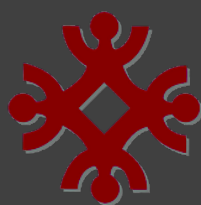


Homelessness in Saint John, NB:

It's Time to Make it History



April 2015



Human Development Council

Table of Contents

Piecing Together a Picture Infographic	2
Executive Summary	3
Ending Homelessness in Saint John, NB	4
Closure of Salvation Army: Where are they now?	4
A Year in Review	5
What is Housing First?.....	5
Housing Indicators in Saint John	6
Outflow Shelter Opens at New Location	6
Switching Gears to End Homelessness in Saint John	7
Safe Harbour: Our Start to Ending Youth Homelessness	8
Key Causes of Youth Homelessness	9
Are the Stars Aligning to End Homelessness in Saint John?	10
Complications: It's not availability—it's affordability.....	10
The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014 report highlights	10
Conclusion & Looking Ahead	11
References	12

PIECING TOGETHER A PICTURE

Homelessness in Saint John in 2014



30
of emergency shelter
beds in the city



198 people used an
emergency shelter



1,271
of Public Housing
units in the SJ Region



31
youth ages 19-24 used an
adult emergency shelter

902
of rent supplements
in the SJ Region

156
average # of active
child-in-care cases



1,300+
of people on the waiting
list for subsidized housing



6,628
social assistance
cases in Saint John
(December, 2014)

For 1 bedroom
apartments in
Saint John...

vacancy rate
9.7%



Median monthly rent



2,834
of people in Saint
John living on less
than \$600/month
(December, 2014)



537 - 595 = -58

*It's not
availability, it's
affordability!*



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Executive Summary

At both the local and national levels, there has been a shift in focus from **managing** homelessness to **ending** it. A clear example of this shift is the adoption of a Housing First philosophy by community and academic experts. This has influenced federal policy thanks to the At-Home, Chez Soi project. (*For an explanation of Housing First, see page 5.*)

An important part of ending homelessness is ensuring that everyone is on the same page when it comes to defining it. Homelessness doesn't just refer to shelter users or people who are sleeping rough (e.g. on the streets, in parks, etc). The Canadian definition of homelessness states:

“Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other.”

Quantifying hidden homelessness remains a difficult task for communities, and Saint John is no exception. In 2014, the Salvation Army announced that they would be closing the Centre of Hope – their emergency shelter for men experiencing homelessness, which had been operating in Saint John's South End since 1982. Although government and community organizations mobilized quickly and Outflow, a community organization, stepped up to open a men's shelter, one of the effects of the closure of the Centre of Hope was that a number of individuals shifted from being shelter users (and thus easily counted) to being “hidden homeless”.

In Saint John in 2014, 198 individuals used an emergency shelter—there are 30 emergency shelter beds in the city. There are over 1,300 households on the waiting list for subsidized housing in the Saint John Region, which has 1,271 public housing units and 902 rent supplements. Rent supplements are given to landlords to make market rent apartments affordable for those who could otherwise not afford them. A single individual receiving social assistance, for example, received \$537 per month, while the median monthly rent is \$595.

While vacancy rates in Saint John were down slightly in 2014 (9%, compared to 11.4% in 2013), they remain extremely high. Unfortunately, affordability remains a major barrier to connecting people who need housing with the many apartments sitting vacant.

The expiry of Federal-Provincial operating agreements received a lot of attention in 2014—and rightly so. In Saint John, this means that from 2014-2030, 82 agreements will expire affecting the affordability of 1,605 units. Considering affordability is already a major issue for many households in the region, this is bad news.

Of the 198 individuals who used an emergency shelter in 2014, 31 of them were youth ages 19-24. We know that many youth experiencing homelessness do not access services for adults. In an attempt to get a snapshot of youth homelessness in the city, the Saint John Human Development Council (HDC) conducted a 24-hour point-in-time count in June 2014. During that 24 hour period, 50 youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability connected with services.

