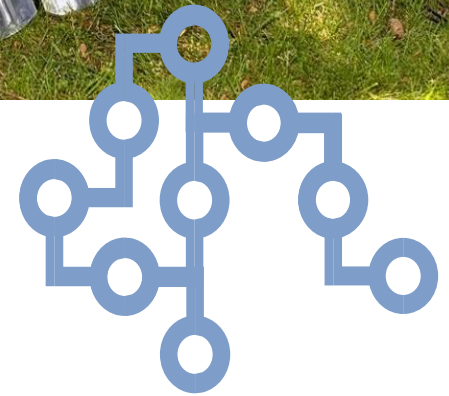


# ST. THOMAS AND ELGIN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN

## TAKING STOCK WORKING TOGETHER

2021 Progress Report



# Introduction


The City of St. Thomas, in its role as the Service Manager for St. Thomas and Elgin County, is responsible for delivering social and community services throughout the City and the County. These services are delivered by St. Thomas – Elgin Social Services Department. As part of its mandate, the Department administers and/or delivers a range of housing and homelessness programs including existing social housing, new affordable housing, rent supplements, housing allowances, portable housing benefits, home repair assistance, homeownership down-payment assistance, funding for emergency shelters and transitional housing, and other homelessness prevention programs including the Housing Links for People (HeLP) program. The City also owns and manages 558 units of housing, including 512 units of rent-geared to income housing.

The St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services Department works in collaboration with existing housing providers, homelessness service providers, and other stakeholders and organizations in the community to help meet the housing and homelessness prevention needs of residents of St. Thomas and Elgin County.

In the past, the Department has undertaken numerous reports and studies about community housing and homeless needs and has worked with organizations to implement many of the key recommendations from those studies.

As required in the *Housing Services Act*, City of St. Thomas Council approved a 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan for St. Thomas and Elgin County in December 2013. The Plan was implemented on January 1, 2014. Service Managers are required in the *Act* to report annually to the public by June 30 on progress in achieving the recommendations in their Plans during the preceding year.

**This is the 2021 Progress Report for St. Thomas/Elgin County.**



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are required to report  
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# Vision

St. Thomas and Elgin County recognize the importance of having affordable, adequate and appropriate housing for its residents. In co-operation with not-for-profit and private-sector partners in the community, and with support from federal and provincial levels of governments, St. Thomas and Elgin County will work towards meeting the housing and support needs of the community, with the elimination of long term homelessness as a key goal.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4
Increase housing supply options to meet projected needs.	Provide supports to keep people in the sustainable housing they currently have.	Enhance the current service system to prevent homelessness, and when homeless “rapidly” move people into stable housing.	Pursue community partnerships and broaden community awareness while advocating to senior levels of government to ensure stable housing and poverty reduction for all residents.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

## Increase housing supply options to meet projected need

### Progress in 2021

#### Regeneration of City-owned Property

In 2021, through a partnership with the City, Indwell – Hope and Homes opened 16 self contained micro unit apartments of supportive housing for vulnerable people experiencing chronic homelessness, high acuity and high hospital recidivism. The units, named Railway City Lofts, are located above the City’s transit building at 614 Talbot St.

The City’s partnership with Indwell – Hope and Homes includes building an additional 45 units of supportive and affordable housing at 16 Queen St. Construction began in 2021 and will be ready for occupancy in early 2023.

#### Municipal Support

In October of 2021, Council approved increasing the number of Portable Housing Benefits (PHB) from 60 to a maximum of 110 to support St. Thomas-Elgin households on the Centralized Housing Waitlist to achieve housing affordability in their current rental unit as an alternative to waiting to move into an RGI unit. In 2021, 63 PHB’s were issued and the average PHB was \$378 per household per month.

