

# Housing and Homelessness Ten Year Plan Development

## Leeds and Grenville Community Consultations - 2013 Customer Survey Results Report

### INTRODUCTION

This report shares findings from the Customer Survey, including quotes, themes and analysis of the survey. The report is intended to reflect the experiences, issues and ideas from the residents of Leeds and Grenville that were consulted.

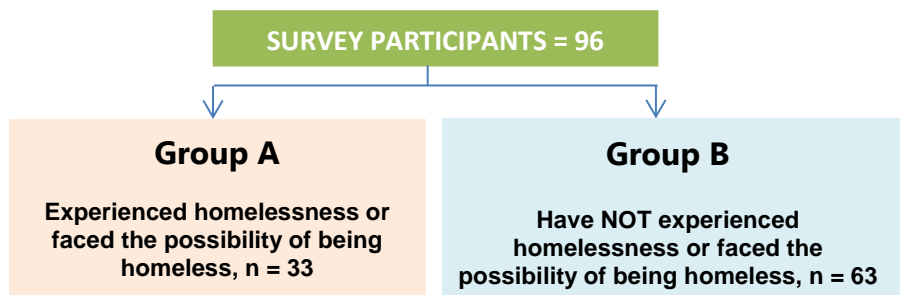
The findings of the customer survey must be regarded as indicative and directional rather than “statistically” quantifiable.

### APPROACH

Customer surveys were administered as follows:

- Sent to various food banks in Leeds and Grenville for distribution to people who access their services.
- Mailed to customers who have accessed Home Ownership Funding, Ontario Renovates Funding, and housing services.
- Mailed to all housing tenants in social housing, including non-profits sending the survey to all tenants.
- Link on the Leeds and Grenville website; including a link insert notice to Ontario Works clients. The link was also provided to all of the service providers who received an invitation to the focus groups for distribution to people who access their services.

### SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



### OVERVIEW OF COMMON THEMES

1. Safe, affordable and stable housing is an essential need in improving the quality of life for individuals, especially women fleeing violence, seniors, and the homeless or at risk of homelessness.
2. Challenges that people faced included not being able to ‘financially’ afford even subsidized housing, but that is not all. Mental health issues, disability, family breakdown, poverty, unstable employment and no fixed address were contributing to housing insecurity and instability.
3. People repeatedly articulated that social assistance and minimum wage rates were not adequate to live in stable and good quality housing.
4. Risk of losing housing is exacerbated by additional costs such as utilities (heat and water), which leaves little money to spend on groceries.
5. Seniors articulated vulnerability in maintaining their housing due to financial pressures they faced.
6. The homeless and those at risk of being homeless lack awareness of supports and services in place to assist them.
7. Social networks (friends and family) play a crucial role in supporting the homelessness and those that are vulnerable.

*“Housing would be more affordable if hydro and heat was included in the rent. Then a person would know how much they have to pay each month. Being on a limited income makes it very difficult at times. At least 1/3 of our income goes into paying these three bills.”*

*(Respondent, Group B)*

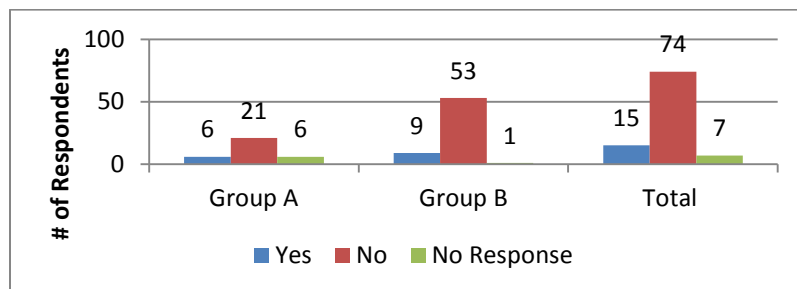
## GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS – LENGTH OF RESIDENCY AND HOUSING SEARCH

### Length of Time at Current Residence:

Length of time at	Group A	Group B
	N	N
5 years and less	19	25
6-10 years	1	9
11-15 years	4	11
16-20 years	0	2
21+ years	2	11
No responses	7	5
Total	33	63

- The respondent's length of time at their current residence ranged from as short as two months to as long as 50 years. A wide range of responses were cited and provided in months and in years. For analysis purposes they have been categorized by the number of years.
- Approximately 46% of the total respondents were living at their current place of residence for five years and less.
- Respondents that reported being homeless or have been at risk of homelessness (Group A), had a shorter occupancy/tenancy status at their current residence.