Affordable housing saves taxpayers money in health, social services and the justice system. Making sure that Saint Johners have access to safe, affordable housing lays the foundation for a healthy life and a healthy community. This is no small task, however: it will take all levels of government, the non-profit sector, the business community, and engaged community members working together to achieve it.

Ending Homelessness in Saint John, NB

This is Saint John's first report card that focuses on **ending** homelessness. For past report cards on homelessness in Saint John, visit www.sjhdc.ca.

Before we can end homelessness, we first have to know what it means. The Canadian definition of homelessness explains:

"Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it... Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other."

Although there is now a Canadian definition of homelessness, measuring homelessness remains problematic. While easy to track, shelter use is just one piece of the puzzle and quantifying the number of hidden homeless is difficult.

Raising the Roof, an organization working to end homelessness in Canada, estimates that up to 80% of those experiencing homelessness are "hidden homeless" (couch surfing, living in cars/abandoned buildings, or staying in a dangerous situation for lack of other options).

A Canadian, [HPS funded study](#) estimates that for every visibly person homeless in Vancouver, 3.5 people are "hidden homeless".

Closure of Salvation Army: Where are they now?

Although there were 17 men staying at the Salvation Army Centre of Hope (the Centre) when its closure was announced, when Outflow opened its new shelter they only had two men stay there on the first night, *so where did everyone go?*

The number of men accessing the Outflow shelter during the first few months at its temporary location was consistently lower than the number of men who were staying at the Centre prior to its closure. While numbers have since increased, during the month of May 2014 there were never more than four men accessing the Outflow shelter on a given night. In January 2014, the lowest number of men accessing the Centre was 11 and the daily average was 13.6; in February it was 12 and 15.6 respectively.

Leading up to the closure, four men staying at the Centre of Hope were moved through the Organized Departures Program—all four of those men are still housed. Another eight men were moved to residential programs run by the John Howard Society. The Salvation Army helped others with finding and getting set up in their own apartments – several men moved in together – or finding a room in a rooming house. Others were helped with the cost of a bus ticket to go out west and join family.

Outreach workers in the city have heard repeatedly from clients that the location of the temporary shelter was the biggest barrier to men who would otherwise have accessed it, with the second being having to leave at 8am. A former employee of the Centre confirmed that the location of the temporary shelter is a barrier to many former clients and does not believe that the reduction in the number of individuals who accessed a shelter in 2014 reflect a reduction in homelessness in the city, but rather are a result of the closure. We know from key informant interviews that once the closure of the Centre was announced, men started looking for alternatives. Furthermore, in the weeks leading up to the closure, the Salvation Army closed a floor of their building. They stopped admitting new clients to the shelter approximately a week before the full closure.

Unfortunately, the decrease in the number of individuals who accessed an emergency shelter does not reflect a decrease in homelessness in the city, rather, it suggests that men shifted from homelessness to hidden homelessness.

A Year in Review

2014 was a year of change. Advocates and service providers breathed a collective sigh of relief in 2013, when the federal government announced a five-year renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). HPS provides funding to four communities in New Brunswick to address homelessness – Saint John, Moncton, Fredericton and Bathurst.

Although HPS funding was renewed, it came with a condition attached: the federal government stipulated that communities begin to invest part of their allocation towards a Housing First program. The adoption of a Housing First philosophy reflects the intentional shift in focus (both at the local and national levels) from *managing* homelessness to *ending* it.

What is Housing First?

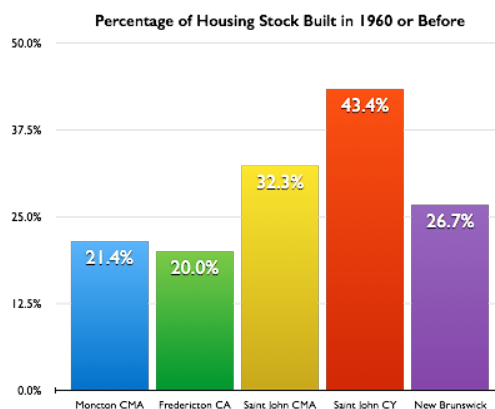
Housing First is a client-centred approach that provides immediate access to housing for people experiencing homelessness, without any housing readiness requirements. It is guided by the idea that housing is a basic human right.

