

**County of Lambton**

**Homelessness Plan**

**2009-2011**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The County of Lambton has developed the Homelessness Plan according to the provincial priorities to:

- Move people from the streets to emergency accommodation
- Move people from emergency to permanent accommodation; and,
- Prevent homelessness by supporting people to retain their permanent accommodation.

The 2009 -2011 Homelessness Plan continues to build on the successes of previous Homelessness Plans while incorporating new developments occurring in the community. The policies and strategies presented here demonstrate the ability of the County of Lambton to provide cohesive and respectful services to one of the most vulnerable populations in this community. The plan has eight sections, an introduction, literature review, environmental scan, review of the local programs and services, review of the recommendations presented in the 2006-2008 Plan, current local trends and needs, recommendations and conclusion.

The introduction provides information regarding the development of the local Homelessness Plan. A brief history is provided to illustrate how programs and services for individuals facing homelessness continue to develop in the County.

The literature review includes several definitions of homelessness. Emerging trends in homelessness are outlined including a new threshold for affordable housing at 30% of income, studies that chronicle poor outcomes for children who become homeless, the need for a national housing policy, and the escalating use of local food banks and homeless services. A new issue in

recent months is the need to find supportive housing for individuals to live independently.

The environmental scan provides an overview of the current housing environment and homelessness funding programs at the national, provincial and local levels. A review of the wait list for affordable housing and housing stock clearly depicts the pressures faced by the County of Lambton's Housing Services department. The development of a new emergency shelter and transitional housing facility by the Inn of the Good Shepherd is detailed. An emerging need is supportive affordable housing for developmentally and physically delayed adults. The community consultations held in the community to address the issues of poverty and homelessness are also reviewed.

Local programs and services available in the community are highlighted to illustrate the depth of need for these services. Statistics are provided for each of the programs supported by the previous homelessness plan. Services provided by service and faith based groups are outlined as their presence demonstrates that there are many needs in the community not currently addressed by the funding provided to the County of Lambton by the provincial government.

A review of the recommendations presented in the 2006-2008 Homelessness Plan provides an update on the work that has been done in the homelessness service sector over the past three years.

Based on the information collected during the planning process of the 2009-2011 Homelessness Plan, the current local trends are identified. From these emerging trends, several community needs are outlined. The community needs have been translated into recommendations for action during the three-year life of this Homelessness Plan. These fourteen recommendations

continue to build on the holistic, comprehensive, community centred approach to program and service delivery that have been the cornerstone of previous Homelessness Plans developed for the County of Lambton.

## INTRODUCTION

With the devolution of services in the late 1990's the provincial government transferred responsibility for homeless service management to the municipalities. As a condition of this transfer, the County is required to develop a local business plan to deliver homelessness services to achieve one or more of the following provincial priorities.

- Moving people from the streets to emergency accommodation.
- Moving people from emergency to permanent accommodation.
- Preventing homelessness by supporting people to retain their permanent accommodation.

The County of Lambton, as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) developed the first homelessness plan in 1999. From 1999 to 2008 the CMSM managed the funding using the definition of homelessness as “one who has no home, or one at risk of having no home because 50% or greater of their income is spent on shelter”.

In 2003, the Homelessness Plan provided a mix of service levels for homelessness services that were appropriate to meet local needs and priorities within the provincial framework and municipal standards, policies, priorities and resources. Since 2003, the County of Lambton Homelessness Plan has focused on a balanced approach to addressing homelessness, providing a comprehensive continuum of services.

The 2009-2011 Homelessness Plan was developed with information gathered through a variety of methods. These include a literature review, key informant interviews, round table discussions with staff, community partners, and social service agencies. Two community consultations were held, one in June and one in November of 2008. Each of the consultations was attended by over

seventy people who identified that they live in poverty. The discussion at each consultation focused on the challenges of living in poverty, including the issues of homelessness. Relevant and realistic solutions were provided by the individuals in attendance. Many of these suggestions have been incorporated into this Homelessness Plan.

The draft plan was reviewed and revised based on input from members of the Community Homelessness Initiatives Network (CHIN). CHIN is comprised of staff from agencies that provide services to individuals facing homelessness and persons who use the homelessness services. Final approval of the 2009-2011 Homelessness Plan will be at the discretion of Lambton County Council.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Homelessness continues to be an issue throughout Canada. The impact of homelessness can be felt at all levels of society including the social, economic, and health sectors. Social agencies, advocacy groups and many levels of government have analyzed the various issues of homelessness. Following is a brief review of recent reports.

Homelessness has been defined many ways. The definition adapted by the Quality of Life Reporting system identifies singles and families experiencing any of the following conditions.

- Rooflessness: staying the night in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. a vacant building, a public or commercial facility, a city park, a car or on the street).
- Living in an Emergency Shelter: singles and families relying on the emergency shelter system on a short-term or recurrent basis.
- Invisible homelessness: temporarily and/or involuntarily living with friends or relatives (couch-surfing) or exchanging favours in return for housing.
- Houselessness: includes people who reside in long-term institutions because there is no suitable accommodation in the community and youth living in care.<sup>1</sup>

The 2006 census marks the first time low-income rates were calculated based on after-tax income, a move the agency said more accurately reflects what families have available to spend. Using the old criteria, before-tax income, there were some 1.2 million children living in poverty in 2005 which was relatively unchanged from the 2001 census. For a family of four in a large city,

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<sup>1</sup> Quality of Life in Canadian Communities, Trends and Issues in Affordable Housing and Homelessness. Trend Report #4. 2008. Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

an income of \$38,610 is the cutoff point. The same family in a rural area would be considered low-income at \$26,579.

A person is considered at risk of homelessness if they spend 50% or more of their income on shelter costs. The broadly accepted measure of affordability in housing is 30% of gross income paid for housing. A single person working full time at Ontario's minimum wage would have to pay more than 40% of their income to rent a bachelor apartment in most communities<sup>2</sup> (based on \$8.75 per hour effective March 31, 2008). A family with two income earners may be better off as a one bedroom apartment can be rented for slightly less than 30% of income, but if the household includes children and needs 2 or 3 bedrooms, the rent consumes more than 30% of income.

Canada's homeless are no longer only single males and females, they include the hidden homeless: retirees on fixed incomes, adults with full-time jobs, single parents with children, those with mental health and addictions issues.

In early 2008 the provincial government struck the Ontario Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction and charged the committee to find ways to reduce poverty. In their strategy paper the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) identified that ending homelessness must be a central part of Ontario's poverty reduction agenda stating that without affordable and stable housing people will not have the opportunity to succeed.<sup>3</sup> The instability caused by homelessness and the lack of stable, affordable housing imposes huge costs on those individuals who experience homelessness as well as the rest of society.

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<sup>2</sup> In Ottawa, with an average rent of \$643 the proportion is 42%; in Toronto, with an average rent of \$726, the proportion is 48%, as cited in OMSSA, A Strategy to End Homelessness. 2008. P.8

<sup>3</sup> OMSSA, A Strategy to End Homelessness. 2008

OMSSA further states that the effort to end homelessness must be broader than the programs and services specifically defined as homelessness programs. There must also be a concerted effort put forth by the provincial government to coordinate programs funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC), and the Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN). Programs funded through the federal departments of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and Service Canada must also be coordinated along with any new funding that comes through other federal ministries.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) in its Theme Report #4, Trends and Issues in Affordable Housing and Homelessness, identifies a number of emerging issues.

Bassuk et. al. observed that both homeless and low-income children experience significant adversity in their lives, with homeless preschool children facing more stress. However, differences in behavior as measured by the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) were minimal. In addition to various stressors, the mother's emotional status is a strong predictor of the negative outcomes of children on both CBCL subscales. These findings emphasize the importance of preventive family-oriented interventions that address the needs of preschoolers and their mothers.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to measure homelessness due to practical challenges in counting homelessness in a meaningful way across the country, including differing definitions and lack of resources. Several municipalities have endeavoured to count homelessness through street counts and estimates. Critics are skeptical of these methods believing that inaccurate counts will be produced

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<sup>4</sup> Bassuk, E.L., Weinreb, L.S, Dawson, R., Perloff, J.N., and Buckner, J.C. PEDIATRICS Vol. 100 No. 1 July 1997, pp. 92-100. Determinants of Behavior in Homeless and Low-income Housed Preschool Children. Retrieved August 13, 2008 from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/100/1/92>

and programs will be adjusted according to the information collected in the survey.