### Searching for Another Residence:



### Searching for Another Residence:

- Majority of the participants intended to stay at their current place of occupancy.
- Participants (Group A) vulnerable to facing housing instability were more likely to stay in their current residence and were not in the process of searching for another residence. Given that many were occupying their residence for less than five years, their experience of being homeless or having faced homelessness along with financial and residential mobility limits may not have given them the liberties and flexibility to easily search for a new residence.
- Only a very small number of participants living in their current residence for less than five years were in the process of searching for a new residence. There is not a strong correlation between length of time at current residence and searching for another residence.

Length of time at current	Searching for another residence			
	Group A		Group B	
	N		N	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
5 years and less	5	14	2	23
6-10 years	1	0	1	8
11-15 years	0	4	3	8
16-20 years	0	0	1	1
21+ years	0	2	1	10
No responses	7		5	
Total	33		63	

*"For the amount of people that are on social assistance, I think the rent costs are high. But to understand our way of thinking, you would have to be in our shoes. I know many people that are not in our situation and they think the rent costs are good, or even low."*

*(Respondent, Group B)*

## GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS - HOUSING AFFORDABILITY IN LEEDS AND GRENVILLE

### Housing Affordability in Leeds and Grenville:

Participants	Do you feel that housing is affordable in Leeds and Grenville?				
	Yes	No	Somewhat	Unsure	No Response
<b>Group A</b>	9	14	1	3	6
<b>Group B</b>	31	19	3	4	6
Total	40	33	4	7	12

- Of the total respondents, 47.6% (n=40) indicated that housing is affordable in Leeds and Grenville, compared to 39% (n=33) that reported housing affordability was an issue. A smaller number of participants reported 'somewhat' and 'unsure'.
- Of the individuals that provided a response, over half of the respondents in Group A noted that housing is not affordable. For Group B participants, a smaller number, 19, or 33% cited housing challenges related specific to affordability.
- The results demonstrate that participants with housing histories that included at risk or being homelessness were more likely to experience challenges finding affordable housing. However, a smaller group of individuals from Group A indicated housing was in fact affordable in Leeds and Grenville. These were respondents that had lived in their current residence for over ten years.
- Over half of the respondents that indicated housing was not affordable had been living in their current residence for less than five years, majority of whom were either homeless or had faced the possibility of being homeless.
- With Group B, the data indicates that respondents with a longer history in their current home (11+ years), generally reported that housing was not affordable in Leeds and Grenville.

Housing is not affordable in Leeds and Grenville			
Length of time in current residence	Group A	Group B	Total
5 years and less	12	7	19
6-10 years	1	2	3
11-15 years	2	5	7
16-20 years	0	1	1
21+ years	1	6	7

### Why housing is affordable in Leeds and Grenville?

#### People responded by relating to their own housing situations to describe why they felt housing is affordable:

*"Rent-geared-to income, therefore it allows a person to be able to afford to eat and spend money on other needs, otherwise it is too costly when you do not have a job or cannot work." (Respondent, Group B)*

*"Yes, very much so. My former residence was way over my monthly allowance for rent and so cut into money to be used for bills. I could barely afford food. Had no laundry facilities. Here has everything one needs. Laundry, garbage disposal, things are actually fixed when needed and I can afford to buy food and have a little extras that could not afford before." (Respondent, Group B)*

*"Yes, I do feel housing is affordable. 30% of your income is fair." (Respondent, Group A)*

*"It is very hard to live on my income and make ends meet. I understand you rated my rent based on my income. I do appreciate the reduced, what I pay, it is still really hard however but I can only do my best. Again I am grateful." (Respondent, Group A)*