“The basic underlying principle of Housing First is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed. This is as true for people experiencing homelessness and those with mental health and addictions issues as it is for anyone... [Housing First is] rooted in the philosophy that all people deserve housing, and that adequate housing is a precondition for recovery.” (Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness, 2013)

On February 27th, 2014, the Salvation Army announced that they would be closing the Centre of Hope – their emergency shelter for men experiencing homelessness in the city, which had been operating in Saint John’s South End since 1982 – on April 30, 2014. Government and community organizations mobilized quickly to ensure that the men in our community who were relying on the shelter would have somewhere to go. Outflow, a community organization, stepped up to open a men’s shelter.

The issue of the expiry of Federal-Provincial operating agreements, which will put 200,000 households across Canada at-risk, was front and centre in 2014 and remains a major concern. The federal government has funded non-profit, public and co-op social housing providers through various long-term agreements. This funding helped cover mortgage payments and allowed housing providers to subsidize rents for low-income households (CHRA, 2014).

“These are Canada’s lowest-income earners & disproportionately represent the most vulnerable in our society: lone parents & their children, seniors, people of aboriginal descent, newcomers, people with disabilities & others.” (CHRA, 2014)



Federal investment in social housing began to decline in the 1990s, and it will be zero by 2040. In response to the expiry, the Co-operative Housing Federation (CHF) of Canada, in partnership with Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) launched the *You Hold the Key Campaign*.

From 2014-2030, 82 agreements will expire affecting 1,605 units in the Saint John Region. Already there are over 1,300 people on the waiting list for subsidized

housing in the Saint John Region. Furthermore, Saint John's housing stock is very old; 43% of it was built before 1960. This means that there are likely more buildings in Saint John in need of repair and renovations and that we need to be investing more into safe and affordable housing in Saint John, not less.

Housing Indicators in Saint John	2013	2014
Number of public housing units (SJ Region)	1,271	1,271
Number of rent supplements (SJ Region)	898	902
# of people/families on waiting list for provincially subsidized units (SJ Region)	1,034	1,304
Percentage of households in core housing need (2006)	12.5%	12.5%
Percentage of households that rent in core housing need (2006)	23.6%	23.6%
Median Rent for a 1 bedroom apartment (SJ CMA)	\$575	\$595
Median Rent for a 2 bedroom apartment (SJ CMA)	\$670	\$680
Vacancy rate for 1 bedroom apartments (SJ CMA)	10.6%	9.7%
Overall Vacancy rate (SJ CMA)	11.4%	9%

Outflow Shelter Opens at New Location

Outflow finished renovations to the old church that houses their new men's emergency shelter; the shelter is now open in its permanent location on Waterloo Street. The move to their permanent location is a relief for the organization and the clients they serve. Now, the emergency shelter is located uptown, within walking distance of other services. In addition, the building will also have space for programming during the day.

While their permanent location on Waterloo Street underwent substantial renovations, a temporary location was opened on Somerset Street in the city's North End.

As of March 2015, the Outflow men's shelter is operating out of a renovated church at 162 Waterloo Street.



For more information on Outflow, visit www.outflowsj.com.

Switching Gears to End Homelessness in Saint John

Paradoxically, the abrupt closure of our only men's shelter—which came as a shock to local service providers—presented the community with an opportunity to reorganize and focus our efforts on ending homelessness, rather than managing it. There will always be a need for emergency shelters; however, they must be used as they were intended—for emergency situations—instead of becoming a long-term response to homelessness. Keeping people in emergency shelters for extended periods of time is expensive and unfair to the individual.