In its Task Force review of Homelessness, OMSSA attributes the growth in the shelter system to many factors – changes in the global economy and the nature of work, reductions to health and social services programs, policies related to de-institutionalization, and a lack of permanent affordable housing. As a result, women, children, youth, families and people with mental health and/or substance abuse issues have now joined transient men as residents of emergency shelters.<sup>5</sup>

Cathy Crowe, a Toronto street nurse and homeless advocate, writes “Family and child homelessness is not known, it is not seen. Despite mounds of academic research that has addressed the cognitive and emotional damage that homelessness causes to children; despite statistics that have counted and identified the growing numbers of homeless families; despite the solutions (affordable housing, higher social assistance rates, a more sustainable minimum wage, childcare, etc) identified by advocates, homelessness remains invisible, hidden, unnoticed, out of sight and unseen.”<sup>6</sup>

Government critics say Canada is in the midst of a crisis and headed for a breaking point unless Ottawa comes through with long-term funding to address poverty and affordable housing. “We’re on the edge of an absolute crisis in terms of homelessness funding,” said Michael Shapcott of the Wellesley Institute, a non-profit research group that tracks federal spending on homelessness and housing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ontario Municipal Social Service Association. (2005, November). *Emergency Shelter Task Force Final Report*.

<sup>6</sup> Crowe, Cathy. Cathy Crowe Newsletter #49 - September, 2008

<sup>7</sup> Keller, J. July 24, 2008, Canada on brink of 'crisis' in homeless funding: advocates. The Canadian Press. Retrieved July 24, 2008 from <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Politics/2008/07/23/6243886-cp.html>

According to the Canadian Federation of Municipalities (FCM), many municipalities are adapting a strategy of preventing Homelessness through an integrated approach. In addition to personal issues, including addiction or mental health, several structural factors contribute to placing an individual or family at risk of becoming homeless. For example, a household that pays 50 per cent or more of its gross income on housing is considered at risk of homelessness. Other economic classes that may be considered at risk of homelessness include those on fixed incomes; such as social assistance, disability support programs, employment insurance or senior's pensions.

Many municipalities in Canada are adapting an approach that addresses the systemic elements of homelessness and its prevention. Sometimes referred to as a Continuum Model or Housing First Approach, municipal strategies are being designed to coordinate and integrate programs, services, and housing among and between sectors, officials, departments and levels of government.

These integrated approaches include homelessness prevention, emergency shelters, transitional housing, supports to housing, subsidized housing, all the way to market rental and home ownership. More comprehensive approaches include income, employment and other health services to enable an individual or family to transition to permanent independent living. The integrated approach enables policy makers to examine policies and systemic issues and take corrective action where applicable to best meet the needs of the individual.<sup>8</sup>

Local food banks continue to struggle to meet rising demand in Sarnia. In June 2008, a citywide food drive fell far short of its goal leaving local social service agencies scrambling to supply families with enough food to get by. With gasoline and utility costs on the rise, more families are dipping into food budgets to keep the household running. The result is a higher demand on

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<sup>8</sup> Quality of Life in Canadian Communities, Trends and Issues in Affordable Housing and Homelessness. Trend Report #4. 2008. Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

soup kitchen, food bank and rent utility bank services from three service providers; the Salvation Army, the Inn of the Good Shepherd and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.<sup>9</sup>

Supportive housing for individuals who require long term supports to live independently is an increasing need in Sarnia-Lambton as the parents of adults with special needs age and become unable to care for their adult children. Single parents who experience homelessness also face a difficult time finding accommodations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Poirier, Jack. The Observer. Food drive falls short. Retrieved July 9, 2008 from <http://www.theobserver.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1106431&auth=BY%20JACK%20POIRIER,%20THE%20OBSERVER>

<sup>10</sup> Homelessness has many faces. Hagan, Tara. September 19, 2008. The Observer. Retrieved September 19, 2008 from <http://www.theobserver.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1207192>

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN**

### ***National***

The federal government recognizes that homelessness is an issue that requires attention at the national level. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) was announced by the federal government on December 19, 2006. The HPS replaces the National Homelessness Initiative, which expired on March 31, 2007. The Strategy which began on April 1, 2007, provides \$269.6 million over two years. The funding is intended to prevent and reduce homelessness by helping to establish the structures and supports needed to move homeless and at-risk individuals towards self-sufficiency and full participation in Canadian society.

The strategy builds and improves upon the National Homelessness Initiative by focusing on a "housing-first" approach to homelessness in Canada. By working with communities, provinces and territories, partners in the private and not-for-profit sectors and Aboriginal partners, the Strategy encourages an effective alignment of federal/provincial/territorial investments and helps homeless individuals and families access the range of services and programs that they need to move towards self-sufficiency.

Under the HPS, the federal government will offer the provinces and territories the opportunity to enter into bilateral partnerships, improve collaboration and develop linkages between the federal homelessness programs and provincial/territorial social services to help communities make strategic investments that will best serve their homeless populations.

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy has three main program initiatives: the Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI), the Homelessness Accountability Network (HAN), and the Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative (SFRPHI).

The HPI funds community led planning processes designed to ensure that communities have the flexibility and the tools required that identify and address their community's own distinct homelessness needs and priorities.

The Homelessness Accountability Network (HAN) provides an opportunity to strengthen the networks between Homelessness Partnership Initiative designated communities, as key partners in the Strategy, and a range of other key stakeholders, in order to strengthen knowledge and partnership development, accountability and results reporting.

The HAN will hold national and regional events and develop Web-based tools to encourage networking among stakeholders, including service providers and a wide range of partners. These activities support discussion and the implementation of effective strategies that will help broaden partnerships, celebrate achievements, encourage local leadership, and engage the private sector through corporate community service funding programs.

The SFRPHI makes surplus federal real properties available to community organizations, the not-for-profit sector, and other levels of government for projects to help prevent and reduce homelessness. It does this by compensating federal departments and agencies, at market value, for surplus properties that are then transferred for one dollar to eligible organizations. Proposals for using surplus federal properties can range from residential and non-residential emergency services to permanent affordable housing. These transfers are conditional to the maintenance of the service for 15 years.

## ***Provincial***

The provincial and federal governments have partnered to deliver the Affordable Housing Program to provide financing for the following initiatives:

### **Rent Supplement/ Housing Allowance**

- \$80 million has been allocated to create 5000 housing allowances for low-income households;
- Housing allowances range from \$20 - \$300 per household.

### **Rental and Supportive Housing - Wave 1**

- \$302.40 million has been allocated to create 4,320 units of rental and supportive housing, of this allocation:
- 3,120 rental units are targeted to people on or eligible to be on a social housing waiting list;
- 1,200 supportive housing units are targeted for persons with mental illness and victims of domestic violence;
- In addition to the above priority groups, persons with disabilities, Aboriginals, recent immigrants, seniors and the working poor are prioritized groups for Affordable Housing Program projects.

### **Brownfields Initiative**

- This initiative funds a minimum of 300 units to be built specifically on redeveloped brownfield sites.

### **Northern Housing**

- \$20 million for the repair or renovation of 1,000 affordable housing units for low-income households in Northern Ontario.

### **Homeownership**

- \$36 million has been allocated to make homeownership affordable for more than 4,500 low and moderate-income renter households.

The City of Toronto completed its first *Street Needs Assessment* in 2006. A total of 5,052 homeless individuals were identified. The majority (72.2 per cent) were staying at a shelter. The number of individuals staying in shelters was highest in 2001: 31,175 people (men, women and children). Beginning in 2002 and continuing to 2006, the number of families and the number of children decreased.

Waterloo's Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy provides estimated in 1999 that there were between 1,500 and 2,000 people who experienced homelessness over the course of a year. The 2006 Inventory of Services estimated 4,832 individuals aged 16 and over used emergency shelters.

The Hamilton Social Planning & Research Council, reports that the number of people using an emergency shelter at least once a year has almost doubled over the last 20 years in Hamilton. Shelter counts conducted by the Social Planning and Research Council showed that there were 160 people staying in emergency shelters on a given night in November 1995, and over 400 in November 2006.

