

Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service System Planning Forum April 12, 2023

Date and time: April 12, 2023; 10:00am – 12:00pm

Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81540086227>

1. **Introduction and Housekeeping** - Mark Aston, Covenant House
2. **Land Recognition** (Savhanna Joy, TAEH)
3. **SSHA Items and Updates – Update from Trish Lenz on shelter system flow data** (SSHA)
 - See slide deck / presentation
 - **Q:** What story do you think the data is telling us? Can you summarize what the story is?
 - **A (Trish):** The story we are seeing over the past three months is that homelessness is increasing in the city and a large share of the population identify as refugees. We are just pulling data for March and we are seeing a stabilization in the number of people experiencing homelessness for the month. Is that a trend or a blip? It will be interesting to track. We are seeing levels of homelessness that we haven't seen before.
 - **Q:** I saw something in the news about reporting of deaths in the shelter and mentioned SSHA decision to shift reporting every month to every six months. Community members have been talking and also recognize people who have passed. There is a memorial every month at the Church of Holy Trinity by the Eaton Centre. Recognizing deaths in the community has been important.
 - **A (Trish):** SSHA shifted the reporting to align with TPH data releases. Will take your feedback back to SSHA and see if we can provide any further information.
 - **Q:** When you talk about homelessness increasing, it seems to be aligned with refugees increasing. With the turnaround to access permanent housing, do you see that turnaround is happening more with people who have refugee status or people with chronic homelessness?
 - **A (Trish):** We could dig into data more for general outcomes. Refugees are a large share of people accessing the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) benefit to leave the sector at a faster rate than others in the shelter system. I don't have the number offhand. It is something to look into. With respect to COHB that is portable, it is used at a very high rate. This is positive as it means they are moving on from the shelter system and freeing up space.
 - **Q:** Are people experiencing homelessness not accessing COHB?
 - **A (Trish):** They are accessing it. There tends to be more flexibility with people who are refugees, e.g. they don't need to stay close to some supports as people experiencing chronic homelessness do. There may be more flexibility to move and apply the COHB to other areas. It would be good to map out where COHB is applied in the city and where folks are distributing themselves geographically.

- **Q:** In the chart during your presentation, the shelter system outflow data highlighted 618 people became inactive. Are these people who left or we don't know where they are?
- **A (Trish):** There is no discharge reason.
- **Q:** Do you have statistics of where people are coming from? TTC may not provide it to us.
- **A (Trish):** Streets to Homes (S2H) has a connection with the TTC and will be doing a presentation on their work. S2H could speak about what they are seeing and hearing from folks.
- **Q:** How many people are still in hotels? I don't think you reported on the occupancy rate. When do those expire and when will there be an influx?
- **A (Trish):** I just present on the shelter system flow data. I can pop the daily occupancy rates in the chat. I can ask the program manager to do a presentation at the next meeting on plans.
- **Q:** The occupancy data is 99-100%. There is no give in the system. There is quite a lot of people in the hotels and we know they are closing. I just want to know how impending those closures are. If they close in the next couple of months, hearing would be great and knowing how much influx may be coming. What happens if there is nowhere for people to go? In the past, refugees would end up at Seaton House and it was always straightforward for housing. Refugees could get permanent housing within a few weeks whereas those experiencing chronic homelessness may take a few months. Refugees would have a willingness to go to Scarborough where there is housing available but I think also landlords are happier to work with refugees than someone who has been homeless for a while and has mental illnesses.
- **A (Mark):** People would be interested in hearing a longer term plan versus just the dates of closures. It could be very disruptive to shelter residents' lives and the shelter system.

Note from chat:

Trish: Re: use of COHB - In Year 3 of the program, take up was largely in the Shelter Relief Stream, making up 80% of all COHB applications. Of this, 64% of Shelter Relief COHB recipients were refugee households.

4. **Refugee Sector Updates – Update from Nicole Williams and Kriti Chandna (SSHA)** See slide deck / presentation

- **Q:** It was really informative. Your overview of what is happening is something we are seeing at Street Haven. We have 75 beds; part of that is the hotel shelter. The number of refugees that we are seeing, especially from Africa, has increased. We are now at 50% of our shelter clients being racialized individuals and the majority are refugees. Some are very vulnerable and high risk youth. We have dedicated our entire shelter hotel to refugees. We aren't connected with the family services group. I am just wondering how we can be connected. I am

concerned the clients aren't getting all of the benefits. My staff are great but they may not be plugging into everything. I am curious about the plan for shelter system for refugees. There was a recent rapid evaluation for the Syrian refugees. I wonder if any of the findings have been taken and applied. There are some interesting findings for our own shelter and SSHA at a system level would be interesting.