In addition, throughout 2021 the City worked in partnership with The INN to renovate a City owned building for the purposes of operating of a 24/7 housing focused emergency shelter. As a result of this partnership, The INN opened its doors at its new 24/7 location in January of 2022.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

## Progress in 2021 (continued)

### Rent Supplement Programs

Rent supplements are provided under three Provincially funded programs: 1) Canada Ontario Community Housing Initiative, 2) Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative, and; 3) Canada Ontario Housing Benefit. These programs assist low income households in achieving housing affordability in rental units that meet their needs.

In total, 85 households were served by these programs in 2021. The average rent supplement per month was approximately \$225.

### Community Housing Forum

In November of 2021, a Community Housing Forum was held in Elgin County. The forum brought together local stakeholders and neighbouring municipalities to meet with representatives from various City departments to learn about housing needs and initiatives. The purpose of the forum was to increase education and awareness of local housing stability challenges and to hear recommendations for responding to these challenges.

### Assistance to Community Groups

During 2021 the City provided assistance and support to community groups in St. Thomas-Elgin to assist with initiatives aimed at increasing affordable housing and housing stability options.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Provide supports to keep people in the sustainable housing they currently have

### Progress in 2021

#### Homelessness Prevention

\$197,969 in HeLP funding was allocated to assist 338 low-income households with homelessness prevention supports. The funds were spent as follows:

- 24% for utility arrears
  - (77 households)
- 32% for last month's rent
  - (96 households)
- 17% for furniture
  - (67 households)
- 16% for rent arrears
  - (51 households)
- 11% for moving costs
  - (47 households)

#### Home Repair Program

\$50,000 from the IAH Home Repair Program helped 7 homeowners and one multi-residential landlord pay for new roofs (5), furnace replacement (1) and plumbing repairs (2).

#### Enhancing Tenant Capacity and Eviction Prevention

The Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) continued to be an effective means to individualize supports and matching to resources for tenants to increase their prospect of having successful tenancies.

The City Housing staff compliment has increased to provide more preventative measures on eviction and homelessness prevention. This includes working proactively with tenants, and participating in Coordinated Access and the Situation Table Emergency Case Conferencing.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Enhance the current service system to prevent homelessness, and when homeless, “rapidly” move people into stable housing

### Progress in 2021

#### Youth Homelessness Protocol

102 youth accessed services through the Youth Homelessness Protocol in 2021.

31% of these youth were 16-18.

55% of those who applied for service had experienced a family breakdown.

18% were couch surfing.

1% eviction by other.

16% personal safety concerns.

51% exited Housing Based Case Management.

98% were connect with a YWCA Housing Based Case Manager or Youth in Transition worker.

#### The INN (formerly The Inn Out of the Cold)

Throughout 2021, this emergency shelter operated in 2 separate locations in order to provide day space as a part of our local response to COVID 19, as well as overnight emergency accommodations.

In total, 263 unique people experiencing homelessness were served at the day space.

155 unique people experiencing homelessness stayed overnight at Inn Out of the Cold for a total of 10,008 bed nights. This was a decrease of 10 individuals from the previous year.

The average stay was 25 nights. 48% of guests were women. 11% were youth between 16-24. 14% of the women and 24% of the men stayed between 1-5 nights in total. 22 women and 25 men stayed just 1 night.

The supports provided include: basic needs, emergency shelter, and matching to community resources. including housing.

#### Client-Centred Supportive Housing

\$514,000 in CHPI funding helped agencies provide client-centred supportive housing as follows:

YWCA Residence (17 beds)

Harmony House (6 beds)

Horizon House (3 beds)

Fairwinds (3 beds)

Unity House (3 beds)

Second Story (6 beds)

Fresh Start (5 apartments)

CMHA residential care home program (avg. 60 beds)



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

### Progress in 2021 (continued)

#### CMHA Housing Support

Due to COVID 19, CMHA Elgin suspended its weekly housing drop-in centre which served as an “intake” point for many individuals who were homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness.

In its place, CMHA continues to employ a Housing and Homelessness System Navigator to collaborate in partnership with Inn out of the Cold to meet with people experiencing homelessness 1:1 to work on housing plans.