The United Way of Toronto identified that in 2006 there were 30 per cent of Toronto families with children living in poverty, compared with 16 per cent in 1990, warning that these numbers point to a broad assault on our economy and our well-being.<sup>11</sup>

Employment in Ontario fell by 35,000 in February, mostly in construction and finance, insurance, real estate and leasing. The unemployment rate increased

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<sup>11</sup> The Star's 106-year War on Poverty. The Toronto Star. Dec 01, 2007 04:30 AM . Bob Hepburn. Retrieved August 21, 2008 from <http://www.thestar.com/comment/article/281511>

0.7 percentage points to 8.7%, the highest since April 1997. Since October 2008, the province's unemployment rate has risen by 2.0 percentage points, with increases concentrated in southwestern Ontario.<sup>12</sup>

Since October 2008, just over half of the country's total employment losses have occurred in Ontario, well beyond the province's 39% share of the total working-age population. Employment in the province fell by 160,000 during this period, with the largest decreases in manufacturing; business, building and other support services; and construction.<sup>13</sup>

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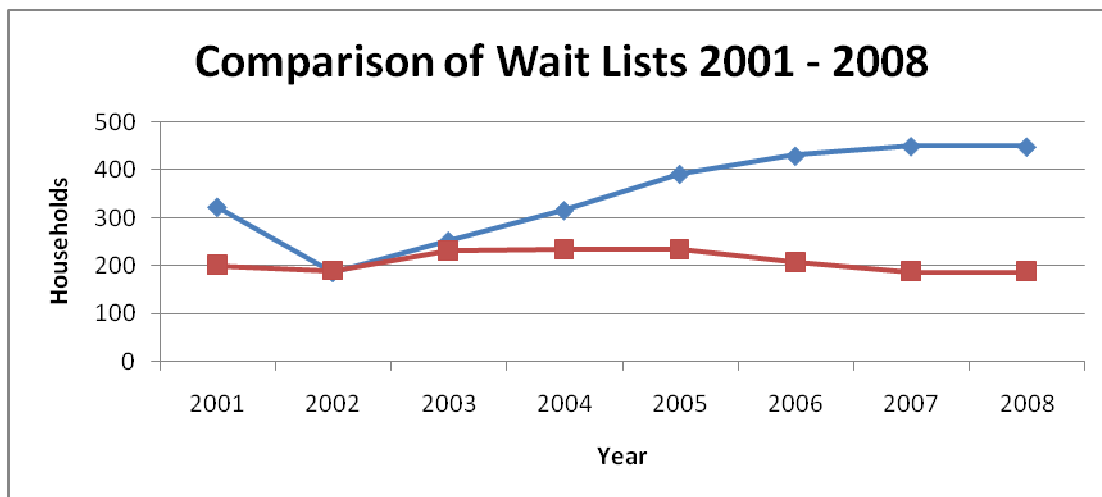
<sup>12</sup> Retrieved March 31, 2009 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090313/dq090313a-eng.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## ***Sarnia-Lambton***

Rates of homelessness are difficult to measure as definitions vary across the country and data collection is sporadic. An indicator of how many people are at risk of homelessness is the number of people on the social housing wait list and the number of people who access the rent utility bank for assistance to retain their existing housing. In September 2006 there were 450 applications for social housing, a 9% increase over 2005. In February 2008 there were 471 applications on the wait list. In June 2008 there were 449 applications.

**Chart 1: Housing Services Wait List**



This chart illustrates that the local wait list for affordable housing continues to increase every year, which is an indication that the need increases. The total number of households placed in affordable housing is declining. The Housing Services department is not able to house all of the applicants who need affordable housing. The wait list will continue to grow if new affordable housing stock is not added to the housing stock in Sarnia-Lambton.

The Housing Services department is currently assisting individuals to purchase a home through the Homeownership Program. Up to 10% of the purchase value of the home (effective October 1, 2008) in down payment assistance is available, up to a maximum \$15,000 and no interest will be charged on the assistance (conditions apply). The Homeownership Program is a partnership between the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario and the County of Lambton. Eligible purchasers will be selected from those who meet the income requirements, other program criteria and are qualified for a mortgage at a recognized NHA financial institution. The program was launched in Lambton County June 2007 and to-date 37 applicants have successfully accessed the program.

To qualify for the down payment assistance, applicants had to meet the following criteria:

- be looking to purchase a home valued at no more than \$182,024
- have a maximum household income of \$69,000
- have less than \$25,000 in assets
- be \*pre-approved for a mortgage from a recognized lending institution

\*applicants requiring a co-signor were not eligible

\*private mortgages were not eligible

In addition, household members had to be:

- Canadian citizens, or
- Granted status as a permanent resident under the Immigration Act, or
- Made a claim for refugee status under the Immigration Act.

Money available to build affordable housing through the Affordable Housing Strategy was used to refurbish 17 units in Sarnia. Attempts to use these funds to build new affordable housing units were thwarted by protest from neighbours in the proposed location of these units.

The Inn of the Good Shepherd, one of the delivery agents of the local rent/utility bank, reports an increase in the number of people dealing with foreclosure who apply for assistance. This is a new trend and they are investigating ways to provide the best assistance to people who face foreclosure.

Local service providers report that the issues surrounding homelessness and poverty are becoming more and more complex. Costs are increasing at rates not matched by increases in OW or ODSP rates or income. The average rent for a three bedroom apartment in Sarnia was \$887 in 2003. In 2007 it was \$913.

There are increases in the number of adults who cannot get the supports they need for independent living. These individuals often fall just short of qualifying for programs offered by the Family Counseling Centre, Canadian Mental Health Association or CCAC but require an advocate or trustee to help them with independent living and to navigate through the myriad of services and supports that are available to prevent homelessness.

There is a growing concern regarding the plight of developmentally disabled adults in who currently live with, and are cared for aged parents. Adults classified as developmentally disabled primarily suffer from retardation, autism, and cerebral palsy. They may also have a variety of other illnesses and/or medical conditions. These individuals require either assisted living in independent settings, in group homes, or round-the-clock supervision in other settings. Faced with a drastic shortage of this type of housing, many of disabled adults are living with aging parents who will soon be unable to support or care for them. While developmentally delayed adults live with their parents they are not perceived to be a priority for assisted living. When the aged parent(s) die or are placed in a nursing home, the developmentally

delayed adult will be placed in an available housing situation, not necessarily with the proper supports.

Currently there is a group in the Sarnia-Lambton area called the Golden Opportunity Committee known as the GO Committee who represent developmentally delayed adults over eighteen years of age that would like to move out of their parents' home but have no place to go due to a shortage of appropriate spaces. The group advocates for affordable, appropriate housing and is seeking support to build and establish suitable housing for these individuals.

Between January and August 2007 there were 567 families who were provided assistance from the rent-utility bank. During the same period in 2008 there was a significant increase, with 705 people assisted. This represents a 24 per cent increase in one year. A more telling point is that there were 1,343 requests for assistance, meaning that 48 per cent of the people who requested assistance were ineligible, putting them at increased risk of becoming homeless.

Service providers also report an overall increase in all programs, the rent/utility bank, emergency shelter, soup kitchen and food bank. Local food drives have fallen short of their goals and businesses have provided monetary donations to help fill the shelves at the food banks.<sup>14</sup> Providers of emergency shelter have noted that there has been an increase in the number of people seeking shelter, including families with children.

The Inn of the Good Shepherd is renovating a building to use as an emergency shelter with services and transitional housing. The capital

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14 Poirier, Jack. July 9, 2008. Food drive falls short. The Observer. Retrieved July 9, 2008 from <http://www.theobserver.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1106431&auth=BY%20JACK%20POIRIER,%20THE%20OBSERVER>

campaign was launched in September to raise funds to pay for the renovations. Once fully operational the Good Shepherd's Lodge plans to have 25 emergency shelter beds and 20 transitional housing beds.

There is concern in the community that the new method of paying OW and ODSP with children taken off the budget will mean that the social assistance benefit payments will be lower than the rent direct payment which may be remitted directly to the landlord to assist in stabilizing housing. If this is the case, the provincial computer system will not process the rent direct and no payment will be sent to the landlord. Local service providers are concerned that this may create homeless situations if the individual is not able to pay the rent.

A study of the Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid caseload revealed that safe affordable housing is a critical element to maintaining stability for children, preventing them from coming into care, allowing them to leave care, and to become stabilized in their homes after leaving care.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Statistical Profile of Lambton County***

Statistical data for the County of Lambton is obtained from Statistics Canada census tables. The last full census was conducted in May, 2006. Because of the complexity and volumes of data collected, information is released several months after the data is tabulated and analyzed. The census provides fundamental information about our country and society. Information collected in the census is used to determine legislation, policy and electoral ridings. Local policy makers utilize census information to identify trends in income and

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<sup>15</sup> Rodger, Susan and Leschied, Alan W. (2008) Raising Awareness, Promoting Understanding: A Review of the Children and Families Referred to the Sarnia and Lambton Children's Aid Society in 1997-98 and 2003-04. University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario. Canada.

demographics, policy development, and to establish programs and services appropriate for the local community.

