

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf. 03-07-98-0127
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 20 October 1998

TO/DEST. Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Committee Co-ordinator

SUBJECT/OBJET **TORONTO DISASTER RELIEF COMMITTEE - REQUEST TO
DECLARE HOMELESSNESS A NATIONAL DISASTER**

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Community Services Committee receive a presentation from the Street Health Coalition.

BACKGROUND

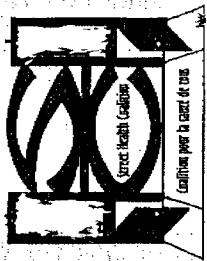
Representatives from the Street Health Coalition have requested that the Committee receive a presentation on the above-noted matter.

Relevant documentation is attached and provided for reference.

This report is respectfully submitted.

Approved by
M. J. Beauregard

Attach: (1)



September 24, 1998

Alex Munter
Regional Councillor
Regional Municipality of
Ottawa Carleton

Dear Alex:

I am writing to request that you add an item to the agenda of the upcoming Community Services Committee agenda regarding the request to Regional Government from the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee to declare homelessness a state of emergency. Background information about this request was forwarded previously to you by the Street Health Coalition. Maureen Mungall and myself as Co-Chairs of the Street Health Coalition are intending to be on hand next week to provide an additional information which might be required. Thank you for your kind attention to this issue.

Sincerely yours,

Wendy Muckte
Co-Chairperson, Street Health Coalition

**Toronto Disaster Relief Committee
c/o 168 Bathurst St.
Toronto, ON
M5V 2R4**

September, 98

Dear Friends,

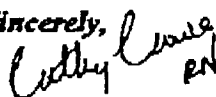
The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee is asking you to endorse our call to have all levels of government declare homelessness a NATIONAL DISASTER, which requires immediate, emergency, humanitarian relief.

We are a group made up of housing experts, academics, business people, health care workers, social workers, anti-poverty activists, and the faith community. We have worked with homeless people, studied homelessness, and have watched the homeless crisis worsen daily. We have bandaged the injuries caused by being homeless and have attended the funerals of many homeless people.

We have asked ourselves these questions: Why is this crisis not dealt with like the ice storm in Eastern Canada, or like the flooding in Manitoba? Why are governments not responding to the hundreds of homeless people's deaths? Why are they ignoring the threat of diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and hepatitis which are related to people's homelessness? Why is it that common sense doesn't dictate that this is one of the largest and most serious national disasters that Canada has ever faced?

Our answer has been to come together and to draw up a call for Disaster Relief. The most basic human rights of a section of our community are being violated. We cannot sit idly by and let this misery and death continue – the time now is to act. We need massive and immediate government intervention.

We appeal to you to endorse our call for action, join our committee, and/or to set up your own committee and send out a similar call. Attached is a form we are asking you to sign. Please send it back to us as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
 RN

Cathy Crowe, on behalf of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee

Note: Members of the committee are listed at the end of the two page State of Emergency Declaration

State of Emergency Declaration

Homelessness: A National Disaster

We call on all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster requiring emergency humanitarian relief. We urge that they immediately develop and implement a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy using disaster relief funds both to provide the homeless with immediate health protection and housing and to prevent further homelessness.

Canada has signed the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing everyone's right to "an adequate standard of living... including adequate food, clothing and housing." Homeless people have no decent standard of living, our governments are violating this agreement by neglecting them.

Despite Canada's reputation for providing relief to people made temporarily homeless by natural disasters, our governments are unwilling to help the scores of thousands of people in Canada condemned to homelessness. Morally, economically, socially, and legally, we cannot allow homelessness to become "normal" in Canadian life. Inaction betrays many thousands of us to a miserable existence and harms our society for years to come.

WHY DECLARE EMERGENCY?

Disaster Now

- ❑ Crisis facilities are already overcrowded. People are ending up in the streets, parks, and alleyways
- ❑ Youth and families with children are the fastest growing population in shelters
- ❑ Major cities search far beyond their boundaries for temporary housing for homeless families
- ❑ Homeless people face poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and increased risk of violence, communicable diseases and compulsive drug use
- ❑ Homelessness causes psychological and emotional pain that can exacerbate or precipitate agonizing deterioration of mental health
- ❑ Prolonged homelessness permanently harms people; ultimately, it can kill them by exposure, illness, violence or suicide
- ❑ Homelessness prevents people from maintaining their health, finding and keeping work, attending school and exercising their rights as citizens
- ❑ Conservative estimates concur that about 200,000 Canadians are homeless

Worse To Come

- ❑ Shelters and other temporary measures provide at best a stopgap. Crowding, insecurity and the risk of disease or violence means prolonged stays harm people
- ❑ Homelessness is contributing to a developing toxic brew of disease including HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, hepatitis, sexually transmitted diseases, and other communicable infections
- ❑ Prolonged homelessness for children harms them for life

- Twenty years of research has shown a continual rise in homelessness, linked to unemployment, reductions to social assistance, cuts to public housing and inadequate tenant protection
- Repeated government task forces, other studies, inquests and recommendations have produced little action, though documenting that the situation worsens yearly

Declaring an Emergency

We urge all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster now, as a first step in implementing a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy, both short- and long-term.

Immediate Short Term Measures

- Governments should reopen and maintain services for the homeless
- All governments should immediately reinstate or establish adequate social assistance benefits
- All governments should make suitable public buildings available as emergency shelters or hostels.
- Even parks can serve as temporary refuges with mobile homes, tents, bath houses and toilets
- Governments should concertededly provide emergency medical relief, including clinics, outreach, infirmaries, screening and immunization, and public nutrition and hygiene programs
- Health strategies should especially treat the relationship between homelessness and severe infectious or communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and hepatitis
- Governments should grant immediate emergency funding to non-governmental organizations (churches, charities, non-profit groups, etc.)

Long-term Measures to be Implemented Now

- Governments should implement a "1 per cent solution": All levels of government now spend an average 1 per cent of their total budgets on housing. Adding another 1 per cent, and henceforth devoting the total 2% to long-term housing, would take the single largest step towards eliminating homelessness.
- Governments should maintain and fund social benefits and services on a stable, long-term basis
- Crisis shelters and aid agencies should receive stable, long-term funding until the homeless are housed

Clearly, the homeless situation is worsening daily at an alarming rate, as the factors creating it remain unchecked. Any delay in firmly and massively responding will only contribute to converting the present crisis of suffering and death which is already an epidemic which no civilized society can tolerate.

This call for Disaster Relief is made by the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee. Membership includes: David Hulchanski-Professor of Housing U of T, Trevor Gray AIDS ACTION NOW, Brent Patterson-AIDS activist, Beric German-Street Health AIDS outreach, Maurice Adongo&Paula Dolczal-Street Health mental health outreach, Peter Rosenthal-lawyer for YCAH in 1996 freezing deaths Inquest, John Andras-co-founder Project Warmth-Vice-President Research Capital Corp, Cathy Crowe, RN-Queen West CHC street outreach nurse, Rev. Don (Dan) Heap (Anglican)-former MP Trinity Spadina, Jeannie Loughrey-Anglican priest Diocese of Toronto, Frank Showler-Member of Board of St. Claire's Inter-faith Housing, David Walsh-President Realco Property Ltd, Sherrie Golden-OCAP, Sue Osborne-Housing Support Worker Cornerstone Women's Residence