- **A (Nicole):** We can take it offline to learn and understand what is going on in the system. We are piloting some work on outreach and education and resources. That is ongoing with Sojourn House to build capacity for organizations providing services that aren't refugee specific. The Syrian refugees were government assisted refugees. It was a collaboration with the federal government. The City can take on and coordinate and plan. We are reviewing all of the ways refugees have been welcomed in the past. Refugees coming from all across the world. We are monitoring what is happening since the Safe Third Country changes happened. It changed the type of refugees that are being seen.
- **Q:** I was happy to see that youth are identified as a priority area where we need to look at services provided. 50% of people in the youth shelter system also identify as refugees. Is there a way to get those involved in that towards the solutions and what the pathways will be. I think we have a helpful voice to bring around what protocols are and the referrals from our sector to the broader youth refugee sector. Our services are provided a bit differently from the adult sector. We can partner around solutions and challenges facing youth, including increasing lengths of stay given barriers they face that are unique from adults. We see it but obviously it is burgeoning to adult system as well. Our staff are doing amazing work but don't have expertise and knowledge like others might. We would like to collaborate around that.
- **A (Nicole):** We are in the beginning stages of looking at where the resources are. Put in proposal about how to support youth in existing youth sector. There are so many that are out there. It is not about our team and how we are forming tables. There are many tables that exist. We can reach out and provide some capacity building. Stay tuned and we will provide an update.
- **C:** We do have a team that we have been sending to various shelters. Youth social worker and staff with many years of experience around legal process. Connect with Debbie Hill-Corrigan of Sojourn House. We are putting something online that can be used. In communications with when the team went out, there is a need for ongoing support – questions about individual cases that they may not know about. Service model that they are coming up. Debbie and Siu Mee can connect Debbie.

5. Housing Secretariat Items and Updates Matt Hilder (Manager of Program Management)

- **Q:** Clarify the two streams – project stream and city stream?
- **A (Matt):** Municipalities get a guarantee out of the municipality stream and project stream is part of national competition (CMHC scoring). Municipality

stream funding has been for city-led projects thus far and 20% has been for Indigenous.

- **Q:** For city-led projects, is there an RFP for community or how does that work?
- **A (Matt):** City leads construction for 822 Yonge and 277 Spadina. And then does an RFP for operations. City does capital and the not for profit does operations.
- **Q:** One concern that I have is RHI as a smallish agency. We tend to not get invited to put in offers and we don't know about it until long after it is done. My emerging question surrounds equitable access to funding. We work with women with histories of violence. Are there some standard communication that you sent that I could take to women coalition? We aren't averse to doing advocacy on that front. Third piece is how do we make ourselves ready as a small agency to tap into the funding? When RHI comes available again, how can we make sure we are ready and can access it?
- **A (Matt):** Q1 and 3 – City supports organizations to apply. There are housing development staff who can share information about program structure and apply on behalf of organizations which reduces administrative burden. #2 – let's touch base offline. I can help to connect you to appropriate staff at the Housing Secretariat that does work with the Women's sector in particular.
- **C (Monica):** Three quick things – circle back to operating dollars and get emphasized in the feedback loop. We need to build housing for clients and not try to fit clients into housing. Operators can't properly house the people experiencing chronic homelessness. I echo what other shelter operators have said – they are doing great work and they want to spread into a continuum of services and we need to support them to build capacity. We need to have a toolkit or demystification on how to submit an application. Most people are successful after applying multiple times. In advance of the application, let's start planning now so that providers can be ready to get things in place from an organizational and financial health perspective. Third – A lot of applications are from people who have their own buildings. We still need shelters. We are losing shelter beds.
- **Q:** A lot of what I wanted to draw attention to has been addressed. But, how can we encourage – crucial to focus on identity and those that are overrepresented... threshold needs. Engage in purpose built units that have barrier specific needs. Building a unit and then retrofitting to meet an individual's needs will increase costs. The other piece that I want to flag around staffing – I am interested and keen to seeing the stacking of funding. Ontario, in particular, is in a challenging spot. A lot of people who get CMHC funding are in jurisdictions that have more investments. I would be really eager to engage in that conversation around cooperative and collaborative approaches to building housing. There is finger pointing around level of government responsibility. It is better to blur the lines and talk about what we need and we need leadership from all orders of government to deliver it.

- **C (Savhanna):** I really like the toolkit and demystification process idea. Building capacity is a big goal of the housing development work group of TAEH.