**Chart 2: Local Housing Stock<sup>16</sup>**

Occupied private dwelling characteristics	Lambton		Ontario	
	Total	% change	Total	% change
Total private dwellings occupied by usual residents	51,955		4,555,025	
Number of owned dwellings	39,255	76%	3,235,495	71%
Number of rented dwellings	12,490	24%	1,312,290	29%
Number of dwellings constructed before 1986	41,750	80%	3,124,010	69%
Number of dwellings constructed between 1986 and 2006	10,205	20%	1,431,020	31%

In 2007, 191 new units were added to the housing stock and in 2008, 258 new units were added. The total housing stock was at 52,404 units at the end of 2008.

### Census Data

Median earnings in 2005 (individuals 15 years and older with earnings) were;

**Chart 3: Median Total Income for Tax Filers and Dependents**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Lambton County</b>	24,300	25,000	25,600	26,100	27,400	28,600
<b>Ontario</b>	24,900	25,200	25,600	26,400	27,100	27,900

Source: Statistics Canada, *Neighbourhood Income and Demographics, 13C0015, 2001-2006*.<sup>17</sup>

48.4% of Lambton County residents (15 years and older) have post secondary certificates, diplomas or degrees compared to the provincial average of 50%.

<sup>16</sup> Statistics Canada retrieved September 29, 2008 from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/community/Details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3538&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=lambton&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=>

<sup>17</sup> As cited in LAMBTON COUNTY ECONOMIC OVERVIEW. Sarnia Lambton Economic Partnership. Summer 2008.

Lambton County has a land area of 3,002 square kilometres and a population density of 42.7 people per square kilometre.

The total number of private dwellings in the County was 51,955 in 2006.

The County's population was 128,204 in the 2006 census, an increase of 1% from the 2001 census. Ontario experienced a 6.6 per cent increase in population for the same period of time.

The median age of Lambton County residents in 2006 was 42.8 years, slightly higher than the 2001 median of 40 years.

16.9 per cent of the population is 65 years old and over, an increase from 16 per cent in 2001. Provincially, there were 13.6 per cent of the population in this age category.

The labour force was 67,450 in 2006, an increase over 64,380 in 1996.

The employment rate <sup>18</sup>in Sarnia-Lambton was 60.1 per cent in 2006, slightly lower than the Ontario rate of 62.8 per cent and the national average of 62.4 per cent.

## **Social Housing**

The County of Lambton Housing Services Department owns and manages 771 Rent Geared to Income (RGI) Units.

An additional 586 non-profit and co-op units (combination of market rent and RGI) and 220 private or non-profit sector rent supplement units are managed by the housing provider and administered by the County.

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<sup>18</sup> The employment rate is the number of people in the County over the age of 15 who are looking for work. This does not include people who have withdrawn from the labour force due to retirement, lack of interest or who are discouraged from seeking employment.

In March 2009 there were 506 applications on the wait list for affordable housing. There were at least 130,000<sup>19</sup> households on the wait list for affordable/social housing in Ontario in March 2009. Of those households on the wait lists, 80 per cent had annual incomes of less than \$20,000.

Ontario continues to experience a significant shortage in new rental housing starts. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) projects that there will be an approximate shortfall of 14,000 new rental units per year until 2016.

On March 31, 2009 the waiting list for Social Housing units managed by the Housing Services department of the County of Lambton was as follows:

Bachelor Units = 49

1 Bedroom Units = 346

2 Bedroom Units = 117

3 Bedroom Units = 77

4 Bedroom Units = 30

5 Bedroom Units = 0

Some names are on two lists (i.e. the applicant has indicated that they would take either a one bedroom or a bachelor unit). After ensuring that these individuals were only counted once, there were 509 households on the waiting list as of March 31, 2009.

The waiting times for these units are listed below:

1 Bedroom Unit - a minimum 18-24 month wait

2 Bedroom Unit – a minimum 18-24 month wait

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<sup>19</sup>Ontario doubles payout for low income children. The Toronto Star. March 21, 2009. Retrieved April 2, 2009 from <http://www.thestar.com/Unassigned/article/606077>

3 Bedroom Unit – a minimum 8 month wait

4 Bedroom Unit – a minimum 8 month wait

These waiting times include individuals who have listed their name on all waiting lists for the right sized<sup>20</sup> unit in Sarnia. Applicants who narrow their preferences could have a much longer wait.

In the 2006 Census Sarnia-Lambton median monthly rent payments were reported as 15.7 per cent of after-tax income. Owner occupied dwellings reported median monthly payments of 17.4 per cent of after-tax income.

**Chart 4: Vacancy Rates (Percentage) by Apartment Type, 2000 to 2008, Sarnia (CA)**

Type	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Bachelor	11.2	14.7	2.4	16.2	1.6	8.6	5.6	6.5	4.5
1 Bedroom	8.5	5.7	5.4	6.4	5.8	5.4	5.1	4.9	3.1
2 Bedroom	5.9	6.6	3.5	5.3	6.3	4.9	4.5	5.9	4
3+ Bedroom	7.5	4.7	4.3	2.5	9.2	8.5	3.4	5.9	x
<b>All Bed Types</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>3.5</b>

Source: CMHC Rental Market Statistics, 2000 to April 2008, Table 10<sup>21</sup>

Sarnia vacancy rates were 3.5% in 2008, down from 5.6% in 2007.

**Chart 5: Average Rent (\$), Two Bedroom Apartments, Selected Cities**

	Sarnia	London	Chatham-Kent	Brantford	Windsor
<b>2005</b>	681	775	624	722	683
<b>2006</b>	691	790	627	712	709
<b>2007</b>	681	816	646	735	773
<b>2008</b>	679	814	629	737	770

Source: CMHC Rental Market Statistics, 2006, 2007, April 2008, Tables 13, 14<sup>22</sup>

- London has the highest average rent for the selected cities
- Chatham-Kent has the lowest average rent for the selected cities
- Sarnia has the second lowest average rent for the selected cities

<sup>20</sup> This refers to a unit that is the appropriate size to house the family unit.

<sup>21</sup> As cited in LAMBTON COUNTY ECONOMIC OVERVIEW. Sarnia Lambton Economic Partnership. Summer 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## **Service Provider Concerns**

Local service providers have been experiencing an increase in the complexity of issues clients have. These issues impact the ability to maintain housing. In particular, there is an increase in adult children of aged parents who have borderline intelligence, a lack of family support, or are isolated and require supports but are unaware of what supports are available. Many of these individuals have been living with their parents and have never been formally assessed or connected with supports. These individuals may or may not have a specific diagnosis but even if they do, they may fall just short of qualifying for supports from any programs in the community.

Service providers face an uphill battle saving tenancies and coordinating supports for these individuals. One major concern is that in order to get supports in place, an individual requires a diagnosis to determine which supports are appropriate. Unless the individual has their own money to pay for an assessment, there is an eight month waiting list and a cost of \$800 to \$1,500 for the assessment. These tests include psychometric, IQ, and background social and intellectual functioning assessments. It has been suggested that these situations require a proactive approach to providing these individuals with supports prior to losing their tenancy.

## **Real Estate**

Sales figures suggest that the local real estate market is cooling off. The number of homes sold and the dollar value of those homes plummeted in August 2008, with year-over-year sales down 28 per cent, the Sarnia-Lambton Real Estate Board reported in early September. The average price of a home in Sarnia-Lambton over the first eight months of 2008 was \$186,145, higher than the \$176,649 cost over the same period in 2007. However, the average value for a home in Sarnia fell in August 2008 to \$177,965 from \$189,029 in August 2007.

There were 1,327 homes sold in Sarnia-Lambton for the first eight months of 2008, compared with 1,502 sold in the same period in 2007, a decline of approximately 12 per cent. The dollar value of those sales was \$246.9 million in 2008, down about five per cent from \$259.6 million in 2007. In August, sales figures decreased about 33 per cent from a year ago to \$22.7 million.<sup>23</sup>

## **Lambton College**

Enrolment numbers at Lambton College are up from 2007 figures and approaching the record numbers enjoyed in the college's heyday in the '80s. Enrolment in the fall of 2008 was 2,597 full-time students, an increase over the 2007 enrolment of 2,499. First-year college registrations are also up eight per cent. The number of out-of-town students increased again this year. The new, 282-bed student residence is full and the number of international students increased from 61 students on 2008 to 90 in 2009.<sup>24</sup> The increase in demand for student housing will put a strain on the availability of affordable housing for the working poor, those in receipt of social assistance benefits, and pensioners.