*"Yes, I have my house and rent just the way it is. Maintenance staff is very good and keeps the floors in hallways clean and lawns outside beautiful. I like the residence; I'm very happy here in my apartment. No problem. Thank you for making me come alive again." (Respondent, Group A)*

### Why housing is NOT affordable in Leeds and Grenville?

#### Respondents articulated issues that highlighted barriers at the individual, household and systems level.

*"No. People on Ontario Works and ODSP do not get enough money to pay rent, hydro, heat and water. People in housing having to pay maximum rent. Does not make it affordable." (Respondent, Group A)*

*"No. We were told when we signed the lease that (at that time) we wouldn't pay market rent for the unit until both of us worked FT. As soon as one of us got a job rent increased 300% and now with only one working we pay market rent. In doing that, no way we can afford to move. Because social housing is NOT any cheaper than regular renting." (Respondent, Group A)*

*"For the most part it is not. Energy costs are astronomical and rents are at a landlord's whim who can charge \$600.00 or \$700.00 dollars for a room. Landlords need to be more accountable." (Respondent, Group A)*

*"Not for a single parent on welfare. I am allowed 600 dollars a month for rent (that must include all costs such as hydro, heat, etc.). There isn't even a one bdrm place around for that, and hasn't been in 20 years! They need to adjust pays to up-to-date costs." (Respondent, Group A)*

*"No. I pay my rent \$750.00 plus \$130.00 for hydro. I have a special diet so I spend \$180.00 on food and non-covered medications. Then groceries I am only able to spend \$25.00 for a whole month for groceries. If rent was the amount that OW giving us for rent was what we actually paid. Would make buying groceries for the month possible." (Respondent, Group B)*

*"I'm renting an apartment, I cannot afford. I was able to afford it when I was with my boyfriend. I need a better place asap; I'm being close to eviction cause I can't keep up with the rent. also my x just got laid off so he has no money coming in. "Taxes are too high in Brockville, due to high service costs (e.g. police, fire, health unit)." (Respondent, Group A)*

*"No. Because most of the manufacturing jobs have left the country leaving only minimum wage. It's hard to pay rent, food, hydro on \$10.50 per hour and raise a family and pay \$800.00 - \$1,000.00 per month rent. We need more affordable housing in LG." (Responding, Group B)*

### Why housing is NOT affordable in Leeds and Grenville?

*"No. A lot of low-income people can't afford most places. If you are a two adult family with grandkids and need a two-bedroom apartment you can't afford to rent one and pay utilities and you also don't qualify for low rental. Some grandparents like myself love having my grandkids overnight whether it be for a weekend or for a week at a time in the summer. I would love to see some of you guys live on what we get to live on and try to pay rent, utility etc. Tell me what you would have left at the end of every month. Nothing. I know what I said means jack shit to the Government". (Respondent, Group B)*

*"I would love to stay in my own home. I am 79 years old and healthy, but my costs are too high. Heat \$400 a month, hydro and water \$350 and taxes \$150. Q4: No, unless I lose my house as I am behind in taxes, water. Had to cancel insurance and my house needs repair." (Respondent, Group B)*

*"No - cost of heat, lights and mortgage are more than I make. People on old age pension and guaranteed income make \$1,300.00 per month. You cannot live on that in this province. The county will have to subsidize." (Respondent, Group B)*

*"No, there is not enough housing for one person or for a big family. A lot of townhouses were sold in Prescott. Now we need them and more! There is nothing out there in my price range. My place is clean and quite." (Respondent, Group B)*