6. Community / Sector Updates

- **Ontario Women’s Housing Coalition and the Queen’s Park Day of Action – Siu Mee Cheng, Executive Director, Street Haven**
 - Siu Mee Cheng introduced herself as the co-founder of the women's and supportive housing coalition – made up of 15-20 agencies
 - In conversations with the NDP caucus, the coalition has been able to connect with them on doing days of action that would be focused on affordable housing prior to the budget launch on March 23.
 - The coalition's day of action was on March 20 at Queens Park. The focus was to be able to work with the NDP caucus. Some of the stories providers shared around housing were presented as questions to the party in power around what the province is doing around affordable housing. The coalition raised a lot of issues and tried to communicate key messages around
 - Dedicated funding for affordable housing
 - Mental health supports
 - Funds available for not for profit sector
 - The issue around housing remained the focus of the QA session.
 - Every November, the coalition plans on doing a collective Queens Park action day. The coalition would go before the legislative and sit in the galleys. The issues that the coalition is concerned with can be given attention and hopefully inform the provincial budget as they are pulling together for the next year. The coalition has put the budget piece as a core piece of their work
- **C:** Mark indicated that Covenant House is interested.
- **C:** Nadine indicated that Fife House really enjoyed it and the connecting / networking. The representation of program staff was invigorating
- **C:** Alexandra Shannan would like to participate
- Siu Mee Cheng shared that Street Haven brought a large contingent of people to the day of action. After the day, managers and directors shared that participating in the day was transformative for folks on the frontlines. There was a lunch party done by the NDP and community staff interacted with NDP representatives. Given it was a transformative day for staff, the management team decided to make it an annual event.
- **C:** Leslie Gash highlighted interest on event in the future
- **C:** November is a great idea and will help organizations to get some legs for some of their own budget submissions as well. It could be an opportunity as sector providers to align messaging so that different orders of government can be hearing similar asks and that would amplify things. Our people with lived

experience caucus wants to get more involved in actions and to have more opportunities to collaborate with leadership and frontline providers.

- **A:** Siu Mee Cheng shared that there was one particular client who shared how difficult it was for them to get there. If there is an interest in the movement, maybe some agencies could create a pool about who needs access to transportation and babysitting so that people with lived experience can come out and have their voices heard.
- **C:** Community Living Toronto and the Toronto Disability Alliance would be very interested as well. Pre-COVID, there was work done hosted through the city – bringing housing developers that were focused on social housing as well as service providers and network to connect. Housing developers may also connect as well. Love the idea of having people with lived experience really lend strength to the stories and the need for housing.

7. TAEH Items and Updates - Pledge to End Homelessness – Mayoral By-Election Advocacy Campaign (Savhanna Joy, TAEH)

- Savhanna (TAEH) led the agenda item on the Pledge to End Homelessness. City staff did not participate in this agenda item. Guidelines about staff and funded agency participation in election activities are available [here](#).
- The TAEH will never endorse or oppose a candidate for Mayor.
- TAEH did a pledge to end homelessness with the recent election. Essentially, a number of asks around budget allocation commitments.
- Some of the TAEH pledge asks were not present in the 2023 budget.
- TAEH is launching a new campaign in advance of the mayoral election. They will update pledge to end homelessness to incorporate an opportunity for strong mayor power and what the strong mayor powers may be able to do to move forward a plan to end homelessness. We are moving forward 2 key asks:
 - For anyone who is elected mayor to develop a plan to end homelessness in partnership with community experts. There are housing plans and lines about addressing homelessness and the context has completely changed. The housing outcomes are fewer and fewer.
 - We saw from the earlier presentation, 46% of folks who are chronically homeless. That is 11% increase from last year. We don't have information on invisible homelessness. Marginalized and oppressed identities. We are seeing a lot more homelessness than we have numbers for. A top of mind priority is to write a specific plan to end homeless.
 - Dedicated fund to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring as part of the mayor budget in 2024. We are asking for a new mayor to demonstrate the commitment and holding themselves accountable to a dedicated plan.

- TAEH Campaign will be launched relatively soon (early May)
- TAEH is also planning a debate that will focus specifically on how each candidate will address the homelessness crisis.
 - There will be a moderator with a background in housing
 - TAEH will request for some input about what kind of questions to put forward.
- TAEH is eager to get endorsements from organizations by sending their logo or a statement to the pledge on their websites.
- TAEH will be drafting some templates for letters of support and people can adapt those to the particular context of their organization
- TAEH will be emailing information in the coming weeks; Savannah is happy to connect with members or their communications teams to coordinate

8. Other business / close

Next meeting:

Wednesday May 10

10:00am – Noon

ZOOM