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DATE: May 27, 2002

SUBJECT: **REGION OF PEEL - 2001 EMERGENCY SHELTERS AND NEW SHELTER INITIATIVES ANNUAL REPORT**

FROM: David Szwarc, Commissioner, Social Services  
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## **OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this report is to provide members of Regional Council with an overview of emergency shelter use within the Region of Peel in 2001. Further, the report outlines new initiatives within emergency shelters in the Region of Peel.

### **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- The Region's leadership is evident in the high level of co-ordination and collaboration amongst staff at all levels of the Human Services departments: Health, Social Services and Housing and Property Services.
- A total of 10,574 people were assisted through the homeless shelters in Peel Region.
- Family shelters served a total of 1,558 families or an average of 130 families monthly. The families assisted included 4,420 people (1,855 adults and 2,565 children).
- Single shelters served a total of 6,154 homeless men and women.
- An increase in the length of stay at the shelters reflects the increasing length of time required for singles and families in need to acquire housing or housing alternatives in the community.
- Collaborative efforts with community partners ensure the necessary program supports are offered for emergency overflow through the Rosetown Inn.
- The main gaps in service identified are lack of affordable and supportive housing, a lack of community health centres and a lack of residential addiction treatment centres or non-abstinence-based programs in Peel.
- Hostel residents cite a lack of acceptable housing options as the number one cause for homelessness.
- Partnerships with the Federal government have allowed for two new initiatives in Peel's shelters, Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) Resource Rooms.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Background**

In May 1999, the Final Report of the Peel Regional Task Force on Homelessness: "Getting to the Root of the Problem" was released. Its underlining theme was to support people experiencing homelessness in order that they could regain stable lives as healthy, contributing citizens. Council approved an organized series of recommendations designed as a continuum to address homelessness, reduce barriers to service access and increase

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the housing supply. Council also affirmed its commitment to the elimination of homelessness in Peel through authorization of initiatives designed to achieve the appropriate balance between the prevention of homelessness and alleviation of suffering for those who find themselves homeless.

### 2. Program Overview

The intent of Peel's emergency shelters is not only to offer emergency shelter and basic needs such as food and clothing, but also to provide a range of supports and programs, which encourages Peel's homeless population to attain and maintain independent living. Programs at the shelters include financial assistance from Ontario Works as well, employment supports, housing supports, chaplaincy, life skills training, a health clinic, mental health and addiction supports and recreation.

There are two family oriented shelter facilities presently operating in the Region of Peel:

- Family Life Resource Centre (FLRC) – Owned and operated by the Salvation Army as an emergency shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic violence. The facility also provides shelter to some homeless families and abused single women.
- Interim Place – Operates two facilities for women and their children who are physically, sexually, emotionally or psychologically abused. (Funding is provided fully by the province under the "Violence Against Women" program.)
- Emergency overflow for families is provided through the Rosetown Inn, a privately operated hotel located in Brampton.

There are four single shelter facilities presently operating in the Region of Peel:

- Wilkinson and Mavis Road Shelters – The Salvation Army provides the staffing of this facility, while the Region of Peel manages the facility and maintains responsibility for the operation of the program. This facility provides temporary emergency shelter for homeless men and women.
- Our Place (Peel) Shelter – A not-for-profit organization that provides emergency shelter for youth.
- St. Leonard's Rotary Resolve House – A not-for-profit organization that provides longer term shelter for chronically homeless men in Peel Region.

### 3. Hostel Activity

The following chart compares hostel activity in 2000 and 2001. The cases are broken down as families, singles, children and total individuals and respective growth:

#### Hostel Utilization 2001 vs. 2000

Year	Cases: Families	Singles	Families Number of People	Number of Children	Total Individuals
2000	1,109	5,053	3,403	1,893	8,267
2001	1,558 (40%)	6,154 (22%)	4,420 (30%)	2,565 (35%)	10,574 (27.9%)

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Information is collected from clients during intake regarding their municipality of origin. The majority of clients are originally from the Region of Peel. Staff relies on the self-declaration of clients. It is not unusual for police from the City of Toronto to bring individuals who have been released from hospital or detox centres to the shelters in Peel if Peel was their home community. However, there is a percent of hostel residents who declare that their last place of residence was Toronto, or other parts of Ontario. Appendix I and II, which are attached to this report provide more details on the clients serviced by the emergency shelters (family and single) in Peel. Appendix IV provides details on municipality of origin for 2001.