Current research tells us that in order to reduce—and ultimately end—homelessness, the key is prevention, and quickly moving people out of shelters, or off the streets, into housing through programs like Rapid Re-Housing or Housing First. According to the Homeless Hub:

“Ending homelessness means doing things differently, and not simply managing the problem through depending on emergency services and supports such as shelters and soup kitchens... Ending homelessness means that no one should be in this emergency situation for any longer than a few weeks.”

The Community Council on Homelessness (CCH) is a group of non-profit and government agencies working together to address homelessness in Saint John. At their meeting on April 2nd, 2014, the CCH reaffirmed their commitment to ending homelessness in Saint John—to get at the root causes, not just cover up the symptoms (*to learn more about the CCH, visit www.homelessnesssj.ca*). The orthodox response to homelessness has always been based on a “treatment first” model; the Housing First philosophy challenges this. Service providers agree with the Housing First philosophy and are working together to improve the coordination of service delivery. In Saint John, Housing Alternatives, a non-profit housing organization, is taking the lead in laying the groundwork for a Housing First program. A Housing First program will not replace existing services; it will complement them and allow us, for the first time, to help get those in our community with the most complex needs off the streets and into housing.

Housing People Makes Sense, Period.

In addition to the moral argument for ensuring that people have access to safe, affordable housing and the supports they need to maintain it, housing people makes economic sense. It is measurably more cost effective than allowing them to remain homeless and rely on emergency shelters for extended periods of time. A key finding from At Home/Chez Soi¹ is that targeting high needs, high service using homeless populations will actually save money.

“The myth that the chronically homeless have too many complicated needs, or are too difficult and ultimately too expensive to house is undone by the results of the At Home/Chez Soi study.”
(Housing First in Canada, p. 14)

The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013 report estimates that homelessness costs Canada \$7.04 billion annually, and we know that a small percentage of the homeless population account for much of the service use. The results of the At-Home/Chez-Soi project show that when the highest service users are specifically targeted, every \$10 invested in Housing First services result in an average savings of \$21.72. High Service users are those with the most complex mental health and addictions issues; the At-Home/Chez-Soi final report calculated that this group of participants had been incurring costs, on average, at a rate of approximately \$225,000 per year, per person.

¹ Note: At Home/Chez Soi was an innovative, ground-breaking, four-year study from the Mental Health Commission of Canada conducted in five Canadian cities on mental health, homelessness, and the Housing First approach. The federal government's adoption of Housing First is based on the success of this project.

