input received from them and their community service partners.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



Jack Carroll
Chair, Provincial Task Force on Homelessness

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Homelessness is a complex problem that is rarely the result of a single cause; it usually results from a combination of individual and societal failures. A common characteristic of most homeless people is that they have lost their connection to personal supports--family, employment, community and friends.

Ontario's homeless population includes single adults with drug and alcohol dependencies, post-release offenders, people suffering from mental illness, families with children and young people. Homeless people need help in re-establishing connections to networks of support that foster independence and self-sufficiency.

Ontarians are increasingly concerned about the impact of homelessness on community life, public safety and business. Solutions to address these concerns require the involvement of communities, business owners and operators, municipal officials, the police and service providers.

Current provincial and municipal funds committed to responding to homelessness are significant, totaling well over \$100 million. In addition, the province has announced several initiatives that in the longer term will contribute significantly to addressing the problems that can lead to homelessness. In the meantime, however, too much of current spending is restricted to short-term, band aid approaches to crisis situations.

Services for homeless people are currently variable and fragmented at the community level. Some municipalities are quite active in providing resources, while others are not. It is clear that when communities do not respond to this need, they are very likely adding to the larger problem of homelessness.

The failure of immigrant sponsorships and continuing delays in the refugee determination process result in higher social assistance costs and added pressures on programs and services for homeless people. Inadequate federal support for immigrant and refugee settlement programs makes it more difficult for newcomers to become independent and self-sufficient.

The federal government has been virtually absent from efforts to improve the climate for growth in affordable accommodation. It is essential that all levels of government share responsibility for removing barriers to the creation of additional rental accommodation, and in fostering more creative approaches to its development.

There is growing recognition that municipalities are the level of government best suited to act as the manager of the system of services for homeless people. They are in an ideal position to assess local needs, plan and set priorities, allocate resources and integrate services.

Municipalities are currently frustrated at what they regard as provincial barriers to improvements—unclear expectations and complicated funding rules that favour short-term crisis services and prevent more creative responses.

Long-term solutions to homelessness cannot be compartmentalized between the provincial and municipal levels; they must be coordinated. To build the capacity of municipalities to act as the service system manager for homelessness, the province needs to establish province-wide outcomes, address its program "silos" and provide more flexible support to municipalities.

In late May the Task Force delivered an interim recommendation to the Government—that the province should assume major funding responsibility for domiciliary hostels.

These provide housing and supports to people who might otherwise be homeless. The Government accepted this recommendation, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced on June 12, 1998 that the province will provide approximately \$14 million in funding to domiciliary hostels retroactive to the beginning of this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our consultations throughout Ontario, and based on our review of existing services and programs for homeless people, we offer the following recommendations for measures to create a more effective response to homelessness, and to improve provincial support for municipal efforts to assist homeless people:

- 1. To create an integrated network of accessible, community-based services and supports to reconnect homeless people to society and strengthen their ability to stay connected:**
 - 1.1 A major priority should be strategies that reconnect homeless people to networks of support to foster independence and self-sufficiency.
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 - Mental health reform to address the needs of individuals being discharged from hospitals;
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 - Ontario Works for hard to serve clients;
 - Correctional Services to link post-release offenders to community services and supports.
 - 1.3 Through the Making Services Work for People planning process, communities should consider how local agencies, including Children's Aid Societies, should respond to the challenges presented by homeless young people. A major priority should be early identification of those at risk of becoming homeless, and homelessness prevention.

- 2. To support municipalities as the local service system manager for homelessness services:**
 - 2.1 Municipalities should be designated as the local service system manager for homelessness.
 - 2.2 Municipalities should work with community agencies and provincial ministries to develop coordinated strategies to achieve three outcomes:
 - Moving people from the streets to emergency accommodation;
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 - 2.3 The \$4 million homelessness fund should be allocated to municipalities to achieve those outcomes.
 - 2.4 Provincial program structures and funding mechanisms should be rationalized to support the planning and management role of municipalities.
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4. To relieve Ontario and its municipalities of the substantial social assistance costs that result directly from federal immigration policies:

- 4.1 The federal government should be responsible for income support for refugee claimants, and introduce tighter sponsorship criteria and more effective monitoring and enforcement measures aimed at reducing the likelihood of sponsorship default.
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5. To improve the climate for private investment in rental accommodation:

- 5.1 The federal government should review its housing and tax policies to improve their support for the creation of private sector rental accommodation.
- 5.2 The province should identify opportunities for facilitating increased partnerships between the private sector and all levels of government.
- 5.3 Ontario municipalities should consider the following steps to create a more positive climate for rental accommodation development:
- Streamlining of zoning by-laws and planning approvals to decrease development costs;
 - Taxing new multi-residential rental buildings at the lower single residential rate;
 - Eliminating existing overlaps in building, fire and property standards, and consolidating regulation enforcement through a single inspection authority, and
 - Ensuring that municipal construction requirements do not exceed provincial requirements.

SECTION 1: MEMBERSHIP AND MANDATE

On January 29, 1998, the Hon. Janet Ecker, Minister of Community and Social Services, announced the appointment of a provincial task force to make recommendations on coordinating efforts to help the homeless throughout Ontario.

The members of the Task Force were:

- Jack Carroll (Chair)
MPP for Chatham-Kent
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services
- Steve Gilchrist
MPP for Scarborough East
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Jim Brown
MPP for Scarborough West
Parliamentary Assistant to the Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services
- Dan Newman,
MPP for Scarborough Centre
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health
- John Parker
MPP for York East
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister Responsible for Native Affairs

Each of these Ministries has direct connections to population groups who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

When the Task Force was appointed, the province also announced increased funding of more than \$6 million to support municipalities and community-based organizations in meeting the needs of homeless people locally:

- \$4 million from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to support recommendations from the Task Force; and
- \$2.5 million from the Ministry of Health for front-line mental health outreach programs in Toronto, Ottawa, London and Hamilton.

The mandate of the Task Force was to consider and develop:

- recommendations on how the province might better support municipalities in improving their response to homelessness, including priorities for the allocation of the \$4 million;
- responses which build on community partnerships with all sectors; and
- initiatives to help keep public streets and areas safe.

SECTION 2: COMMON THEMES: WHAT WE HEARD

The Task Force was aware that municipalities across Ontario vary considerably in their approaches to addressing homelessness, and in the range of services present within communities. In recognition of this diversity, a broadly-based consultation process was developed:

- Nine representative municipalities were chosen to take part in the consultations, including Kingston, Ottawa, Durham Region, Hamilton, Kenora, Thunder Bay, Windsor, London and Toronto. In addition, a town hall meeting was held in Newmarket.
- Through their Heads of Council, municipalities were asked to design their local consultation, and to invite service providers, advocacy groups and other key informants.
- Although a general discussion guide was developed to reflect the initial areas of interest to the Task Force, each municipality was encouraged to host a meeting that would strongly reflect local issues, responses and concerns.
- To provide an additional avenue for consultation, a day was set aside for all MPPs to bring forward local issues to the Task Force.
- Throughout the process, the Task Force accepted written submissions from interested groups.

By the end of its consultations, the Task Force had heard from approximately 400 individuals representing at least 150 organizations, including police, school boards, advocacy groups, service providers, business groups, political representatives, and homeless people themselves.

The following findings reflect what the Task Force heard during the consultations across the province. Although each community had its own view of the issues, participants had remarkably consistent comments on the reasons for homelessness, possible solutions and the barriers to improving services.

1. Homelessness is not just a single issue; it stems from a multitude of failures.

A Complex Problem

While participants in the consultations often expressed different views as to the principal cause of homelessness, they generally agreed its roots are many and varied. The faces of homeless people are individual, but the factors that led to their situation are usually a combination of individual and societal failures. The many dimensions of homelessness were captured by a comment we heard in Ottawa: "Please resist the temptation to look for one solution to homelessness. The problem is very complex."

The path to homelessness is not generally traveled overnight. The causes can often be traced to individual or family problems--failed marriages or relationships, physical and sexual abuse, dysfunctional families, poor work skills and unemployment. Some homeless people have made choices, such as alcohol or drugs, that led to the street. Others are there because of circumstances beyond their control, as in the case of people with mental illness and the children of homeless parents.