#### Crisis Beds

CMHA Elgin and the YWCA operated a total of 6 “safe beds” serving as temporary emergency shelter for individuals applying for transitional and/or supportive housing services from them, and moved individuals from those beds into appropriate housing when it became available.

#### Family Central Apartments

In addition to operating its 6 supportive affordable housing units, Family Central Apartments renovated additional program space to provide Monday to Friday day time drop in and food security services to vulnerable people. As well as 10 winter emergency shelter beds.

#### Coordinated Access System

Throughout 2021 a local Coordinated Access System met monthly to match people experiencing homelessness identified on the By Name List to housing resources based on willingness, need and priority. The By Name List is a list of names of people in our community actively experiencing homelessness. Throughout 2021 the practices of our local Coordinated Access System continued to be developed and refined to enhance efficiency and best practices.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

### Progress in 2021 (continued)

#### Women's Homelessness

The Taking Action on Women's Homelessness Advisory Group met regularly in 2021. The work of this Advisory Group included hosting the Community Symposium Addressing Women's Homelessness on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with 100 virtual attendees.

In 2021, this group expanded to include a focus on developing solutions for family homelessness and renamed itself the Taking Actions on Women's and Families Homelessness Advisory Group.

Member organizations across St. Thomas and Elgin grew to include and were not limited to: Homelessness Service and Prevention Providers, Housing Providers, Indigenous Services, Child Protection, Social Services and the Ministry of Community, Safety and Correctional Services.

The following action areas provided by OrgCode continue to guide the Taking Action on Women's and Families Homelessness Advisory Group:

1. Annual Housing and Homelessness Symposiums
2. Community of Practice for Housing & Shelter Providers
3. Improved Access to Transportation
4. System Navigation for Women at Risk of Homelessness
5. Creation of Affordable Housing
6. Support Creation of Coordinated Access System

#### 2021 Point-In-Time Count

A Point-In-Time (PIT) Count collects demographic information on a specific day and time for people experiencing homelessness.

In 2021, as a requirement of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a PIT Count was held in St. Thomas-Elgin. In total, there were 77 unique survey participants.

The demographic data collected through these surveys can be used to help guide local plans to respond to occurrences of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

Pursue community partnerships and broaden community awareness while advocating to senior levels of government to ensure stable housing and poverty reduction for all residents

### Progress in 2021

#### Committees

The Housing and Homeless Action Group, now known as the Housing Stability Alliance reconvened in early 2021 under updated Terms of Reference.

Throughout 2021, the West Elgin Housing Stability Coalition continued meeting to assess and advocate for the housing and homelessness needs of West Elgin. As a result, the coalition commissioned the report, *Elgin County Housing and Homelessness Needs Assessment*.

Other committees including Access to Affordable Housing, Coordinated Access, Youth Homelessness Protocol, and Taking Action on Women's and Family Homelessness met on a regular basis. The committees consist of a wide range of community partners including members from CMHA, CCHC, YWCA, The INN, Fresh Start, Poverty Coalition, United Way, Drug and Alcohol Strategy, Residential Care Homes and others.

#### Street Outreach

In 2021, a Street Outreach Team was piloted in partnership between CMHATVAMHS and the City. Throughout 2021 approximately 85 unique people received Street Outreach support and services. Advocacy efforts to fund this service as permanent are on going.

#### Provincial Activities

City staff have continued their ongoing involvement with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding existing service provisions and future opportunities for increasing affordable housing stock. In addition, City membership in OMSSA and City Staff's active participation in OMSSA discussions at various levels of government has contributed to OMSSA's lobbying efforts with MMAH.

#### Poverty Coalition

The Elgin St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty has continued to work closely with three main priority groups: Housing, Economic Security and Food Security. Throughout 2021, the Poverty Coalition worked collaboratively to address urgent needs throughout the pandemic such as access to food and food security. As a result a sub working group was formed to focus specifically on food related needs in our community.

[www.povertycoalition.ca](http://www.povertycoalition.ca)