

Needs Assessment: Poverty and Homelessness in an Agricultural, Resourced-Based Community Stony Plain, Alberta



Excerpt Report*
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BACKGROUND

Stony Plain is a town within Parkland County, west of Edmonton dominated by agriculture and other resourced based industry. Stony Plain has a population of 15,051 according to the 2011 census and an average population growth rate of 4% per year. Residents of Paul First Nation, Parkland County, and numerous villages in the surrounding area access. Stony Plain as a central service point. Domestic violence, homeless youth, newcomers, senior housing stressors and lack of transportation are some of the area trends. Community service providers recognize there is a homeless issue in the area, but the scope and characteristics are not well understood.

In Spring 2014, local and regional social service providers participated in a number of focused dialogues and came to the following conclusions:

Valid, meaningful research is needed to put a face to the issues of homelessness locally,

The lack of access to affordable and low-income housing is at a crisis point, having numerous complex social implications, and

A systematic, community approach is needed; a simple 'program' delivered by a single sector or agency will not suffice to address the issues.

In July 2014, Stony Plain Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) obtained a Service Canada grant in the amount of \$38,737 administered by the Alberta Rural Development network. In partnership with the University of Alberta, the grant was allocated to cover costs of a full-time temporary research project coordinator and a part-time research assistant working with the primary University of Alberta researcher to conduct a six-month study on poverty and homelessness in Stony Plain and area.

Homeless has been defined as:

*"The situation of a person or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing or the permanent prospect of acquiring it."**

161 people at risk of becoming homeless were surveyed.



The purpose of the study is defined by the following goals:

1. What does homelessness look like in Stony Plain and surrounding area?
2. What are the causes of homelessness in our community?
3. What services are available to people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in our community?
4. What gaps in services exist for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness?
5. What is the level of awareness of homelessness in our community, and what are the attitudes towards it?



Key Findings

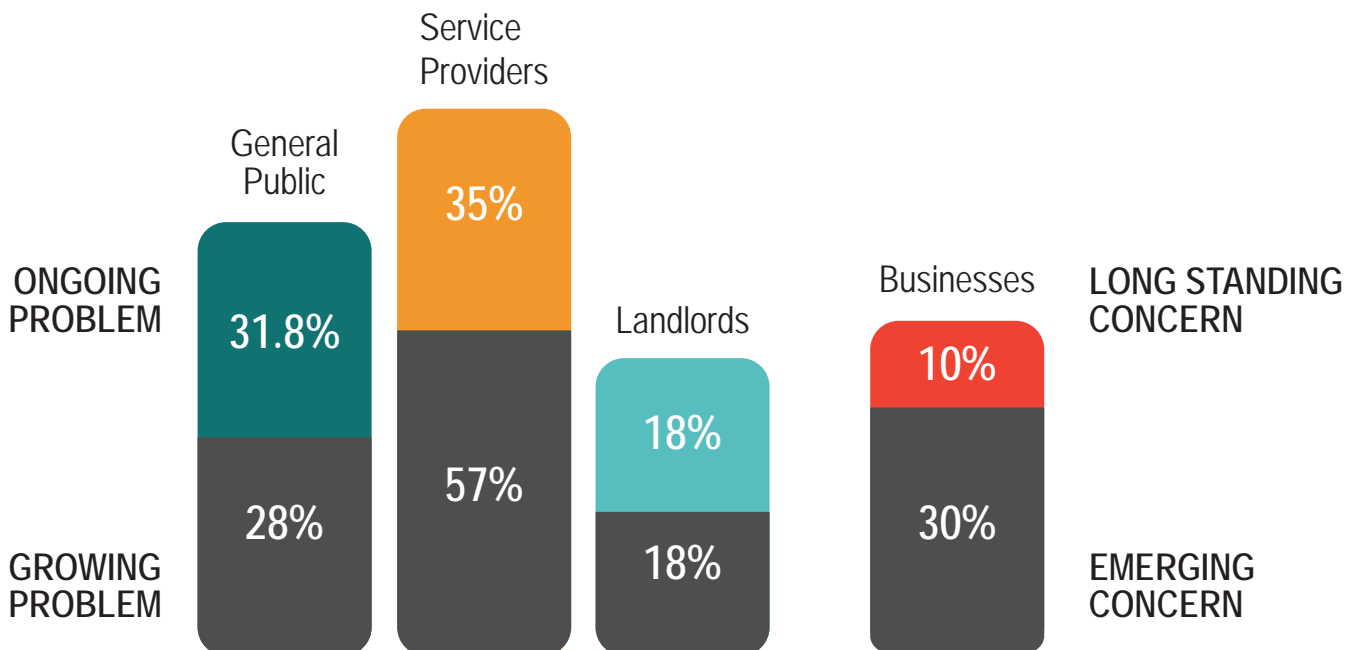
Lack of affordable housing, employment issues, lack of personal/public transport and single family income were mentioned by participants in the at risk and homeless survey as contributing factors to people in Stony Plain to obtain or keep appropriate housing.