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<sup>23</sup> Red hot real estate cooling off. Tyler Kula. The Observer. Retrieved September 5, 2008 from <http://www.theobserver.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1186649>

<sup>24</sup> Enrolment numbers up. Jack Poirier. The Observer. Retrieved September 5, 2008 from <http://www.theobserver.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1184806>

## Local Poverty Forums and Perspectives

On June 18, 2008 and again on November 15, 2008, two Community Forums were held to gather input from people living in poverty. A report was compiled for each event and sent to Deb Mathews, MPP London and Chair of the provincial Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction for use in developing a poverty reduction strategy. One of the many issues identified by individuals living in poverty was a lack of safe, affordable housing. The following are quotes from individuals who attended the consultations.

*“We need housing here in this city. I am sitting here with a group of family visitors who work with people every day with people in poverty. They have no housing. What’s wrong with our provincial government to stand up and change our housing problem?”*

*“We need so much government housing and not segregated housing because I am just as good as everyone else here. Every one needs a house where they want to live and have an option. We don’t need to be shoved off in some corner because we are poor. I did not choose to be poor. My mom did not choose to be poor, but unfortunately she brought me up to be poor. I only know how to live in poverty.”*

*“I was on a waiting list too long, I ended up moving out of town into Courtright<sup>25</sup>. But I live and work here. I am one of the people who is a single mom of three kids, I work two part time jobs. I work my butt off and I am not getting anywhere except that I am a little bit ahead. But one day can bring me down.”*

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<sup>25</sup> Courtright is a rural community in the County of Lambton. It is approximately a 40 minute drive from the city of Sarnia where most social services are offered.

*“I waited two years, I was on the list but it took me two years before they found me a place. I was one of the fortunate ones who has an apartment. Now market rent for my apartment, I could not live in it. It’s seven hundred dollars a month for my market rent. I am with housing and it goes according to what I earn and I am very fortunate and very glad I got this apartment. It’s a huge one bedroom, well kept, and I count my stars every day for being in there.”*

*“What I would say as far as geared income housing and affordable housing, I don’t know how or which one we follow into, I think the problem is this. The government cannot possibly set up or build enough government houses for everyone that needs them. All you have to do is look at the GTA, you will never get enough houses for the people in that area. One thing I would suggest and I have experienced. I have a small apartment in Sarnia. And I love Sarnia, Mike Bradley<sup>26</sup> has done lots for us. What I would suggest the government would do is allocate more spots. My understanding is that each city has so many spots available to them. For low housing, affordable housing, whatever category it falls into. Not everybody wants to move, I don’t want to move, I like the area I am in.”*

*“The province does not have enough money to build affordable housing for everybody that needs it. So in private rental units, is that maybe the government can subsidize those rental units. So let’s say you only got three hundred dollars a month in rent and the apartment you live in is seven hundred dollars, ask the government to kick in the three hundred dollars to stay where you are.”*

*“That would take the back log and hardship off. There are a thousand people or more waiting to get into this low income*

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<sup>26</sup> Mike Bradley is the Mayor of the City of Sarnia.

*housing. I have been offered it twice only to find that I was in a worse place that I was in already. I have a girlfriend that's on disability, she is in the same apartment complex, we cannot live together because they will knock her checks down. That's another huge problem. If we could do simple things like that. It's a stroke of the pen by the government, to allow us to remain where we are."*

*"As soon as you go to low cost housing they knock your shelter allowance down. You are no better off, you don't get a dollar ahead. You get further behind and you end up in a worse situation than you were in the beginning. So that is one of the solutions I would suggest the government move on. The government has to start spending their money wisely."*

*"The other thing is housing. It's time that the city gets on the building inspectors and got them off their ass. There are too many buildings in this city where you call up the city and they say well we can't do anything until the owner, a bunch of people, the renovators that do renovations that are not properly licensed that there's leaks, there's mould, not proper insulation. Look at 206 Queen Street, one of the worst buildings and 217 Queen should have been torn down. Mould is one of the biggest things hitting the poverty line because they can't keep the units clean. Yet the owners can kick them out because the place is filthy."*

*"I tried to go to work when I first came out of my abusive situation. At that time I was living in Ontario housing, my rent was one hundred and fifteen dollars. I worked for one month and they put my rent up to five hundred and twenty six dollars. Then I got fired, because I was emotionally not ready to go back to work. And I went to a tribunal at Ontario housing, they would not accommodate me. If I*

*didn't have the Inn of the Good Shepherd<sup>27</sup> to pay my rent that month, I would have been on the street. They should give us at least three to six months to get back on our feet when we get back to work."*

*"My name is David. This is my sixteen year old son. He's been with C.A.S.<sup>28</sup> for quite some time and I've been trying to see if I could have him with me. But looking for a big enough place has been hard enough. And looking for a cheap enough place has been hard enough, which I think everybody can pretty much agree with. I think it's a combination of, like some people probably had good jobs, and run into some hard times where it's difficult to put food on the table and that. Then they get depressed because of that which causes other problems like say between their spouse or their kids. And then they end up in situations where they get caught up in drugs, alcohol, and they go through all their life savings and then they end up on the street. I know about that because when I used to live in Toronto I ended up on the street for six months. So, this issue is really dear to my heart. "*

*"There are people out there that do suffer from different types of mental illness and that also adds to their difficulty with getting preferable housing, you know putting food on the table for the kids, worrying about education and the price of it. If there was a program that would help out like all these people that are living below the poverty line, and all these homeless people, that would be a big plus."*

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<sup>27</sup> The Inn of the Good Shepherd provides a soup kitchen, food bank and rent utility bank assistance.

<sup>28</sup> C.A.S. is the Children's Aid Society

Forum participants indicated that they have been on waiting lists for subsidized housing for 6 months, 12 months, 15 months, 16 months and two years.

## LOCAL HOMELESSNESS PROGRAMS

Since 1999 when the responsibility to delivery homeless services was devolved to the County of Lambton from the province, the County has undertaken to deliver homelessness services to meet the provincial priorities of:

- moving people from the streets to emergency shelter;
- from emergency shelters to permanent housing; and,
- helping people retain the housing they do have.

The County's Homelessness Plans strive to meet these provincial objectives. The inaugural plan focused on helping people to retain their housing. In the last eight years the plans have sought to provide a balanced approach to address all three provincial priorities. The following provides a description of programs and services funded by the County of Lambton to address each of the three provincial and the impact of each program in the community during 2008.

### **Moving People from the Streets to Emergency Shelter**

**Emergency Hostel** – The Emergency Hostel program is delivered by three local not-for-profit organizations, the Inn of the Good Shepherd, Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul. These agencies place an individual or family in a local motel for emergency shelter. The agencies are then reimbursed a portion of their costs for the emergency shelter through the Ontario Works program.

**Impact** – Prior to 2004, emergency shelter services in the community were provided and self-funded by the three community agencies mentioned above. This limited the number of people they could assist. Providing this service also put a strain on each agency's funds, thereby reducing the

amount of money available for other core services. Ontario Works negotiated agreements with each agency to provide this service. Emergency shelter services are now available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for those in the community who find themselves without shelter.

In 2008 there were 318 homeless people provided with shelter.

***Haven Project*** – The Haven provides emergency shelter for youth ages 16 – 24 in a County owned Social Housing unit. It is managed by the Inn of the Good Shepherd and funded in part by Ontario Works and the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS). This program was developed in response to a request for help from the community and the provincial government because their residential home for youth was closing, which would create a new group of homeless in Lambton. Since the literature considers homeless youth to be the most vulnerable, the Haven has been a valuable investment in the youth of our community.

Residents are required to follow house rules and attend school if they have not yet completed their grade 12. Youth are taught budgeting and job searching skills and are also informed of services available in the community. When residents move out of the emergency housing they are assisted to find and secure accommodations, apply for Ontario Works assistance, and attend their appointments. Residents may also be involved in The Haven's Extended Care program that provides supports after leaving the shelter.