For the period of May 9 to 16, 2001 at the Wilkinson Road shelter residents provided the following information about previous accommodations:

- 69% of residents maintain the Region of Peel was their last permanent resident and where they were residing one year ago
- 14% of residents maintain that the City of Toronto was their last permanent address and where they were residing one year ago
- 13% of residents declared another city
- 4% of residents declared another province

Of those who said that immediately prior to admittance they were residing outside of Peel Region:

- 29% claim to have come to Peel as a result of eviction
- 10% due to transient lifestyle
- 33% due to release from correctional facility or as a result of spousal abuse or parental conflict
- 38% failed to provide information

Staff are participating in the implementation of a national computer database in all Peel emergency hostels. This database will give more precise data in the future (detailed description of this initiative is provided later in the report).

### **4. Program Outcomes**

The emergency shelter programs are a key component of the Continuum of Supports Framework available in Peel Region, as outlined in the March 22, 2001 report to Council. Each program offers a variety of supports in addition to meeting the basic needs of the homeless population. One of the challenging tasks for staff at the emergency shelters is to identify the outcomes of the various interventions provided. Each individual situation is different and success is measured in a variety of ways. For some homeless people, admission to a shelter from the street is considered a success. For others, securing financial assistance, commencing counselling and moving out of the shelter is a significant success. Appendix III attached to this report provides outcomes of current interventions in the Emergency Shelters.

With the introduction of the new information system in all homeless shelters in Peel Region over the past few months, staff expects to have more reliable and detailed information about all shelter residents and be able to measure the outcome of the various interventions. Up until now, the manual tracking of client information has been cumbersome and difficult to analyze. Ontario Works staff is actively participating on the National User Group and the system enhancements will allow for the collection of meaningful outcome data that will influence program planning and evaluation. The majority of shelter providers have

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expressed concerns about the lack of resources to assess the effectiveness of their programs.

### **5. Gaps and Barriers**

Individuals who are homeless often face many barriers in accessing conventional services. Homelessness is often misunderstood, and many common myths prevail in society. As a result, many homeless individuals are often wrongly stigmatized and find it difficult to obtain appropriate services.

Despite increases to hostel capacity in Peel it has still been necessary to seek alternate solutions to manage the demand volume. For several years, the Rosetown Inn, a privately operated hotel in Brampton has been used in emergency situations for client overflow purposes. With the Family Life Resource Centre operating near or at capacity and experiencing an increase in the average length of stay, it has been necessary to place more families at the Rosetown Inn. Ontario Works staff presently meets with residents at the Rosetown Inn daily to discuss case plans. Effective November 2001, a Family Transitional Worker provides additional supports to families as needed. Further collaborative efforts are being made to ensure that additional program supports are being provided at the Rosetown Inn. These program supports include working with community agencies to provide life skills training, parenting and budgeting courses, involving other departments within the Region of Peel (i.e. Health), as well, working with local schools to ensure that the increasing number of children at the Rosetown Inn receive the supports they need.

Length-of-stay statistics, at all emergency shelters, indicate increasing lengths of time required for singles and families in need to acquire housing or housing alternatives in the community. Furthermore, as the percentage of mental health and addiction concerns is suspected to be greater than self reported, the ability to develop appropriate case plans, based on individual history and need is challenging. It has been identified that appropriate treatment facilities and/or non-abstinence-based programs are required, but waiting lists are long in Peel and many treatment centres are not located in the Region or readily accessible. There is a clear indication of the need for supportive housing options where both affordable housing is provided, along with appropriate support services.

The higher than expected youth population within the shelters has required the staff to amend programming in the hostels as the challenges and needs of this population are unique. In addition, housing a diverse population ranging from age 16 to over 60 years of age continues to present issues of varying health needs, language and communication barriers, conflicting expectations and diverse program and support requirements.

Within the existing shelter system, Peel must have in place a support system that allows the homeless into appropriate shelters for a length of time that will provide professionals with the opportunity to assess individual or family needs and then place them in a program that meets their needs. If there are time limits assigned to the length of stay, delays, barriers or waiting lists encountered, the individual or family cannot move to the next step of appropriate and supportive housing. The end result means that housing designed to be temporary and targeted for emergency purposes, reaches capacity, begins to warehouse individuals or families and is unable to accept new clientele.