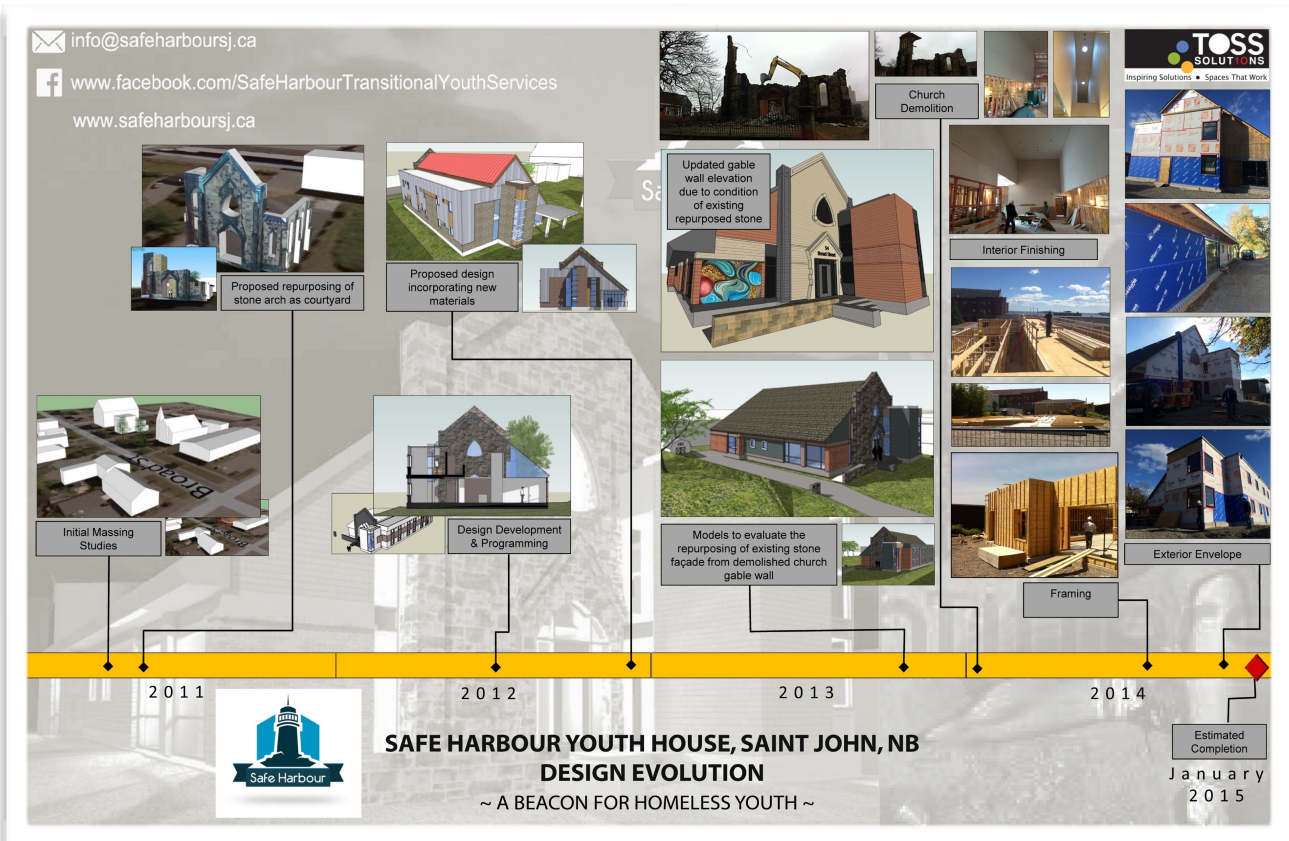
Safe Harbour: Our Start to Ending Youth Homelessness

Safe Harbour, which provides emergency and transitional services to youth experiencing homelessness in the city, opened on March 17th, 2015. In 2011, youth service providers from the community came together after emergency/transitional housing for youth experiencing homelessness was identified as a major gap in services in our community. With support from the faith community, government, and TOSS Solutions, work began to fill this critical gap in services—this was the first step in making Safe Harbour a reality.

Youth homelessness is distinct from adult homeless. For youth, “home” isn’t just about shelter and food; their financial, advocacy and emotional supports, as well as their community are tied to home. Youth need different services and supports tailored to them. They are still developing and are trying to make the transition from childhood into adulthood—which is difficult under the best of circumstances.

There are many factors that contribute to youth homelessness and homelessness is rarely caused by a single event and “may be the end result of a process that involves multiple ruptures with family and community and numerous episodes of leaving, even if for short periods” (*Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*, 2014).

The research on youth homelessness consistently identifies difficult family situations and conflict as the key underlying factors in youth homelessness. There is extensive research in Canada and the United States that points to the fact that the majority of street youth come from homes where there were high levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, interpersonal violence and assault, parental neglect and exposure to domestic violence, etc.



It is also clear that childhood abuse, trauma and living in a constant state of fear, have long-lasting consequences for brain development, decision-making, the formation of attachments and positive social development.

For years, youth serving organizations, such as the Teen Resource Centre (TRC) and ONE Change, have done their best to help youth who were homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless given the gaps in services that exist in our community. Safe Harbour will fill the largest of these gaps by providing emergency and transitional housing to youth; it will be a safe place where they can get back on their feet, before they slip through the cracks.