A common and compelling characteristic of homeless people is that they are unconnected to personal social supports--to family and employment, to their hometown, to people they trust who can help them through a difficult time or link them to a support network. The importance of personal supports is illustrated by a comment at the Toronto consultation: "Most of us say we're independent, yet our connections with families, workplace and community are what enable us to function. For someone with no connections, just providing a roof over his head won't work."

2. The profile of homeless people in Ontario includes five key groups:

- **single adults with drug and alcohol dependencies;**
- **post-release offenders;**
- **people suffering from mental illness;**
- **homeless families; and**
- **young people, including street kids with children.**

Single Adults

This is the largest and most visible group among the homeless. They are typically subject to chronic drug and alcohol addictions, and have often been homeless for a lengthy period. In many cases their addictive behaviour means that even if they can obtain housing, maintaining it is next to impossible without supports. Their work skills are often long outdated, and employment is therefore not an immediate prospect. Members of this group are major consumers of emergency hostel services and other high cost crisis services.

In some communities, a substantial proportion of this homeless population is made up of Aboriginal people. They particularly suffer from the loss of connections to family and community that result from migration to urban areas. In our meeting with Aboriginal leaders, they indicated strongly that the search for solutions to homelessness must involve both them and members of Aboriginal communities. This view was echoed in the community consultations. We were told that municipalities should be more proactive in reaching out to Aboriginal communities and their leaders in addressing the homelessness problems of Aboriginal people.

Post-Release Offenders

For people being released from provincial correctional facilities, discharge planning is made available to ensure that the individual has a place to go in the community. However, although discharge planning is available for all people being released, and indeed is mandated as a condition of release for parolees, it cannot be forced on those who have completed their sentences. Among this latter group, it is estimated that approximately one-third go to emergency hostels upon release.

This has led to frustration in some communities who may feel that the correctional system is "dumping" post-release offenders without the necessary support. At several of the consultations, participants suggested the correctional system ensure that discharge planning is accessed by all offenders who are about to return to the community.

The Mentally Ill

Estimates vary, but perhaps as many as one-third of all homeless people suffer from a serious mental illness. Participants in the consultation agreed that past reforms to Ontario's mental health system were not matched by the development of appropriate community services. As a consequence, deinstitutionalization and early discharge were not in the past supported by the creation of a comprehensive continuum of care. As one participant in the Toronto meeting put it, "Obviously there used to be too many people in hospital, but now there are too many on the street."

Investments are being made to enhance case management, community treatment and crisis response, and these are recognized as making a positive difference. Still, too many mentally ill people continue to be at risk of becoming homeless; many do not have the stability and/or skills to maintain housing.

Many participants argued that it is inappropriate for hospitals to be discharging patients into an emergency hostel. Emergency hostels are not equipped to operate as overflow capacity for the mental health system. Too often, seriously ill people in distress are forced to leave hostels because they pose a danger to themselves or to others. The number of mentally ill people who refuse to take their prescribed medication was identified as an unresolved challenge for the mental health system, and should be addressed through mental health reform.

As mental health reform proceeds, it will be important to continue reinvesting in community services, and to improve coordination among existing services between the provincial and municipal levels.

Families

Several communities are seeing a marked increase in the number of homeless families, predominately single parents with children. A number of causes were cited during the consultations, including spousal abuse and family violence, addictions and unemployment. For families, the route to homelessness often begins with the loss of a job. Low skills and the changing workplace add to the risks of homelessness.

Significant concerns were expressed in all of the consultations about children in homeless families. Meeting their special needs presents a serious challenge for schools and community service providers. The dislocation experienced by these children places them at risk of future difficulties, including their own cycle of homelessness.

In addition, early identification and supports for high-risk families are needed to break the cycle of poverty, and prevent isolation and homelessness. Key early intervention services include parenting skills, budgeting assistance and life skills training.

Young People

The increasing presence of young people among the homeless is a disturbing trend for the future. Growth in the number of homeless youth was cited in practically every one of the consultations we held across the province. The reasons most commonly cited were family breakdown and child abuse. Several communities reported an increase in teenage mothers living on the street with their children. Obviously both mothers and children are at high risk of a repeating cycle of poverty, ill health and homelessness. The high illiteracy rate of street youth was frequently cited as a strong indicator of reduced prospects for employment and self-sufficiency.