**Impact** – In 2008 there were 182 youth who were sheltered at the Haven. Of this number, 104 were males and 78 were female. After moving out of the emergency shelter, youth are assisted to maintain their new housing through an outreach program.

**Cost** – The combined cost of emergency shelter provided for adults and youth in 2008 described above was \$222,573. This is a 45 per cent increase over the cost for the program in 2007 and provides an indication of how the need for homelessness services has grown in these turbulent economic times.

***Homelessness Program*** - The Inn of the Good Shepherd provides a Homelessness program that includes educating the general public about poverty and homelessness in the County of Lambton. The Inn provides one-stop access to telephone and printed information about support services for people who are at risk of becoming homeless, and for those who are, and a staff position who is responsible for co-ordinating the community's response to homelessness. This includes providing services and advocacy.

**Impact** – This program provides access to information and services regarding homelessness in the community for consumers and the general public. Those that are homeless or at risk of being homeless access the Community Worker at the Inn who will assess each situation and develop an individual service plan to meet their needs. In 2008, \$57,200 was invested in this program (\$10,000 for information access/public education and \$47,000 for the community outreach worker). A representative of the Inn spoke at over seventy-five events to raise the awareness of homelessness issues in the community. A total of 2,035 people attended these sessions.

### ***Moving People from Shelters to Permanent Accommodation***

***Housing Worker*** – The Inn of the Good Shepherd hosts this position. The position provides assistance to individuals and families in the emergency hostel program to secure permanent accommodations and provides supports

to retain that accommodation. Participating agencies refer their clients to the Housing Worker whenever they place someone in a shelter.

**Impact** – This program focuses on moving homeless people into permanent accommodations. In 2008, \$47,200 was invested in the program, resulting in 110 people being moved to permanent accommodation. The number of people helped in this program increased by 15 per cent from 2007.

The potential impact of savings can be calculated as follows: 110 clients stayed in the shelter an average of 16 days – an increase of 23 per cent from 2007 - in the 2008. Since clients may receive up to 30 days of emergency shelter per diem, there is an average savings of 14 days for each client at \$44.75 per day. This means that for 2008 the potential savings to the program was \$68,915.

### **Helping People Retain Their Current Housing**

**Rent/Utility Bank (County)** – This program is delivered in partnership with the three previously identified agencies. All clients participate in a brief interview over the telephone, or in person. This preliminary intake information is used to identify the specific need, determine if the individual qualifies for financial assistance, and to assess the urgency of the situation.

**Impact** – This loan assists individuals to help pay rent or utilities when they fall behind in payment and are at risk of becoming homeless. In 2008, a total of \$82,600 was invested, allowing 605 families to retain their housing. The number of people helped in this program increased by 37 per cent from 2007.

***Provincial Rent Bank*** – This program is with the same partnerships as the County Rent/Utility Bank program. The funding distribution between the agencies providing Provincial Rent Bank services in the County of Lambton is calculated based on the percentage of the total assistance provided for a month by each agency. Where there is a surplus of funding in a month the amount of the surplus is carried forward.

**Impact** – This loan program assists individuals to help pay rent arrears or first and last months rent when obtaining housing after leaving a shelter situation. In 2008, a total of \$43,200 was invested allowing 313 families to retain their housing. The number of people helped through this program increased by 15 per cent from 2007.

***Provincial Emergency Energy Fund*** – The three agencies mentioned above deliver this program as well. The funding distribution between the agencies provides Provincial Emergency Energy services in the County of Lambton and is calculated based on the percentage of the total assistance provided for a month by each agency. Any surplus is carried forward.

**Impact** – This program is a loan that individuals access to help pay their utility cost when they are in arrears and includes reconnection fees. In 2008, a total of \$21,780 was invested so that 162 families were able to retain their housing. The number of people helped in this program increased by 19 per cent from 2007.

**Food Distribution** –The Inn of the Good Shepherd receives funds to enhance their soup kitchen program. The partnership established in 2003 among the local food banks to share resources where applicable remained in place.

**Impact** – In 2008, \$11,800.00 was invested allowing the Inn to provide fresh vegetables and fruits not normally offered in their program. The funding also allows the Inn to provide more meals to those in the community who are in need because of rent or utility arrears, but for whatever reason, did not qualify to access those programs. 29,780 people benefited from this initiative in 2008, representing an increase of 5 per cent from 2007.

### **Additional Resources**

The following is a list of local programs or services offered throughout the County of Lambton by agencies not funded by the County of Lambton. These services also provide valuable resources to the homeless in the community. The resources are identified as they meet each of the provincial homelessness priorities.

### **Streets to Shelter**

#### ***Emergency Shelter - Harbour Inn***

Harbour Inn, emergency shelter for men, opened its doors to the community on November 6, 2006. The facility is operated by the members of the River City Vineyard on Mitton Street in central Sarnia. Between November 2006 and March 2009 the Harbour Inn reported that 381 different individuals stayed in this emergency shelter. Of these 381 individuals, 300 left the shelter for permanent accommodations, usually apartments.

The numbers of individuals seeking shelter at the Harbour Inn increased dramatically around the beginning of March 2009. The causes of homelessness reported to volunteers at the Harbour Inn are related to the current economic conditions. The most common reason for seeking shelter is that individuals are unable to pay their rent due to lay offs.

Harbour Inn staff report that when the shelter first opened they found it easy to assist people to find housing. However, it is becoming more difficult to place individuals in permanent accommodation, taking up to six months to find permanent accommodations in some cases. An average of eight to ten people stays in this shelter per night, with the majority between the ages of 18 to 22.

#### ***Trusteeship - Family Counselling Centre (FCC)***

The FCC provides trusteeship services for adults with developmental disabilities to prevent homelessness. Their funding comes from the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The agency helps adults who have developmental disabilities with emergency shelter and assists individuals to obtain permanent accommodation.

#### ***Discharge Plans - John Howard Society***

The John Howard Society has experienced a significant reduction in their funding support which causing changes to the services they provide. The Society supports incarcerated individuals to develop a discharge plan. The Society will try to get inmates to a phone 10 days prior to their release in order to apply for Ontario Works assistance. If the inmate has friends or relatives that they plan to stay with, Society staff will make phone calls on their behalf. The Society refers all individuals who have no place to go to the Inn of the Good Shepherd. As a result of a Board of Directors decision, the

John Howard Society stopped providing emergency shelter assistance in late 2005. A client will receive a hygiene package, food, clothing, and when appropriate, winter coats when discharged from custody.

### ***Friends and Relatives***

Many people experiencing homelessness will rely on friends and relatives for emergency housing. These people are often referred to as “couch surfers” who move from friend to friend until they outstay their welcome or feel pressure to move on.

### ***Support Workers - Community Mental Health Association (CMHA)***

Individuals experiencing homelessness may also have mental health issues. CMHA has support workers to help house homeless persons who are eligible for their assistance. They also may provide financial assistance to obtain housing.

### **Shelter to Permanent Accommodation**

#### ***Start Up Assistance - NeighbourLink Sarnia***

NeighbourLink is a local help line that uses volunteers from local churches to respond to local needs. They operate a resource centre that collects donations of used furniture and distributes the collected items to low income families starting up a new residence.

#### ***Transitional Housing***

The 2005-2008 County of Lambton Homelessness Plan identified a need for transitional housing in the community. Currently there are two transitional housing facilities for women within the county. The Women’s Interval Home in Sarnia provides short-term shelter and counseling to women and their children who are in abusive situations. Three Fires is a women’s shelter located on Walpole Island. It is primarily a shelter for women and children in abusive situations, but if room is available they will accept anyone in crisis.

These transitional housing options do not address the concerns identified in the previous Homelessness Plan. The traditional housing needs identified at that time called for housing supports and services for 1-2 years to ensure that the homeless person has a successful transition to becoming a renter and ultimately, independent.

The Inn of the Good Shepherd, identified above as one of the service providers for emergency shelter services, received permission from its Board of Directors to investigate establishing an emergency shelter and transitional housing in the community. Various models were investigated and the Inn is currently in the process of building a facility that will house 25 emergency shelter beds and 25 transitional housing beds. The Inn purchased property on Confederation Street in Sarnia has plans to start building the facility in the summer of 2009. Their intent is to open the emergency shelter beds in September of 2009 and the transitional housing units near the end of 2009. This initiative is being supported by the County of Lambton.