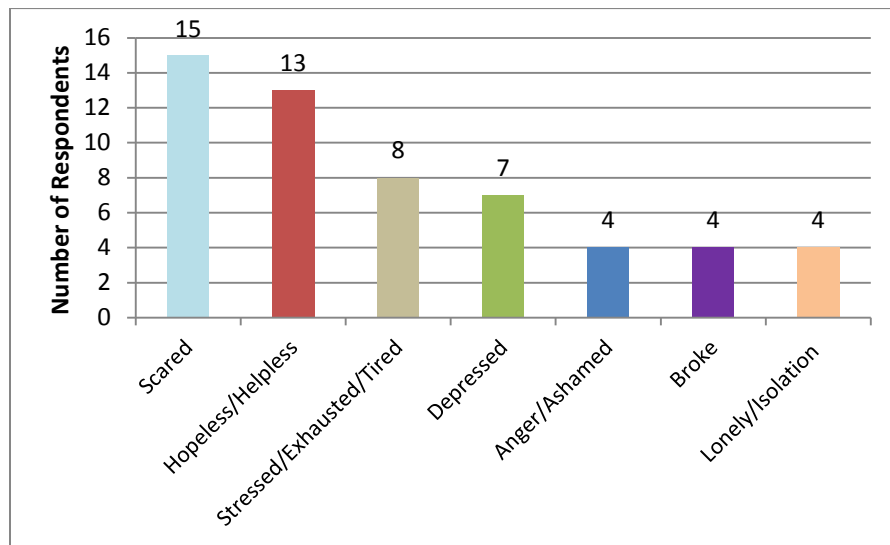
#### Some of the common themes identified through the survey responses are:

- 1) High rent costs**
- 2) High utility costs**
- 3) Loss of employment creating housing insecurity**
- 4) Better wages to help people afford their housing**
- 5) Social assistance allowance not enough to make ends meet**

## GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS – GROUP A (Experienced Homelessness or at Risk of Being Homeless)

### Respondents' Feelings Based on their Experiences:

- Recognizing the variety of perspectives that vulnerable people experience is an important process to making a plan meaningful and to help create real change.
- Respondents that experienced homelessness or faced the risk of being homeless cited 'phrases' that denote the vulnerability of the population and the mental anguish they experience. These experiences add layers of complexity in their lives, while having to obtain and maintain the basic necessities: shelter, food and clothing.
- Each person's situation is different but there were common elements of how people felt that suggests thinking about human service integration and different solutions for housing and homelessness.
- Scared, hopeless, helpless, stress and depression were the most common feelings expressed by the respondents.



If you had to pick three words to describe your experience, what would it be?





## GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS – GROUP A (Experienced Homelessness or at Risk of Being Homeless)

### Types of Formal and Informal Supports and Services Accessed:

- Only a few respondents articulated usage of formal or informal support and services. This included:
  - **Formal Supports and Services:** Social Services (n=3); food bank (n=1); social worker (n=1); women's shelter (n=2); housing supports (n=1); residential rehabilitation (n=1); Salvation Army (n=1)
  - **Informal Supports:** Family and friends (3); faith institution (n=1)
- With some respondents they only became aware of supports and services at first contact or outreach with a social worker or an agency.

### What we Heard:

*"I contacted E FRY Kingston. Contacted Housing they are the only two places I know that help with being homeless"*

*"Unofficial and active advisers and advocates, Community Housing, various medical and legal sources, provincial and federal disability programs, CPHC (VON) and Brockville Transit. (Please note that I list Community Housing as second: I wanted/needed a roof over my head while other needs took time - some a long time to fall into place.) I became aware of other supports and services as long as I and "supporters" persevered."*

*"People from my church. Supportive and helpful worker from Interval House. A lot of people don't know what's out there for them. Pet - if I didn't have her, I'd be curled up on the couch."*

*"Food Bank, Ontario Works. Did not know of any other services at the time"*

*"Yes, I'm aware of other supports and services. I applied for housing, used the food bank."*

### Awareness of Existing and Additional Supports and Services:

- Twenty-one respondents commented on awareness of existing and additional support and services. Of these individuals, a little over half (52%) were not aware of supports or services currently available to assist them or knew of additional.
- The responses highlighted that in addition to people's basic needs not being met they were also not able to tap into the appropriate service delivery systems that could offer immediate assistance.
- People need to know where to go for help and how to get their needs met.
- A couple of respondents felt that even though they sort out supports, nobody was willing to assist.