**REGION OF PEEL - 2001 EMERGENCY SHELTERS AND NEW SHELTER INITIATIVES  
ANNUAL REPORT****6. New Shelter Initiatives****(a) Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)**

In order to assist both municipalities and shelters to develop useful and comparable information on homeless individuals served, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) developed a homelessness data collection and management system. The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) information can be collected on individuals and families using the shelter system within a municipality. The data collected will provide longitudinal, multi-locational and discrete data on shelter clients over time. The Homeless Secretariat of the Federal government has taken over the responsibility for this program.

Upon learning about this initiative, Peel staff began discussions with CMHC about implementing the system in the emergency shelters in Peel Region. Staff identified a number of significant impacts of this type of program including accurate and reliable data regarding the number and characteristics of our homeless population, as well as the outcome of various interventions. This information will be extremely helpful for staff in making recommendations to Council regarding service needs and the evaluation of policies and programs appropriate to both prevent and reduce homelessness in the Region. In June 2001, HIFIS was implemented in five shelters. Progress has been made, although reporting capabilities are minimal at the present time due to system limitations. However, the Homeless Secretariat has recently approved further development of the program. Ontario Works staff is participating in the National User Group for HIFIS. The upgrades are expected to be introduced through late 2002. Peel will incorporate these upgrades which should improve data collection and data integrity.

**(b) HRDC Resource Banks**

Continuing to build upon the supports and services provided to homeless individuals utilizing shelters in Peel, Ontario Works submitted a formal proposal to Human Resources Development Canada for the creation of employment resource rooms in the hostels. Funding was granted for the establishment of full employment resource rooms in the Mavis Road and Wilkinson Road shelters, as well as Our Place (Peel), with a program implementation date of July 2001.

The focus of these resource rooms is to provide further supportive services, aimed at assisting the homeless in Peel with finding and securing employment. The intent is to empower all residents with knowledge and resources that will enable them to successfully search for and obtain employment.

To date the resource rooms have been well received by shelter residents. The Mavis and Wilkinson Road resource rooms have provided service to a high volume of participants, reaching peak numbers in November of 290 participants who received some form of job search assistance. Services provided include referrals to employment agencies, job search planning, interview skills, computer assistance and resume writing.

Our Place (Peel) has reported a steady increase in the number of visitors to its resource room. Many have received assistance with job search planning, life skills coaching and resume/cover letter writing. Referrals have also been made to various community

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agencies specializing in educational resources, health care, psychosocial supports and addiction services.

Overall, the resource rooms have been a positive addition to the shelter environment providing its residents with one to one, specialized job search assistance. It is anticipated that further successes will continue to be reported as the resource rooms continue to expand their services and community links.

### (c) Emergency Shelter Community Advisory Group

In order to improve communication with the community about the emergency shelter program, staff are in the process of establishing a community advisory group.

The advisory group will include representatives from community organizations who assist homeless persons, emergency shelter operators in Peel Region, community advocates and former shelter residents.

The advisory group will be asked to draft a Terms of Reference and include a reporting schedule to General Committee.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The following chart reflects the total operating costs, subsidy and net Program cost of the hostel program for 2001.

	FLRC	Mavis Road	Wilkinson Road	St. Leonard's House	Rosetown Inn	Our Place (Peel)	TOTAL
Operating Cost	\$540,818	\$599,969	\$942,172	\$293,950	\$833,530	\$174,188	\$3,384,627
Provincial Subsidy at 80%	\$432,654	\$479,975	\$753,737	\$235,160	\$666,824	\$139,350	\$2,707,702
Net Cost to Region	\$108,164	\$119,994	\$188,435	\$ 58,790	\$166,706	\$34,838	\$676,925

The Region's leadership is evident in the high level of co-ordination and collaboration amongst staff at all levels of the Human Services departments: Health, Social Services and Housing and Property Services, together with other Regional departments such as Finance, Corporate Services and Public Works which have supported a variety of specific initiatives. The Region's own ability to effectively collaborate among its departments has provided a practical means to draw together resources from federal and provincial sources, which would not otherwise be coordinated.

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**CONCLUSION**

The solutions for addressing homelessness are as complex as the individual needs of those experiencing homelessness. What is clear is that in Peel, there is an urgent need for diverse shelter and housing options that provide a range of supportive services to allow independent living. Emergency shelters perform a valuable resource but cannot provide stable housing or the support required to break the emerging cycle of poverty and homelessness in the Region.

The Region of Peel has limited capacity to respond to these diverse challenges and will require long-term partnerships with other levels of government and the community if we are to satisfactorily address the growing problem of homelessness.

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**Approved for Submission:**

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