## **Maintaining Homes**

### **Food / Clothing Programs Churches**

Most churches have an informal policy to help homeless individuals where they can. Many churches provide food vouchers and some provide help with utility bills. Most churches indicate that the help people require are significantly more than they have the capacity to help with. They refer individuals and families to the Inn of the Good Shepherd, Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul for assistance.

Within the city of Sarnia, many churches contribute to NeighbourLink, a faith based program that helps people in need. Many churches that do not provide direct assistance to homeless people, but will refer individuals to

NeighbourLink for assistance because they make financial contributions to that organization.

## **A REVIEW OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE 2006-2008 HOMELESSNESS PLAN**

The 2006-2008 Homelessness Plan contained the following recommendations. Community Homelessness Initiative Network (CHIN) members supported these recommendations as critical elements necessary to meet the needs of the homeless community in the County of Lambton. These recommendations fell under the umbrella of Social Planning and Program Support and the following provides an update of the work that has been accomplished in the past three years.

### **To Move People from the Street to Emergency Shelter**

#### **Recommendation #1**

That County staff work in partnership with community agencies to obtain funding for the purpose of conducting research into the cause(s) of increased use of the local emergency shelter program and to identify potential solutions to the cause(s).

#### Update

- Staff created a grant package summarizing the local environment related to poverty and homelessness. This package is provided to agencies along with funding opportunities coming from the County's Community Development Officer.
- Staff has lobbied the provincial government (seven different ministries) related to the potential funding of a permanent emergency shelter in the community.
- Staff have supported the Inn of the Good Shepherd's grant application for Federal funding for an emergency shelter

**Recommendation # 2**

That County staff work with local service providers, community agencies, and businesses to develop and implement emergency shelter strategies that:

- Reduce the isolation emergency shelter clients experience from the services they require. These strategies could include satellite and on-site service provision.
- Implement either another form of emergency shelter or alternative temporary accommodation for tourists or workers during peak tourist periods and traditional plant shutdown times.

**Update**

- The Ontario Works department provided bus passes to individuals housed in emergency shelter in remote areas to allow them to attend appointments.
- A local faith based group, Rivercity Vineyard opened a shelter in the last two years that is located in the core of the city. This shelter is called Harbour Inn and can accommodate 20 people per night.
- County Council provided a grant to the Inn of the Good Shepherd for purchasing property in Sarnia to create a permanent emergency shelter.

**Recommendation #3**

That the County of Lambton should maintain the Community Outreach Worker position along with the current emergency shelter system and Haven Program for youth at minimum and enhance them whenever possible. (i.e. Increased per diems, “house-ability” programs, etc.)

Note: The emergency shelter and Haven programs are offered in partnership with Ontario Works and the Housing Services department.

## Update

- The County of Lambton has maintained the Community Outreach Worker position and the emergency shelter system agreements in place in the community.
- The Haven program for homeless youth is still supported by the County and operating.
- Emergency Shelter per diems have been increased each time the province has allowed for increases over the past three years to local program per diems.
- The Community Outreach Program funding was increased in 2008.
- The “house-ability” program is in the development stages and is planned to be a part of a new transitional housing program.

## **To Move People from Emergency Shelter to Permanent Housing**

### **Recommendation #4**

County staff should review the Community Housing Worker job description and determine an optimum client-to-staff ratio for a housing worker. This will allow for maximum efficiency of the position and have the correct number of housing workers available in the community as the need dictates.

## Update

- A review of the Community Housing Worker position was completed.
- Current role is being maintained and position will be impacted upon construction of transitional housing facility.

### **Recommendation #5**

That a comprehensive data base of all affordable housing that is available in the community be created and maintained.

#### Update

- County's Housing Services department maintains list of social housing available.
- Private sector housing list maintained and available on "Sarnia4rent" web site.

#### **Recommendation # 6**

That the County of Lambton investigate transitional housing options to meet community needs.

#### Update

- The County of Lambton held a community forum to determine the need for transitional housing and the scope of services required to support individuals in transitional housing.
- The Inn of the Good Shepherd proposed an emergency shelter / transitional housing model and received a grant from the County of Lambton and has commenced fundraising and development processes.

#### **Recommendation #7**

That the County of Lambton develop and implement a "house-ability" program for the purpose of helping emergency shelter clients become housing ready. The "house-ability" program could include workshops and counseling to improve the ability of emergency shelter clients to become housed and to also maintain that housing.

#### Update

- The County of Lambton investigated several similar programs throughout Ontario. Many components of a program are addressed in current programming.

- A working committee that includes County staff is developing a comprehensive “house-ability” program that is to be offered as part of the future transitional housing being constructed by the Inn of the Good Shepherd.

### **To Prevent Homelessness by Assisting People to Retain Permanent Housing**

#### **Recommendation # 8**

That the County of Lambton support the creation and distribution of awareness materials through CHIN for the public and agencies of all service providers that assist the homeless population, whether in a formal or informal manner, and what that service or level of service is.

#### Update

- The County of Lambton has supported CHIN with funding in its efforts to educate the public and raise awareness of homelessness issues in the community.
- CHIN developed and distributed an educational brochure containing local homelessness data and information. It was updated in 2008.
- CHIN conducted a bus tour focusing on the programs and services used by those who are homeless called, “A Day in the Life of a Homeless Person”.
- CHIN supported the delivery of “Bridges Out of Poverty” Workshops in the community.

#### **Recommendation #9**

That financial support to the soup kitchen and rent/utility bank programs be maintained and enhanced with a new program to educate individuals lacking budgeting skills to enable them to adjust their budgets to cover the utility costs of their rental accommodations.

#### Update

- Financial support has been maintained and enhanced throughout the period for rent utility bank programs.
- Counseling for budgeting is now offered at the Inn of the Good Shepherd, one of the rent/utility bank service providers.

### **Management of the County Homelessness Plan**

#### **Recommendation #10**

That the County of Lambton pursue funding allocations under the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program (CHPP) and support agencies in acquiring other funding in order to assist individuals to maintain their current accommodations or find shelter.

#### Update

- Staff created a resource document summarizing local statistical and economic information relevant to poverty and homelessness issues to help local agencies prepare grant applications.
- Local agencies are kept informed of funding opportunities through the County's Community Development Officer.
- The Inn of the Good Shepherd secured funding from both the Affordable Housing program and Homelessness Partnering Strategy of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to build the emergency shelter and transitional housing facility, The Good Shepherd's Lodge.

#### **Recommendation #11**

That the County of Lambton support the creation of a Social Planning Network.

Update

- The County of Lambton has participated in activities to investigate creating a Social Planning Network in Sarnia-Lambton including a public forum and focus group sessions.
- Staff provide administrative support to a local steering committee that is pursuing the establishment of a social planning council.

**Recommendation #12**

That the County of Lambton support the Community Homelessness Initiatives Network (CHIN) and its partnerships.

Update

- Homelessness funds have been allocated the past two years to support their educational campaign on homelessness.
- Staff from the Ontario Works, Housing services and Social Planning departments attend CHIN meetings quarterly.

**Recommendation #13**

That the County of Lambton work with the leadership of social agencies partnered to address homeless issues to ensure the delivery of quality programs funded by the County.

Update

- All homelessness programs funded by the County of Lambton have been formally reviewed and audited during the past three years.
- Recommendations from program review and audit process have been acted on by the County and agencies.

#### **Recommendation #14**

That the Social Planning and Program Support Department coordinate and continue to lead other County departments in delivering a holistic approach to homelessness services through the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the County of Lambton Homelessness Plan 2006-2008.

#### Update

- Social Planning and Program Support has been the lead responsible for the Homelessness budget.
- Social Planning and Program Support has worked with various County departments including Housing Services and Ontario Works to implement the recommendations of the 2006 – 2008 Plan.

#### **Recommendations for Departments with Shared Responsibilities**

The following recommendations were made to work with other County of Lambton departments to meet the provincial vision for homeless services as described above.

That the County of Lambton, in all departments, support increases in funding from the province as they relate to programming that helps the homeless population. This may include per diem funding, rent or utility banks, emergency energy funds, rent-geared-to- income (RGI) and any other funding stream that is intended to serve the homeless or at risk of being homeless population. Implementation of this supports all three of the provincial priorities – moving people from streets to shelter, from shelter to permanent accommodation and to retain their current housing.

## Update

- Lambton County council passed a motion to allow for incremental increases to the per diem rates without having to receive approval each time the rate increases.
- Housing Services has obtained funding to increase the number of affordable housing units in the County of Lambton.