### What they Said:

*"I wasn't aware of anything until I contacted the social worker. No one knows what is out there in support and services until they need it. Thank you".*

*"Women's shelter, never knew it was there until I was taken there".*

*"I am disabled and had no idea what to do. I was not aware of no help or services and I never thought I would require them. I thank you again for the support that came my way that I had no idea about."*

*"I tried every avenue available and nobody helped".*

*"I was fortunate: these supports and services came along in respectively due time. I do not know enough of present ones to know what new initiatives should be implemented."*

## GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS – GROUP A (Experienced Homelessness or at Risk of Being Homeless)

### Making Supports and Services Helpful:

- Group A respondents were asked about what would have made supports and services they accessed helpful. The responses articulated did not always reflect the question posed. However, reiterated by the participants is the need for effective vehicles to not only mobilize information about supports and services available, but they must be accessible at the time of need or during a crisis situation.
- Providing support in navigating the system would also be helpful including making sure the system of services works for people.
- Inferred from the responses is that systems must become more person-centred; and vulnerable people must be treated with dignity and respect.
- Interpreting some of the responses denotes that employees involved in service delivery should be well-trained to deal with the diversity of people and their unique housing experiences.
- The following reflect additional views from the respondents:

*“Making people aware of services available, and having easy accessible information for times of crisis.”*

*“More information about where to go to get the help you need, whether it is shelter, food, clothes.”*

*“More knowledge of what was available and how to access services much more geared to income housing or imposed rent freezes.”*

*“Housing needs more guidance NOT people who treat us with no respect”.*

*“Worker who was in charge of updating my progress at [Agency name], in finding an apartment and job was very negative and very discouraging.”*

*“Homeless / couch surfer/ auto living generally means no home address, no home phone, no mailing address, no call answer/waiting, no computer, no home office (for tax info, life ins, does, etc, etc.) All of the above required by Housing / Welfare to process an application. One-on-one counseling required to determine urgency and extent of crisis.”*

### New Supports and Services:

- As a follow up to how supports and services can be made helpful, respondents were asked to suggest new ones. There were very few responses specific to the question.
- The responses however, were specific to improving existing services and supports:
  - **Social Housing: Better screening and processes to speed up the waiting list.**
  - **Home Incentives: Support to keep a home. Taxes should be removed from heating.**
  - **Need for more supply of geared to income and affordable housing and to think differently about ways to provide this affordability beyond the traditional social housing approach.**
  - **Housing priorities and options for single fathers.**
  - **Response to property standards should be proactive, not reactive.**
  - **Housing should be well maintained and in good repair.**
  - **Reconsider dwelling types for social housing units (i.e. smaller houses instead of apartments.)**
  - **Develop a landlord and tenant outreach and feedback loop with a focus on hearing tenant's issues.**
  - **Ensuring that tenants are meaningfully engaged in planning and decision making in the areas that affect their lives.**



## GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS – GROUP A (Experienced Homelessness or at Risk of Being Homeless)

### What they Said:

*"Repairs on units are done cheaply. Windows have no insulation around them. Repairs are not done "right" half of the time. There is no hood vent above the stove. The electric wiring is out dated. Units should be based on our net income, not gross income. We live in a small town; rent should not be based on city prices. You would get better feedback if you had tenant meetings. Giving people a break on rent, would allow people to save for a house to buy. Bonus cheques should be given to tenants that keep their place nice. Being forced into a two-bedroom which is not right. If our rent is higher than a mortgage payment for our unit that is "WRONG". You need a tenant group leader to go around in their area to get feedback for you once a month. Need some sort of incentive to keep tenants happy. You need to focus more on fixing units right."*

*"Could the government buy up houses and have them for people on government assistance to live in; could have smaller houses as well as apartments; it's just a thought. Maybe too costly in terms of repairs and maintenance. I do not want to move this is just an idea."*

*"Expediency sure would be better! And there really should be a lot more options for men as well. They have woman's shelters for this, but not many options for single fathers."*

*"It costs too much to re-roof, to do foundation repairs, etc. City taxes raise some 5% every year. My 2012 taxes for the city was \$2,570.11 for an old house built in 1957. In July my old age federal increased \$3.46 or 0.00329 or not even 1% I understand there is a program for home repairs if the valuation is less than \$150,000.00. However my new assessment notice for 2013, is \$174,000 and 2016, \$189,000. My case is no assistance. Assistance should be based on your income for seniors and the most of residential tax payers in Brockville are seniors."*