



THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA

REPORT TO: Chair and Members of the Community Services Committee

SUBJECT: Hostel and Homelessness Service Operations in Niagara: A Status Report

RECOMMENDATION

That this Committee recommend to Regional Council that this report be received for information.

PURPOSE

This report has been prepared to inform Committee and Council on the status of hostel and homelessness service operations in Niagara, the current environment in which they operate and staff involvement in future plans.

BACKGROUND

Emergency Shelters

The Regional Municipality of Niagara has been providing funding for emergency shelter services for the past two decades under the authority of the applicable social assistance legislation. Funding is provided to cover the costs of shelter, food, and a personal needs allowance provided to shelter residents.

An emergency shelter stay is defined through Provincial legislation as being of 30 days duration or less. However, the local Administrator can approve extensions to the length of stay, if there are extenuating circumstances.

The Hostel/Emergency Shelter program is cost shared between the Province and the Region on an 80/20 basis. The current maximum per diem payable to hostel/shelter providers is \$39.14, which is eligible for the 80/20 cost sharing arrangement with the Province. Per Diem based funding is the only mechanism currently available to Municipalities and shelter providers through the *Ontario Works Act*. Currently, there are several arrangements with agencies to provide shelter based emergency housing services. Hotels and motels are used in St. Catharines when demand exceeds capacity and are used in Niagara Falls and Welland pending the establishment of new emergency

shelters. Hotels/motels are less than ideal for emergency shelter due to poor or non-existent cooking and feeding arrangements as well as lack of supervision and casemanagement supports.

The services and bed capacity are as follows:

Hostel/Shelter	Location	Target Group	Bed Capacity
Casa El Norte	Fort Erie	Refugees	8
Community Resource & Action Centre	Welland	All	*21
Matthew House	Fort Erie	Refugees	8
Nightlight Emergency Youth Shelter	Niagara Falls	Youth	6
The Raft	St. Catharines	Youth	6
Salvation Army	St. Catharines	Males	22
YWCA St. Catharines	St. Catharines	Women and children	20
YWCA St. Catharines	Niagara Falls	Women and children	*20
Total			<u>111</u>

* Under construction and scheduled to open spring 2005.

Placement in hotels/motels is co-ordinated through Project S.H.A.R.E. (Niagara Falls), Open Doors Concepts (Welland), and Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold.

Homelessness Support Services

The Region of Niagara has been providing funding for homelessness support services in Niagara since 1998 when the Province transferred service management to the Region. Niagara receives funding for three of the five Provincial homelessness programs, Supports to Daily Living, Community Partners Program and Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund. Each program has a particular focus aimed at reducing homelessness and is 100 percent provincially funded. The five provincial homelessness programs are:

Program	Funding
Supports to Daily Living (SDL)	100% Provincial
Community Partners Program (CPP)	100% Provincial
Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund (PHIF)	100% Provincial
Emergency Hostel Redirect (EHR)	80/20 Provincial/Municipal
Off the Street into Shelter (OSIS)	80/20 Provincial/Municipal

Supports to Daily Living is a program of support services that enable people with special needs to live independently in their social housing unit within the community. In addition to their low income, these individuals are generally prone to chronic homelessness, are survivors of abuse, and many have histories of mental illness and substance abuse are categorized as hard-to-house.

The Community Partners Program's principle objective is to facilitate and assist in the provision of affordable and retainable housing to low-income and homeless individuals through supporting staffing and hours of operation at housing help centres.

The Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund is designed to support outreach services to move individuals who are on the street to temporary shelter and then to permanent accommodations and prevent individuals at risk from becoming homeless.

Niagara has contracted with community agencies to provide homelessness services. These agencies are:

Program	Agency	Budget
Supports to Daily Living	Canal View Homes	\$132,473
Community Partners Program	Housing Help Centre of St. Catharines	\$ 88,869
Community Partners Program	Project S.H.A.R.E.	\$ 46,396
Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund	Community Care of St. Catharines	\$243,816

REPORT

Role of the Region

As mentioned in the Background section, per diem based funding is the only mechanism currently available to Municipalities and shelter providers through the *Ontario Works Act*. As such, shelters are highly dependent on fluctuating levels of bed usage, which in turn creates instability and challenges for providers. In response to concerns of the sustainability of one shelter and the system as a whole, a consultant was hired to conduct a peer review in 2003.

The peer review was an important step in developing a shelter system that supports the homeless in our society. The Consultant identified the need for the Region to demonstrate leadership on homelessness issues by addressing access to transportation and homelessness services, adequacy of funding for hostels and homelessness services, and the development of standards for the hostel system.

During 2004, the Hostel system faced the same pressures as in previous years:

- a high degree of hostel use especially during the summer months due to seasonal closures of the Out of the Cold programs;
- a large number of refugee arrivals in Fort Erie requiring emergency shelter services;
- high rent and utility costs;
- lack of affordable housing,
- delayed exit from shelters due to low rental vacancy rates and high shelter costs; and
- the lack of an integrated public transit system.

These pressures resulted in two significant events in 2004, the homeless in Montebello Park being housed in Merritton Town Hall and the opening of a temporary refugee shelter at Sunset Haven in Welland.

Community Services Department staff have been consulting with community agencies and local municipal governments on the expansion of hostel services. The recent opening of the Nightlight Emergency Youth Shelter in Niagara Falls has added six youth beds to the

emergency shelter system. Two projects one each in Welland and Niagara Falls are nearing completion and two others in St. Catharines and Fort Erie are in the early discussion stages. These projects could add as many as sixty beds to Niagara's shelter system.

Niagara continues to provide a casemanagement based approach when working with the homeless in our shelters. Staff develop exit strategies in partnership with the hostel provider and the resident with the goal of finding sustainable housing in the shortest time possible.

Through its contracted agencies the Region provides a range of homelessness services across Niagara. Community Care of St. Catharines provides homelessness outreach services funded by the Region of Niagara and has created the Homelessness Initiative Outreach Program (HIOP). HIOP staff are co-located at housing help centres and provide services that move people from the street into shelters and subsequently from the shelters to housing.

Future Plans

Given the pressures on the shelter system and the growing problem of homelessness across Niagara, staff is reviewing the current system of homelessness service provision to address issues of duplication between the Community Partners Program and Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund programs as well as the uneven distribution of homelessness funding in Niagara. In addition, the Province is currently reviewing the possibility of consolidating its five homelessness programs in a way that would allow municipalities more flexibility in program delivery. Should all five programs be consolidated there is the possibility of a 93/7% Provincial/Municipal funding formula. Staff will report to committee and council on the outcome of the review in the near future.

SUMMARY

Niagara continues to work closely with those agencies that it has contracted with for hostel and homelessness services as well as the community at large to provide services to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. Service demands have increased as has the need to provide these services throughout Niagara. The current level of funding needs to be reviewed in order to meet current demand for services and to prepare for future demand. Funding and the service model needs to be reflective of the unique nature of Niagara.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Dominic Ventresca, Acting Commissioner
Community Services Department

Mike Trojan
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by David Pelette, Manager – Housing, Hostels and Homelessness, and Brian Hutchings, Director – Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities.