

## **Background**

The City of Greater Sudbury (City) is a service manager pursuant to the *Housing Services Act, 2011*, and as such is responsible, in accordance with its housing and homelessness plan, to carry out measures to meet the objectives and targets relating to housing needs within the City. The City administers and funds housing and homelessness programs and services, and partners with community service providers, to provide emergency shelter programs and other programs intended to meet the needs of persons who are experiencing homelessness.

### Off The Street Emergency Shelter Program Update - November 28, 2016 to April 15, 2017

The Off The Street Emergency Shelter Program (OTS Program) successfully operated as a Low Barrier Emergency Shelter Program for a third full season from November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to April 15<sup>th</sup> 2017 at 200 Larch Street, Sudbury. The OTS Program was operated by Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and funded by the City of Greater Sudbury, utilizing both federal and provincial homelessness funding. On November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016 an Open House was held at 200 Larch Street for the OTS Program to allow the community, other service providers and potential program users the chance to see and better understand the program.

The OTS Program was a Low Barrier Emergency Shelter Program intended to provide shelter for people who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or be otherwise disconnected from mainstream shelter programs. Low barrier refers to a shelter where a minimum number of expectations are placed on people who wish to stay there. The aim is to have as few barriers as possible to allow more people to have access to services. Low barrier facilities follow a Harm Reduction philosophy. The OTS Program was open from 8:00 pm until 7:00 am daily, and provided temporary cots, nutritious refreshments, and a safe warm place for men and women aged 16 and over.

An average of 28 people per night utilized a cot for sleeping while many other people came in but did not stay to sleep. Some people used the service in the evening for social interaction, coffee and soup, and support.

In an effort to provide additional support to, and gain a broader understanding of, the clients of the OTS Program shelter, the Homeless Individual and Family Information System (HIFIS) was introduced to this OTS Program. Users were asked some very basic questions upon entry to the program and were provided with a keycard, similar to a hotel room access card, with the information imprinted so that they would not have to re-answer all the questions each night. Some persons chose not to answer the questions and were still permitted access to the program.

The HIFIS data shows that over the 139 days that the program was open; there were 291 uniquely identified individuals who slept there, and another 232 individuals who came in for social interaction but did not sleep there. A total of 3,900 bed nights were provided. The average age of individuals who stayed was 35 years; 80% were male and 45% identified as aboriginal. The majority of people (209) used the program between one to four nights; however 32 people used the program more than ten nights.

The OTS Program provided an additional 30 cots to the existing 64 emergency shelter beds in the community. Partnerships and linkages were built between CMHA and the other emergency shelter programs, community outreach, the Homelessness Network, Ontario Works, N'Swakomok Native Friendship Centre, and the Greater Sudbury Police Services in order to provide a safe and supportive environment and enhance the access to services for person experiencing chronic homelessness.

Many of the shelter users have experienced chronic or episodic homelessness, have mental health or addictions and have multiple barriers to finding and keeping housing. While in the program, CMHA made efforts to create trusting relationships and connect people with services that would assist them with housing, income support, life skills, mental and physical health. Over 1,300 referrals were made from the OTS Program to other services, and 36 individuals were moved to permanent housing.

The OTS Program has met a gap within the continuum of programs available for persons experiencing homelessness and there is a need to continue to provide this OTS Program for persons who are under the influence or otherwise disconnected from mainstream emergency shelter programs.

### 200 Larch Street

In December 2015, CMHA started operation of a Harm Reduction Day Program (HRH Program) at 200 Larch Street under a Lease Agreement with the City. The HRH Program was co-located with the overnight OTS Program and operates during the day hours. The HRH Program provides services to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and are alcohol dependent. The HRH Program offers access to meals, primary care, skill development, social supports, and a Managed Alcohol Program.

The development of both the Harm Reduction Home and the OTS Program came from priorities identified through a harm reduction consultation led by the North East LHIN in partnership with the City of Greater Sudbury and other community partners. The co-location of the two programs has created awareness, access, and support for participants of both Programs.

In May 2017, the CMHA made a request to the City for the transfer of the property at 200 Larch Street for use as a residential Managed Alcohol Program, a Low Barrier

Emergency Shelter Program, and other community services that provide support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The transfer will occur in 2017.

It is recommended that CMHA operate both programs at the co-located site. In accordance with Section 22 of the City of Greater Sudbury Governing Procurement Policies and Procedures, a non-competitive purchase may be considered where a Single Source purchase is being recommended by the authorized person, and an award of non-competitive purchases with a total acquisition cost of \$50,000 or more shall require Council approval in accordance with paragraph 8 (1) (d). The OTS Program is currently funded at approximately \$330,000 annually.

## **Next Steps**

A OTS Program has been determined to be an important support for people who are homeless and vulnerable. The co-location of the Low Barrier Emergency Shelter Program and the Harm Reduction Program is recognized as a good fit for people experiencing homelessness and addictions.

Once the transfer of the property at 200 Larch Street to CMHA has been completed, discussion will continue with the CMHA to further develop the Low Barrier Emergency Shelter Program in collaboration with the other services offered at that location.

## **References**

Housing Services Act 2011 <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/11h06>

City Council Meeting, May 30<sup>th</sup> 2017, Resolution CC2017-140

City of Greater Sudbury Purchasing By-Law 2014-01