We are finally on the brink of being able to offer a continuum of services to youth experiencing homelessness in our community. The ONE LIFE (Living Independently For Education) program, which offers longer-term, independent housing for youth as long as they are attending school or an education program, is an important part of this. It is crucial that youth have somewhere to move on to after they leave Safe Harbour.

“The causes of youth homelessness, then, have more to do with individual/relational factors, structural factors and systems failures, than with the decision to leave home because one does not like the rules. Those who run away for more frivolous reasons typically return home quickly; having to wear the same socks for a week, going hungry and a heightened likelihood of being a victim of crime, can make doing the dishes seem not so bad.” (Coming of Age, 2014)

Key
causes
of

Youth Homelessness:

1

Individual/relational factors

(i.e. Breakdown or conflict in Relationships)- the majority of street youth come from homes where they were neglected by parents, physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, or exposed to domestic violence.

2

Structural factors

(i.e. Long-term problems they can't control)- social conditions like poverty, underemployment and lack of housing stability also frame the experience of young people and can underlie stressors within the family that can lead to conflict, meaning "home" is no longer a viable option.

3

Institutional and systems failures

(i.e. Slipping through the cracks)- sometimes the systems we put in place as "social safety nets" (such as child protection, health and mental health care) don't catch people. Many young people "age out" of the child welfare system into homelessness. For many of these young people there is no "home" to return to.

Are the Stars Aligning?

Given the significant events of 2014, coupled with the inspiring commitment of community organizations to do whatever it takes to end homelessness, it would seem that the stars are aligning. We currently have an opportunity to radically change how homelessness is addressed in Saint John, and we need to seize that opportunity.

Importantly, The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014 report points out: “Our current understanding of homelessness suggests that we need to pay more attention to housing. A key piece of the puzzle is addressing the lack of affordable housing in Canada. For all the work we do to help people while they are homeless, including the innovative and successful strategies and interventions such as Housing First, we will have to account for the availability of housing – particularly appropriate and affordable housing – in order to give people the opportunity to leave homelessness.”

Complications: It's not availability—it's affordability

In Saint John, as in the rest of Canada, the one missing piece of the puzzle is affordable housing. Vacancy rates in Saint John were 9% in October 2014. While this is down slightly from 11.4 in 2013, they remain extremely high and are some of the highest rates the municipality has ever seen. In the days and weeks leading up to the closure of the Salvation Army Centre of Hope, many wondered why we couldn't simply start moving people into apartments.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple.

There are currently over 1,300 people on the waiting list for subsidized housing in the Saint John region. These units are rented on a “Rent Geared to Income” (RGI) basis, which means tenants pay a maximum of 30% of their before tax income on rent. The market-priced units that have unprecedentedly high vacancy rates are not RGI units. Those who rely on social assistance, and many of the working poor, cannot afford market rent.

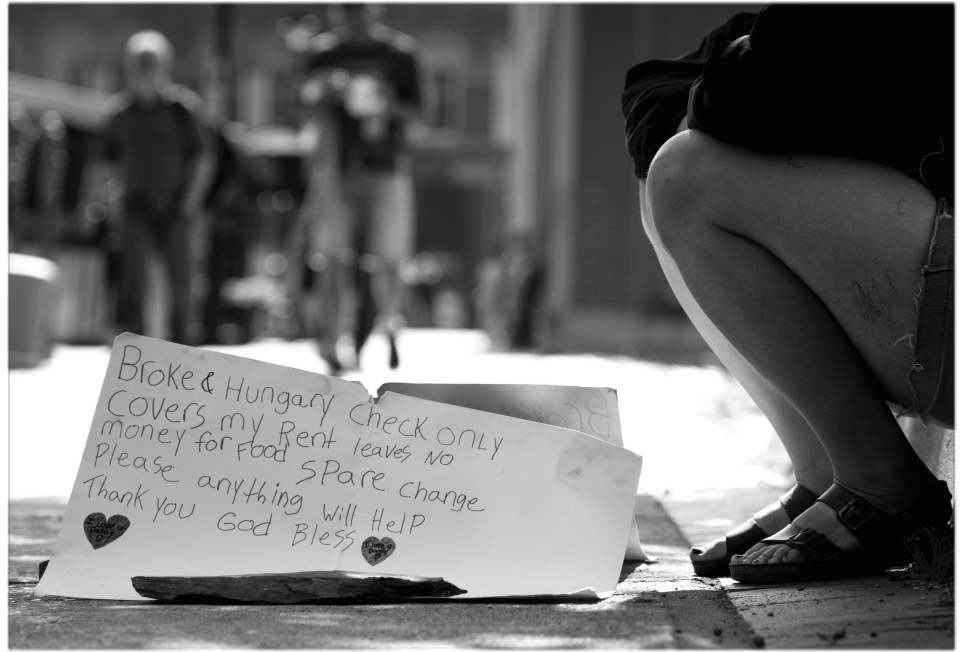
The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014 report highlights:

- An adequate supply of safe, affordable & appropriate housing is a prerequisite to truly ending homelessness in the long term.
- The rise of modern mass homelessness in Canada can be traced ***directly*** back to the withdrawal of the Federal government's investment in affordable housing and pan-Canadian cuts to welfare beginning in the 1980s.
- Over the past 25 years, Canada's population increased by almost 30%, while annual national investment in housing has decreased by over 46%. Federal spending on low-income housing (per capita) dropped from \$115 to \$60.

When it comes to ending homelessness, the one critical hurdle that remains is Canada's dire affordable housing crisis.

In December 2014, there were 6,628 social assistance cases in the Saint John Region. There were 5,298 cases under the Transitional Assistance Program, for which the base monthly rate for a single person is \$537 (\$576 for a single person – designated), and 1,330 cases under the Extended Benefits Program, for which the base monthly rate for a single person is \$663.

2,834 people in the Saint John Region were living on either \$537 or \$576 per month at the end of 2014.



According to the province, “financial assistance is given to people who have no other income to meet their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter”. The base rate for social assistance, however, is \$537 per month, while the median rent for a one-bedroom is \$595 per month—even if we ignore the cost of heat, lights, food, and clothing the math still doesn’t add up.

If we use a bachelor apartment, with median rent at \$495/month, that leaves a person \$42/month for heat, lights, food, clothing, personal hygiene products and anything else they might need.

Although there are many vacant units in Saint John, when it comes to accessing them, affordability remains a major barrier—market rents are simply unattainable for many people in our community.

Conclusion & Looking Ahead

Access to adequate and affordable housing is a human right and a basic need; without it one cannot concentrate on work, school, or healthy living—it is also a critical part of any Housing First program.

Affordable housing saves taxpayers’ money in health, social services and the justice system. Housing assistance leads to positive outcomes for our society; it gives low-income people the ability to live in secure and permanent housing.

Making sure that Saint Johners have access to safe, affordable housing lays the foundation for a healthy life and a healthy community. This is no small task, however, and will take all levels of government, the non-profit sector, the business community, and engaged community members working together to achieve it.

As Saint John works to end homelessness, one of the first steps will be to ensure that we have a clear picture of homelessness in our community, supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. In the coming year, there are several major initiatives that will help us achieve this goal. There will be a National Point in Time Count conducted in January of 2016, which will give us good local data that can be compared provincially and nationally. Saint John will also be participating in the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness’s 20,000 Homes Campaign, which will be launched July 1st, 2015.

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Homelessness in Saint John, NB:

It's Time to Make it History

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Prepared by Jenny O'Connell (Community Development Coordinator) with the Human Development Council, a local social planning council that co-ordinates and promotes social development in Greater Saint John. Copies of the report are available from:

Human Development Council

www.sjhdc.ca (under Our Work, Publications)

39 King Street, 3rd Floor Brunswick Square, Unit C1

PO Box 6125, Station A

Saint John, New Brunswick E2L 4R6

Tel: 506.634.1673

Fax: 506.636.8543

info@sjhdc.ca

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