96% of the service providers in the area indicated that they were serving clients who were homeless at the time of completing the survey, but in only 18% of the cases the clients were primarily referred for housing issues.

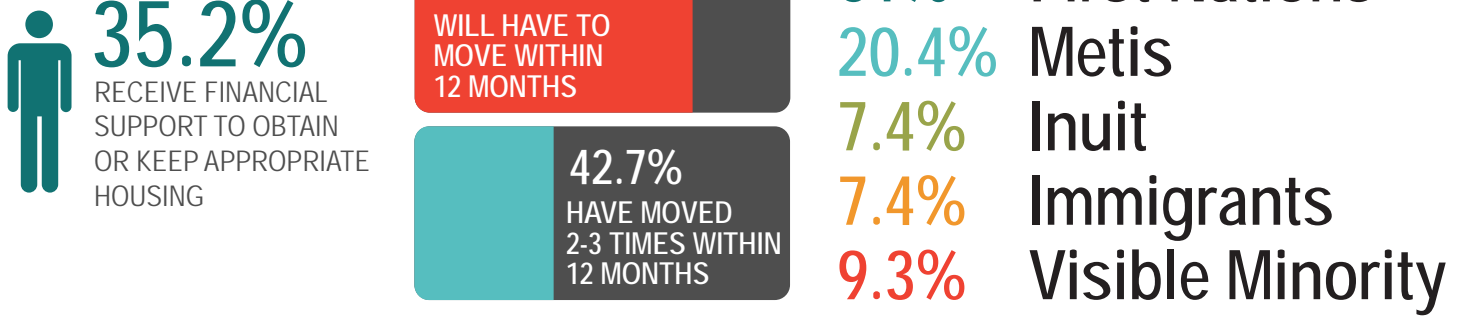


Centralized services, education/awareness, information sharing, needs for different types of housing, and improved services were all mentioned as needs to improve service delivery to homeless and at risk of becoming homeless population in Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Parkland County.

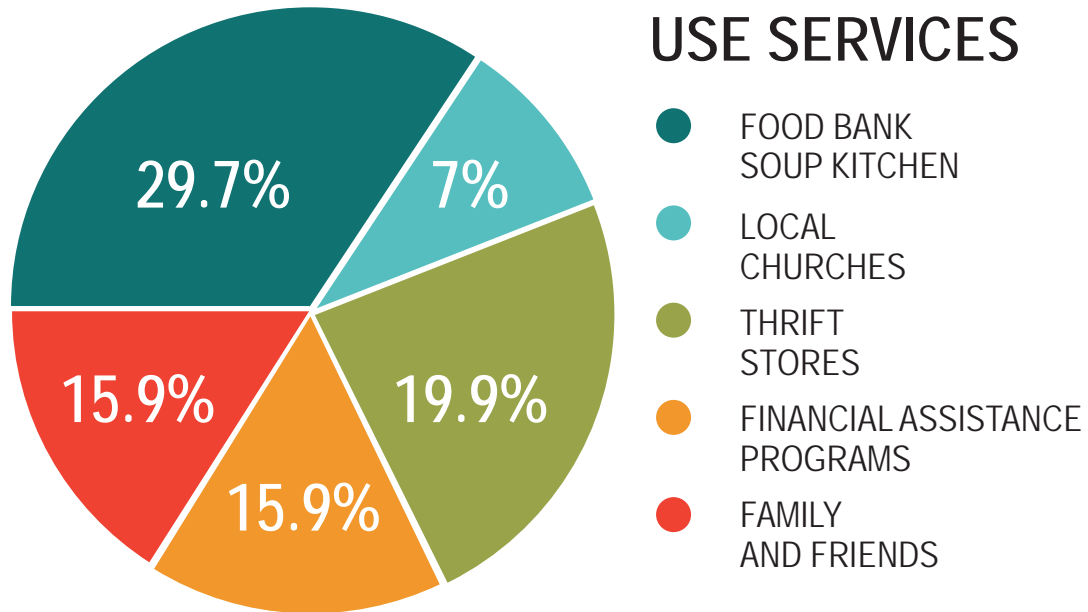
The service providers in the area identified shortages of services, lack of transportation, and shortage of long term affordable housing/shelter as gaps in services.



MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM



HOUSING ISSUES

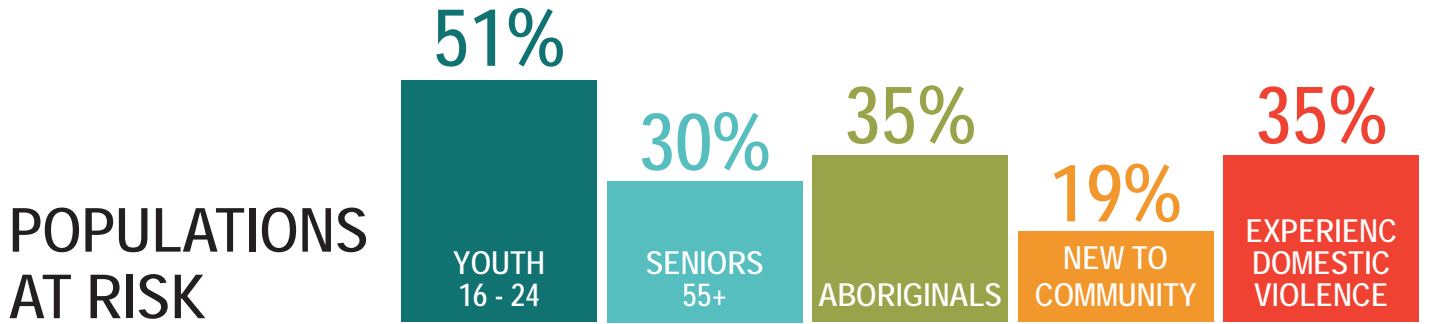


"....on Monday... I saw eleven people, ten of them were walk-ins and out of those eleven people, nine were homeless. And they were people nobody in our office has ever seen before. So they're new clients, they're new residents that were coming to our office for help. And that was just in one day.... So that was really just the fluctuation of people asking for help, needing help, realizing perhaps that there is more help or resources available." -Service Provider

Key Findings

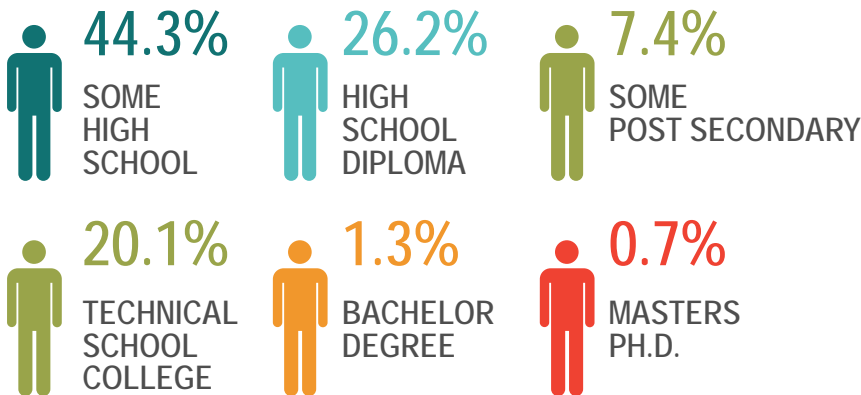
68.2% ARE NOT EMPLOYED
51.3% EARN < \$15,000/YEAR

52.9% ARE SINGLE
55.8% HAVE FINANCIAL DEPENDENTS



Youth is a big one for sure... you can't live at home anymore for whatever reason. Perhaps domestic violence, perhaps addictions, perhaps mental health, and yet they're still trying to go to school. Where do they get support and where do they find housing? ...That's where we get a lot of that... that couch surfing population we know nothing about. That the teenagers just go to stay with a friend and eventually those couches run out and where do they go?" - Service Provider

EMPLOYMENT STATUS



"I think there's a group of people who will be coming into greater risk in upcoming five to ten years, and that's a whole collection of women who have been divorced or separated for years and they worked in maybe a social services or non-unionized environment and now they're turning sixty-five and they didn't contribute a whole lot to their CPP and they don't have pensions and they've lived in apartments or rentals for years. And now they're soon-to-be unemployed because they retire, but they won't actually ever because they can't afford to... as rents keep going up they're not going to be able to do it." - Service Provider

BARRIERS AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

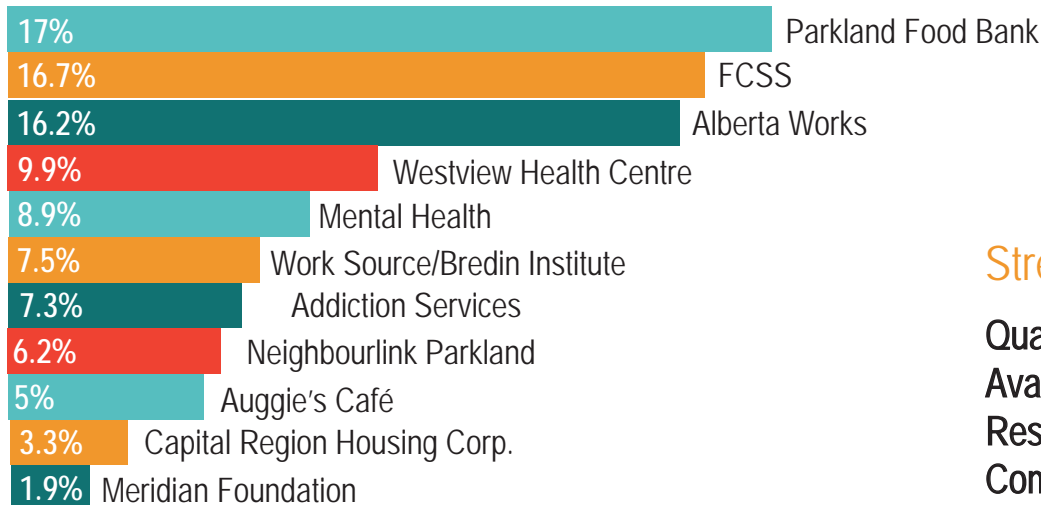


Lack of Affordable Housing	72.1%
Physical Health	23%
Mental Health	24.8%
Addiction Issues	12.4%
Employment Issues	52.2%
Lack of Person/Public Transport	44.7%
Poverty/Lack Personal Finances	39.1%
Finding Affordable Child Care	28.6%
Relational Violence/Abuse	13%
Divorce	9.9%
Single Income Family	43.5%

"There's a lot of shame...So unfortunately they'll come in when they're really in crisis." - Service Provider

"We lived in the van. And we also went to Calgary to my daughter's place. We'd spend like two weeks with her 'cause I had to keep in contact with my AISH worker, and with the housing. [So your mom lived in the van with you?] Yeh, this fall? She's eighty eight years old." -Homeless Participant

KNOWLEDGE OF SERVICES



Strengths within Stony Plain

Quality of services,
Availability of resources,
Resilience of the people,
Community involvement, and
Accommodating landlords.

I don't think its lack of information or resources in the community. It's period, lack of housing. - Service Provider

RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness raising needs to focus on making it known that homelessness is not only a real problem in the community of Stony Plain, but also a growing problem. Awareness raising should include education that people at risk of becoming homeless have long term problems with affordability, adequacy and suitability of housing.

Centralization of services is important. This will include a coordinated approach to delivering holistic services to people at risk of becoming homeless. Coordination and awareness raising of current services is needed.

Interventions should focus on building safety nets to prevent people from becoming homeless by developing affordable housing options, creating opportunities for people to find employment and to generate an income in Stony Plain.

Program development should have a special focus on sub groups that are more vulnerable to become homeless; youth, single parents, seniors, First nations and immigrants/migrants (out of country and out of province).

The courses of homelessness are multi-factorial and inter-sectoral collaboration is essential to prevent people from becoming homeless and to support people experiencing homelessness.

Short, mid, and long term plans need to be developed to come up with a permanent solutions to prevent people from becoming homeless and support people experiencing homelessness to become housed.