A common theme we heard throughout the consultations was the need to make homeless youth a target for preventive approaches. Many participants were critical of the inability of mainstream agencies to respond adequately to the challenges of disaffected youth:

- With respect to Children's Aid Societies, three significant concerns were raised. Participants felt that CASs need to improve their early identification of, and support for, children in at risk families. They expressed concern that some Societies appear to back out of providing services for some 13-15 year old teens in anticipation of their reaching the age of 16, at which CAS involvement ends. We also heard calls for the Societies to develop more flexible approaches to providing outreach, supports and safety to street youth.
- The education system was criticized in several respects--for its inability to motivate young people to stay in school, and for its lack of emphasis on teaching basic life and employment skills and budgeting.
- Many felt that existing youth services at the community level are uncoordinated and therefore confusing to those looking for help.

Homeless youth are particularly mobile, and when they move to another community, they can easily become disconnected. Therefore, a key objective of youth services should be to keep young people in their home communities so that they can maintain their existing support networks, such as family, friends, teachers, coaches, etc. This reinforces the need for all communities to ensure that a reasonable level of youth services are available.

- 3. The failure of immigrant sponsorships, lengthy delays in the refugee determination process and inadequate newcomer settlement support services all result in higher social assistance costs and added pressures on programs and services for homeless people. The federal government's failure to address these issues drains resources from provincial, municipal and charitable programs.**

Sponsored Immigrants

A large portion of newcomers to Canada come to Ontario. Federal immigration policies require that "family class" immigrants be covered by a sponsorship agreement, through which close relatives agree to support the immigrant and his or her dependants for ten years.

Although the federal government sets the rules in this area, the province and the municipalities bear the costs of social assistance when sponsors default on their agreements. In the absence of this support, those individuals would be at risk of homelessness, adding to the pressures on the provincial-municipally-funded hostel system. The roughly 30,000 failed sponsorships cost Ontario between \$242 million and \$278 million per year in social assistance payments. The federal government provides no reimbursement for these costs, or for the hostel costs of those individuals who become homeless.

Refugee Claimants

Individuals who make a claim for refugee status upon or after their arrival in Canada must have their claim adjudicated by the federal Immigration and Refugee Board. This process remains too lengthy. Many spend weeks or even months living in hostels until they can become settled into the community. If they are found to be in financial need, Ontario provides refugee claimants with the same social assistance benefits as landed immigrants or Canadian citizens.

This is a frustrating and costly situation for all concerned--the claimants, municipalities and the province alike. Communities which welcome the largest number of refugees, particularly Toronto, point out that these people typically are strongly motivated to move out of hostels and become self-sufficient. Once out of hostels, they rarely become homeless again.

The estimated current number of refugee claimants receiving social assistance is 10,000, representing annual costs to the province and municipalities of roughly \$80 million. As in the case of failed immigrant sponsorships, the federal government does not reimburse the government of Ontario or municipalities for these costs.

Settlement and Integration Services

We heard growing concern in those communities that receive the largest numbers of newcomers, about inadequate federal support for settlement and integration services for immigrants and refugees. In the absence of these services, some newcomers will remain trapped in hostels and on social assistance, resulting in personal frustration, unnecessary dependence and higher costs.

4. Public concern over homelessness is growing in Ontario. People are increasingly concerned about public safety and the impact of homelessness on businesses and community life.

The public behaviour of some homeless people is a growing issue in several of the communities we visited. Concerns ranged from fears for public safety and personal security, to the frustration of business owners located in areas where homeless people congregate. "From the business perspective, there is fear of being robbed or having your customers hassled." (Kenora Meeting, April 5) Police and community agencies also expressed frustration at being caught between homeless people and community demands to respond to public intoxication and threatening behaviour.

The issue of Bill 47 was raised at several consultations. This 1994 legislation, brought in by the former NDP government, removed the ability of the courts to force rehabilitation on people convicted of public intoxication. At our Kenora consultation, we were told that Bill 47 resulted in the loss of a wilderness work camp that was seen by many participants, including formerly homeless people, as effective in encouraging people to examine their lifestyle and deal with their addictions.