That County of Lambton departments review all relevant local policies and procedures that may create barriers for homeless clients to accessing County subsidy programs (including Housing Services and Ontario Works) and make amendments to ensure that these become “Homeless-Friendly”. (i.e. low income individuals that financially qualify to receive subsidy should receive it even if another policy disqualifies them)

## Update

- Changes were made to Ontario Works policies to allow for rent direct payments to landlords of Ontario Works recipients on a voluntary basis.
- Individuals who apply for Ontario Works assistance after being housed in emergency shelter have a mandatory obligation to pay their rent directly from Ontario Works to their landlord as part of the strategy to assist these individuals to maintain their accommodation.
- Managers in the Social and Health Services division of the County of Lambton have increased their awareness of poverty and its issues through Bridges Out of Poverty training.

That the County of Lambton consider establishing a Working Group on Housing for Seniors to examine in depth the range of housing options for seniors at risk. This group should include both private and non-profit housing agencies, Ontario Works (Homemakers), Social Planning, and Homes for the Aged.

#### Update

- Two groups - The Lambton Housing Advisory Committee and the Lambton Seniors Association have been addressing these concerns.
- There is an awareness in the community that the issue of senior's housing is becoming a concern and this would be an agenda item for the Social Planning Council when it is established.

That the County of Lambton consider establishing a Working Group for Youth Housing to examine in depth the range of housing options for youth at risk. This group should include both private and non-profit housing agencies, Ontario Works, and Social Planning.

#### Update

- An ad hoc community group called the GO Committee has formed to examine affordable housing options for disabled youth in the community.

That the County of Lambton apply to the Homelessness Secretariat to allocate funds from the Supporting Community Partnership Initiatives (SCPI) fund to the County of Lambton. This should be a coordinated effort among Social Planning, Housing Services, and the Community Development Officer.

#### Update

- The County of Lambton entered into discussions to apply for SCPI funding. It was determined that the County of Lambton did not qualify for funding under this initiative.

## CURRENT LOCAL TRENDS AND NEEDS

County staff engaged in a consultation process involving key stakeholders in the homeless community, conducting focus groups and individual meetings with County and community agency staff for the better part of 2008. In addition to these consultations, local data was collected and analyzed. Existing departmental policies and/or procedures that impact homelessness in our community were also reviewed. This analysis was conducted in an effort to identify the current local trends and needs of the community in relationship to homelessness.

The following section details the identified trends and needs in the community in relationship to the Provincial Government's identified service priorities.

### **Trend #1**

There are an increasing number of individuals who do not meet criteria to receive assistance from community social agencies (CMHA, ODSP) but lack independent living skills to prevent homelessness.

**Community Need** – Assistance for individuals who do not qualify for supports from community social agencies with independent living to prevent homelessness. These supports should include but are not limited to; assisting with taking medication, budgeting, bill payments, and hygiene.

**Community Need** – Social agencies to relax criteria for support qualification to meet all levels, degrees of their client population.

**Trend #2**

There is an increase in the number of homeless clients with multiple barriers and involved with multiple service providers.

**Community Need** – For community groups to work together to find the most appropriate solutions to prevent homelessness. This could involve formal case conferencing on an ad hoc basis to meet demand.

**Trend #3**

Community groups and local social service agencies currently involved in poverty and homelessness advocacy have indicated an interest to continue participating in networking opportunities.

**Community Need** – To establish a series of meetings/forums to be held and coordinated on a variety of related topics on an annual basis.

**Community Need** – To establish a centralized group or body to coordinate/lead the networking and report on the outcomes.

**Trend #4**

There are a growing number of evictions and housing tribunal cases in the community.

**Community Need** – That a community mechanism be established to help individuals maintain their housing prior to tribunal or eviction situations.

**Trend #5**

Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program shelter costs are not keeping up to reflect market rents.

**Community Need** – The two provincial income support programs must increase the shelter portion of support to reflect market rents.

**Trend #6**

Local rent and utility bank usage has risen steadily over each of the past years.

**Community Need** – To increase the funds available for usage in the local rent/utility bank.

**Community Need** – To supplement the local rent/utility bank with community funding (i.e. a foundation account)

**Trend #7**

Waitlists for social housing have grown in size as well as length of time in the past year.

**Community Need** – To increase the amount of social housing stock available.

**Community Need** – To increase the number of Rent Geared to Income units.

**Trend #8**

There is an increase in the number of situations where the barrier to being housed or receiving income support is the result of being in conflict with a program policy or rule.

**Community Need** – To identify local rules and policies of social programs that prevent people from receiving income support and housing assistance and adjust them to being more “homeless” friendly.

**Trend #9**

There has been an increase in public knowledge and interest of poverty and homelessness issues as evidenced in the number of local public forums on the topics in the past year.

***Community Need*** – To ensure community efforts are strategically aligned and continue in a collaborative manner regarding efforts in the areas of homelessness and poverty reduction.

## 2009-2011 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in response to and to address the local trends and community needs identified throughout this planning process.

### **Recommendation #1**

That County staff work with local social service agencies in finding a solution to helping individuals in the community with independent living skills that are just below the required qualifying criteria of the service population for the agency.

### **Recommendation # 2**

That County staff establish a working group with local service providers for the purpose of exploring the establishment of a community case conferencing table that would put in place supports to assist individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless.

### **Recommendation #3**

That the County of Lambton continue to support the creation of a social planning body to increase networking opportunities that support poverty and homelessness groups in the community, continue to support community conferences and forums on poverty awareness and collect data to support community initiatives.

### **Recommendation #4**

That County staff work with an agency to take the lead on trusteeships to help people maintain their residency/tenancy. This agency would have to coordinate supports with CMH, FCC, OW, ODSP, and other service agencies.

**Recommendation #5**

That the County of Lambton advocate for increases to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program shelter costs to realistically reflect market rents.

**Recommendation #6**

That a forum be established to help individuals maintain their housing. This may involve flexible pay direct situations including partially paying rent through Ontario Works and ODSP rent direct payments.

**Recommendation # 7**

That the County continue to participate in Rent/Utility bank programs and advocate for increases in the amount that municipalities receive to assist those in need of assistance and County staff investigate with community service providers methods of supplementing the local rent/utility bank with community funding.

**Recommendation #8**

That the County of Lambton support efforts to increase the amount and availability of affordable public and private sector housing and rent geared to income units in the community.

**Recommendation #9**

That County staff work with the Guiding Coalition of the Circles Poverty Reduction Campaign in identifying local municipal policies that create barriers to accessing affordable housing and income support programs and identify solutions to these policies.

**Recommendation #10**

That the County of Lambton, in the Social and Children Services Division, conduct a review of all relevant local policies and procedures that may create a barrier to homeless people accessing income or housing supports. The purpose of such a review would be to amend identified barrier creating and/or conflicting policies and procedures to ensure they are “homeless friendly”.

**Recommendation #11**

That the County of Lambton continue to support the holistic approach to homelessness issues through the continuum of care approach currently implemented by the County of Lambton. This would include working closely with community networks addressing issues affecting homelessness or its causes including poverty, mental health and housing networks.

**Recommendation #12**

That County staff work with the Inn of the Good Shepherd in reviewing and redefining the role/scope of the Outreach Worker and Community Housing Worker positions in relationship to the establishment of a permanent emergency and transitional housing shelter.

**Recommendation #13**

That the County continue to support the development and the implementation of programs and services of the new permanent emergency and transitional housing shelter.

**Recommendation #14**

That the County of Lambton continue to pursue funding for Homeless Programs and Services from all levels of government as they become available and support local service agencies to acquire funding in order to assist individuals to maintain their current accommodations or find shelter.

## **CONCLUSION**

Homelessness continues to be an important social and economic issue across the country and in the County of Lambton. The literature review and environmental scan highlight the emerging trends in homelessness. This Homelessness Plan details a comprehensive, cohesive approach to addressing the many facets of homelessness in the community.

The County of Lambton has a rich tradition of providing a comprehensive continuum of services to address homelessness issues. This plan builds on that tradition while supporting the provincial priorities for homelessness programs and services.

Effective implantation of this plan will involve coordination of programs and services at all levels of government and within local service agencies. Developing creative partnerships to address the many complex needs of the homeless community is integral to the success of this plan. In doing so, the County of Lambton will create a comprehensive, cohesive environment respectfully addressing the needs of homeless individuals in the County of Lambton. The recommendations outlined in this plan support the economic and social objectives detailed in the County's Strategic Plan.