Thank you!

You participated in a Sheridan College and Oakville Community Foundation research study about finding solutions to housing issues in the Halton Region. You said you would like to see a copy of the results, so here are some highlights.

The issue:

Safe and affordable housing is a basic human need, yet in 2016 the Halton Region had 264 homeless individuals and families. This number is rising, particularly as housing prices soar in Toronto and people are forced to move outside of the city. Housing needs must be addressed at the individual, community and government levels

The event:

Six focus groups were conducted with fifty individuals working within the housing community in the Halton Region. Participants were asked to discuss the **major issues** and identify **gaps in services** that their particular organization experiences in relation to housing. They were asked to **brainstorm fresh, creative ways** to address housing in the Halton Region. Findings suggest that housing needs must be addressed at the **individual, community** and **government** levels.

Issues & Gaps

Individual

- Gaps in providing housing that is culturally appropriate, addresses the needs of youth, seniors and multi-generational families, and for individuals with health and ability needs
- Clients' needs are often vast and interconneccted but programs and services are siloed thus requiring clients who need multiple services to go to different locations with various dates, times and requirements
- Housing alone will not keep majority of clients self-sufficient because of complex needs
- Transistional housing is short term and does not allow individuals to find ways to become self-sufficient in the limited time
- Front-line & case workers are often fulfilling multiple roles when meeting with the needs of their clients

> ...we have one shelter for singles, one family shelter program lcoated in the south of Halton...There's no way for people in the north to get there. And if they have school or if they are working, it's not even an option.
>
> *- Sienna, front-line worker*

And I find, at the front line level when you're playing multiple roles: landlord advocate, recruiter, support to the youth – we end up in really difficult situations now and how we further advocate for this young person with other landlords knowing the kind of circumstances and the barriers and the challenges and then that's going to deter landlords, but still needing to be a support and help navigate young people, homeless people, vulnerable people through this process.

- Ruby, front-line worker

Community

- High cost of living makes affordable housing out-of-reach
- Disparity of services e.g. homesless shelters between the north and south of Halton
- Many organizations are trying to be a 'catch-all' rather than focussing on their areas of expertise
- Frontline workers want to work together but lack the time and capacity to facilitate effective collaborations
- Organizations do not know what other organizations do or the services they provide
- Landlords overtly discriminating against renting to people who are on social assistance or receiving disability payments

Government

- Rent-geared-to-income housing waitlists are extremely long
- Lack of public transporation limits people's ability to stay in their community while being able to access services, work in other communities
- Two-tiered government system is a challenge because Region is responsible for housing and municipalities for planning
- Unclear guidelines for which level of government to go to leads to uncertainity of where to focus funding requests
- Lack of clarity in how funding decisions are made
- Funding continues to become available for 'innovative solutions' which rarely sems to include building more housing
- Frustration at being told to innovate when service providers are already creative in finding solutions to a myriad of difficulties their clients experience in addition to innovativating in order to stretch dollars
- Short-term funding is problematic because funding is often cut short as the program is gaining momentumn

If there were a better public transit system, that would help to some extent. I know it wouldn't solve the problem because some folks need the support of being accompanied, but it would make it a little bit easier. So public transportation across Halton has been a longstanding issue.

- Raquel, front-line worker

I really feel affected or offended by the word 'innovation' because we are super creative already...and on top of that, what we're doing is not enough, so we really have to, on top of what you're saying, you know working day and night, we have to be innovative

- Angelina, front-line worker

Recommendations: Addressing Housing

Meeting individual needs

- Build new affordable housing complexes to increase access
- Creatively reimagine spaces for housing and shelters:
    - utlizing warehouses, industrial complexes, commercial properties for large families
    - repurposing closed facilities (e.g. schools and hospitals) for shelters or individual apartments with shared kitchen facilities
    - using faith-based spaces, businesses, banquet halls and schools for emergency shelters
- Institute a revolving schedule to increase shelter capacity
- Facilitate house sharing for seniors, lone parent families, youth
- Need mulitiple strategies and practices to address the complex nature of people's lives and needs
- Enhance wraparound programming as it is beneficial and meets the multiple and complex needs of clients

> ....maybe the region or the municipalities need to step up to the plate and demand a certain percentage of a particular type of housing in an area so for every fifty houses that you build that are two story, you have to build a bungalow or something like that. So that there's appropriate housing for those that don't want multiple stairs…
>
> *- front-line worker*

Leadership at all government levels

- Implement a Region and sector-wide computer program so clients fill out one detailed application for all required services
- Region to act as a collaboration hub to help facilitate effective networks and to navigate funding applications
- Offering rebates or tax breaks to homeowners willing to renovate their houses to become landlords
- Increase federal and provinical funding to municipalities so they can increase stocks of affordable housing
- Increase the minimum wage to a living wage
- Increase social assistance levels above the low-income cutoff (LICO) which is a minimum of $24,000
- Increase funding to mental health and addiction services to greatly improve likelihood of success in obtaining and maintaining housing
- Longer-term funding to sustain already successful programs rather than the continued expectation for new innovations
- Invest in accessible education would improve the quality of life for many individuals
- Offer credential programs for highly educated immigrant populations

> ….so the successes that we've had are not assuming we know what people need or want, but actually helping people to talk and then having a unique plan per person. Because not everybody is the same. And I understand that's very costly in some ways, or seen as very costly, but I truly believe that it will actually be a cost reduction on the other end when you look at the overall whole system
>
> *- Olivia*

Coming together as a community

- Provide frontline workers opportunities to network with each other to develop and strengthen partnerships and capacity for collaboration
- Funding agencies should collaborate so that larger pools of money could be made available to make real and effective change
- Leverage potential philanthropic community members to help address housing affordability
- Educate all residents that there are low-income residents in their community
- Educate homeowners on the pros of becoming landlords and considering renting to low-income individuals
- Evaluation tools should accompany all new programming and be done on existing programs
- Bring related organizations, e.g.police and hospitals, to the table
- Institute one hub where vulnerable populations apply for all the services they may require simultaneously rather than having to locate and secure individual services

> It's getting back to that grassroots level and it takes a village, right? That's what I keep saying. And I think we have to return to that mentality, you know? We [should not] all [be] working individually in our own fields.
>
> *- Michelle, housing and outreach worker*