



FINAL REPORT

Stony Plain's Plan to End Poverty and Homelessness: Phase 2

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, Stony Plain's population was 17,189, accounting for a 14.2% growth since 2011. Along with a growing population, Stony Plain has seen a growing incidence of poverty and homelessness within the community. A needs assessment study was conducted in 2014-2015 to assess the prevalence of poverty and homelessness, the factors and issues contributing to such, and strengths of the community. The study revealed that poverty and homelessness are indeed problems present within Stony Plain, though because of its rural nature, such problems tend to appear differently than in urban centres. The shortage of affordable housing, lack of transportation, shortage of services, and income levels were cited as contributing to the problem. Based on the results, recommendations were developed for moving forward.

With a better understanding of poverty and homelessness in the area, The Town of Stony Plain and Stony Plain FCSS committed to developing a plan to address many of the issues identified in the study. This report was commissioned to develop a community based approach to addressing issues of poverty and homelessness in the area. Operating from the premise that every individual and family has the right to a safe place to sleep and live, and a life free from the constraints of poverty, the overarching vision of this report is realizing an end to poverty and homelessness within Stony Plain, whereby:

***Stony Plain and area residents are enriched through a strong,
healthy, connected community.***

The purpose of the community action plan is to help readers better understand the nature of poverty and homelessness within Stony Plain, and its impact on individuals and families, as well as the community as a whole. It explores the trends that affect citizens of Stony Plain, and the role they play in contributing to, or alleviating, the effects of poverty and homelessness in the area. Through community consultations, a literature review of best practices and strategies in poverty and homelessness reduction, as well as an environmental scan of current community models, issues were prioritized, and proposed strategies were developed to begin the work of the community action plan. The development of tangible strategies and courses for implementation are crucial to the achievement of an end to poverty and homelessness within the area.

Understanding the breadth of the issue, an attempt was made to focus the efforts to end poverty and homelessness and Stony Plain. Based on the literature review, environmental scan, information derived from the Phase I needs assessment, and feedback received at the community consultations, key priority areas were identified and focused on:

1. Defining an End to Poverty and Homelessness
2. Lived Experience Perspectives
3. Tri-Regional Approach
4. Addressing Issues of those Most At-Risk
5. Enhancing Cultural Awareness
6. Food Security
7. Promoting Lifelong Learning
8. Access to Recreation, Social and Community Opportunities for All
9. Transportation
10. Awareness, Education and Advocacy
11. Housing

Proposed strategies and implementation initiatives were developed for each of the key focus areas. A summary list of proposed strategies is available in Appendix A.

This report is the starting point for which to better understand the causes and implications of poverty and homelessness in the Stony Plain area. It provides a recommended framework from which to address the issues. The report, and affiliated strategies, is developed with the understanding that poverty and homelessness are complex issues requiring a series of collaborative, integrated efforts to address them. There is not a sole, singular solution, nor can the work be completed in isolation. To realize the end of poverty and homelessness within Stony Plain, it is necessary to implement a cross-sectorial, comprehensive, and cohesive community action plan.

BACKGROUND

In spring 2014, recognizing that poverty and homelessness were issues in the area, but not fully understanding the scope or characteristics of the problem, area service providers came together. They participated in a series of focused dialogues and came to the following conclusions:

- Valid, meaningful research was needed to put a face to the issues of homelessness locally,
- The lack of access to affordable and low-income housing was at a crisis point, having numerous complex social implications, and
- A systematic, community approach was needed; a simple ‘program’ delivered by a single sector or agency would not suffice to address the issues.

Such conclusions spawned the initial development of a three-phase approach to ending homelessness and poverty in the area:

Phase 1: Needs Assessment

Phase 2: Develop a Community Action Plan

Phase 3: Implement the Community Action Plan

PHASE 1

In July 2014, Stony Plain Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) obtained a Service Canada grant 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 working out of the FCSS office, 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 area¹. The study occurred in late 2014 and early 2015. For the purpose of the project, homeless has been defined as:

“The situation of a person or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing or the permanent prospect of acquiring it.” (Adapted from the Canadian Homelessness Research network, 2012)

The study attempted to answer or explore the following questions:

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?

¹ Proceeding information about the study was derived from the 2016 Needs Assessment by Dr. Richter and Ms. Peter

Five populations of interest were focused on: general public, service providers, homeless and at-risk population, business and industry, and landlords. Unique surveys were developed for each of the five populations. In addition to the surveys, focus groups were conducted with Service Providers and Homeless and At-Risk groups. Data was collected over a six-month period, from October 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015. Qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to analyze the data. Full access to the report is available via the Town of Stony Plain website², however, key findings from the study included:

- Many respondents indicated homelessness is a problem in our community, with around 30% agreeing the problem is growing
- As housing concerns indicate poverty concerns, the proportion of people experiencing housing instability is a concern. Service providers indicated in the survey the proportions of clients they serve that have issues with acquiring or keeping appropriate housing:

Populations at risk	%
Youth 16 – 24	51
Experience domestic violence	35
Indigenous Individuals	35
Seniors 55 and older	30
New to the community	19

- Inability to find affordable housing, employment issues, lack of transportation and income were mentioned by participants in the at-risk and homeless survey as contributing factors to people in Stony Plain's ability to obtain or keep appropriate housing.
- The service providers identified shortages of services, lack of transportation, and shortage of long term affordable housing/shelter as gaps in services.
- Centralized services, education/awareness and 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.
- Quality of current services, availability of resources, resiliency of people, community involvement and accommodating landlords were mentioned as strengths in the community of Stony Plain.

² <http://www.stonyplain.com/Assets/FCSS/Resources+and+Links/Final+Report+Needs+Assessment.pdf>

Based on the findings of the study, six recommendations were developed for moving forward:

1. Awareness raising needs to focus on making the general public, town council and politicians aware that homelessness is not only a real problem in the community of Stony Plain but it is 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.
2. Centralization of services is important. This will include a coordinated approach to delivery of holistic services to people at risk of becoming homeless. Coordination and raising of current service is needed.
3. Intervention 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 income in Stony Plain.
4. Program development should have a special focus on sub groups that are more vulnerable to become homeless: youth, single parents, seniors, indigenous individuals, and immigrants/migrants (out of country and out of province).
5. The causes of homelessness are multi-factorial and inter-sectoral collaboration is essential to prevent people from becoming homeless and to support people experiencing homelessness.
6. Short, mid, and long term plans need to be developed to come up with permanent solutions to prevent people from becoming homeless and support people experiencing homelessness to become housed.

PHASE 2

With the need for a coordinated approach and plan clearly established through the results of the study conducted in Phase 1, the Town of Stony Plain committed funds to Phase 2 of the project. A temporary, full time Community Development Coordinator was hired for the period of August 8-December 30, 2016. Within this timeframe, the coordinator was responsible for communicating the results of Phase 1 to the community, gathering feedback and information for the development of a Community Action Plan, conducting a literature review and review of community models addressing poverty and homelessness in a rural context, prioritizing issues identified in Phase 1, and developing a preliminary framework, with strategies, for a community action plan.

The coordinator conducted community consultations through a variety of means including focus groups, individual meetings, and group sessions. Results of the community consultations are available in detail in Appendix D. An extensive literature review and environmental scan were also conducted, details of both can be found in Appendix B and C, respectively. Based on the information compiled and feedback received from the consultations and reviews, the issues were prioritized as the basis for this report, and accompanying strategies were developed.

Phase 2 focused on finding ways to address the issues identified in the study, and working together to develop initiatives and frameworks to end poverty and homelessness within our community. To date based on what was heard in community consultations; the general consensus was that every individual in the community should have access to a warm, safe place to sleep, and anything less should be viewed as unacceptable. Keeping this in mind, combined with information derived from a review of current definitions (available in the literature review, Appendix B) the basic parameters for ending poverty and homelessness within the Town of Stony Plain was developed:

***Stony Plain and area residents are enriched through a strong,
healthy, connected community.***

The proceeding report, and all affiliated strategies, was developed keeping the above core parameters in mind. The report focuses on ending both poverty and homelessness in Stony Plain. The consultations, research, discussions and interactions with individuals conducted in Phase 2, made further apparent that in addressing homelessness within Stony Plain, it will be critical to also address poverty.

As such, in working towards preventing individuals from becoming, or moving people out of, homelessness, it is important to also address the issues of poverty in the community. In addressing issues of poverty, and working towards moving people out of poverty, one can better prevent homelessness. Therefore, this plan is structured to not only work towards ending homelessness in Stony Plain, but takes a proactive approach, working towards alleviating the effects of poverty for people, and in doing so, enhancing quality of life for more Stony Plain residents, and hopefully preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place.

EMERGING TRENDS

It is important to recognize the changing landscape of Stony Plain since the initial Needs Assessment was conducted in 2014-2015. There have been several impactful events, changes, and activities that shape the current environment of Stony Plain. These emerging trends play a critical role in the Community Action Plan and must be duly considered throughout the development, implementation, and evaluation of the plan.

Alberta's Economyⁱ. The Albertan economy has felt the enormous impact of the dramatic drop in oil prices. The effects have been far-reaching and well beyond the energy sector. 2016 saw unemployment rates rise, weak investment, and labor market challenges resulting in low earnings and weak household spending. The Government of Alberta has forecasted 2017 to bring about a very modest economic recovery. However, the effects of our weak economy will still be persistent, and contribute to the prevalence of poverty and homelessness within our community.

Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy. The provincial government plans to have a strategy released to the public in Spring 2017. Preliminary information indicates the strategy centers on the vision: "Albertans have appropriate housing and housing supports"ⁱⁱ. The strategy may have important implications for the implementation of Stony Plain's Community Action Plan, it will be important to review the strategy carefully, and identify any opportunities, when it is released.

Provincial Initiatives. The Government of Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan may affect Stony Plain and Region. The plan to phase out coal may have an impact on local unemployment levels, as there are three coal-fired units in Parkland County (Keephills, Sundance A, Sundance B). Such a phase out has the potential to impact up to 700 jobs (both directly and indirectly)ⁱⁱⁱ. Further, many individuals in these jobs may require further training and education to increase employability as coal has been their livelihood for many years^{iv}.

National Housing Strategy. Following months of consultations regarding housing in Canada with stakeholders, the Federal Government released the document "What We Heard"^v. It highlights the various housing issues, priority areas, and ideas for moving forward. In the next several months, the government will follow up on this report, and release a National Housing Strategy. The State of Homelessness in Canada Report contends we are entering a promising phase of homelessness elimination in Canada, with renewed federal interest and investment, favourable results of housing first models nationwide, and a return to a National Housing Strategy^{vi}. As with the Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy, the National Housing Strategy will likely have an impact of the implementation of Stony Plain's Community Action Plan. It will be important to monitor the release, and shape Stony Plain's plan accordingly.

Federal Initiatives^{vii}. The government has introduced several initiatives which will prove beneficial to those at-risk or living in poverty. The Canada Child Benefit is tax free, and gives families up to \$6480 per year for each child under 6 years, and up to \$5400 per year for each child over 6 years of age. The Old Age Security benefit has also been increased by \$947 annually. Employment Insurance premiums and waiting periods to access this benefit have also been reduced.

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Population^{viii ix}:** Per the municipal census the population of Stony Plain was 17,189 in 2016. This accounts for a 14.2% increase in population since the 2011 census. Based on the 2015 municipal census, approximately 12% (1929) of the population were youth, aged 15-24 years old. Approximately 29% (4407) of the population were seniors, aged 55 years or older³. Compared to the data derived from the 2011 National Household Survey, Stony Plain's youth population is shrinking (14% in 2011), and the senior population is growing (26% in 2011).

Data from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) shows the following trends with the Stony Plain Census Subdivision^x:

- **Indigenous People:** 6.3% (925) of the population of Stony Plain had an Aboriginal identity. The Aboriginal population, on average, is younger than the non-Aboriginal population.
- **Education^{xi}:** The share of the adult population (25-64 years) that had completed a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest level of education was 25%. 14.6% of the population had no certificate, diploma or degree; this group experienced the highest level of unemployment in the area.
- **Employment:** 7850 people were employed and 405 people were unemployed in Stony Plain, for a total labour force of 8255 in 2011. The employment rate was 66.4% and the unemployment rate was 4.9%. The median after tax income for these workers was \$34 995.
- **Income:** The median after tax income of economic families (related people living in a household) in Stony Plain was \$74 672, the median for couple families with children was \$102 909, and the median for lone parent families was \$54 242. Individuals in non-economic family households (non-related people living in the same house) had a median after tax income of \$34 364.

While initial 2016 Census data was released in February 2017, the more in-depth information shown above will be available in the latter half of 2017^{xii}. When the data

³ Percentages based on the 15 737 residents who reported age

becomes available, it will be interesting to compare the demographic information, and identify relevant shifts and trends.

POVERTY

In 2010, about 6% of Stony Plain residents were living in poverty^{xiii}. Data from the 2011 National Household survey showed that based on the after-tax low income measure, the percentage of the population living in poverty was 6.4%^{xiv}. That number increases for children, as **8.8% of children under 6 in Stony Plain were living in poverty** in 2010⁴.

“For the standard products of the National Household Survey, the line chosen is a relative measure: the after-tax-low-income-measure...For this measure, the income used is after-tax income of households. There are no regional variations to account for prices or cost of living differences: all applicable households in Canada face the same line adjusted for household size. The line is set at half the median of adjusted household after-tax income.”

This measure alone does not adequately convey the magnitude of poverty within the area. It is a relative measure that is not adjusted for regional variations. Further, as a 2010 statistic, it is out of date. Through the exploration of other trends, one can begin to form a fuller picture of poverty in our area.

8.6% of the population relied on some form of government transfer payment as their source of income in 2010^{xv}. This includes Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplements, Employment Insurance, Child Benefits, and all other measures of government payments⁵.

Analyzing food bank data is a good method to understand poverty in the area. As Food Banks Canada (2016) states, “Poverty is the key driver of food insecurity, and food insecurity is the key driver of food bank use,” (Pg. 9). Food Banks Canada notes in their 2016 Hunger Count that there was a nationwide increase in food bank use, with Alberta being a province with one of the largest surges, partly driven by the recent economic downturn. Between 2015 and 2016, there

* Statistics Canada. 2013. STONY PLAIN, T, ALBERTA (CODE 4811048) (table). NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY (NHS) PROFILE. 2011 National Household Survey. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-004-XWE. Ottawa. Released September 11, 2013. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed November 30, 2016).

⁴ Prevalence of low-income in 2010 based on after-tax low income measure (%) for people less than 6 years.

⁵ The other forms of government transfer payments are not specified in the report, and account for 1.5% of the population.

was a 17.6% increase in Alberta food bank use. As a snapshot, in March 2015, 67 443 individuals were assisted compared to 79 293 individuals assisted in the same month of 2016. Looking back even farther, since 2008, food bank use in Alberta has increased by 136.1%.^{xvi}

Parkland Food Bank has seen similar increases. Between 2014 and 2015, the number of unique individuals served rose by 17.5%. When considering the total number of individuals served from 2014 to 2015, this increases to 37.5%. Further, Parkland Food Bank Society reports a 37% increase in Monthly Full Hampers from 2014 to 2015^{xvii}. While complete 2016 data is not yet available, the year has brought with it continued increases as well.

Looking at Stony Plain FCSS specific service levels also provides a glimpse into the increasing level of need within the community. Between 2014 and 2015, FCSS saw an increase of 11.5% for Information and Referral requests. Expanding the timeframe, such requests increased by 18% from 2011 to 2015. Additionally, there was a 19.7% increase in individuals accessing FCSS to discuss housing issues from 2014 to 2015. The number of individuals accessing FCSS services for income assistance rose by 36% over the same time frame. The need continues to rise; as of October 2016 the number of individuals inquiring about income assistance already surpassed 2015's total requests.

Such measures highlight the increasing levels of poverty in the tri-municipal area, and how the recent economic downturn has affected the population. Some of these changes have become more prevalent since the Needs Assessment was conducted in 2014, and must be duly considered when formulating an Action Plan.

SHELTER

19.8% (1150) of the total population were spending 30% or more of their total household income on shelter costs, based on data from the 2011 National Household Survey. That percentage rises to **32.8% when considering tenant-only households.**

Vacancy rates in the area have increased dramatically from 2014 (2.1%) to 2015 (10%). However, average apartment rental rates have not reflected the increased supply available. An average apartment rental rate was \$1116 in 2014. One year later, with an 8.1% increase in vacancy, average rental rates rose slightly to \$1117.

The CMHC forecasts vacancy rates continuing to rise over the next three years in the Edmonton Census Metropolitan area (CMA). This is due to supply growth surpassing demand. However, average rents are expected to continue to increase in the Edmonton CMA over the next three years. This is attributed to the change in units being offered—new units, which typically rent for above-average price^{xviii}.

It is important to consider these trends, and others as they arise, when developing and implementing a plan to reduce poverty and homelessness in Stony Plain. As has been previously mentioned, poverty and homelessness are a result of a series of interrelated factors that play a role in one's situation. It is essential to consider the factors that shape Stony Plain, and shape the face of poverty in the area to develop the most comprehensive plan possible. Further, it is important to keep a pulse on the local trends throughout the implementation of the plan, as shifts in some may result in a range of differing effects. The shift in trends from when the Needs Assessment was conducted in 2014 to today, further solidify this need to remain up to date on area trends.

*Endnotes for this section are available in References at the end of the document.

PROPOSED STRATEGIES

The following proposed strategies have been developed based on information and input derived from the 2016 Stony Plain Needs Assessment, Phase 2 community consultations, models other communities have implemented, and research of best practices. Proposed strategies are grouped under common themes, as follows:

1. Defining an End to Poverty and Homelessness
2. Lived Experience Perspectives
3. Tri-Regional Approach
4. Addressing Issues of those Most At-Risk
5. Enhancing Cultural Awareness
6. Food Security
7. Promoting Lifelong Learning
8. Access to Recreation, Social and Community Opportunities for All
9. Transportation
10. Awareness, Education and Advocacy
11. Housing

The largest focus areas within this plan are transportation issues, increasing awareness, education and support of the issues, and housing. The community consultations revealed these three areas to be extremely critical factors to address when working towards a poverty and homelessness- free Stony Plain.

A summary of the proposed strategies is available in Appendix A. Please note, the implementation measures are proposals, and will be adjusted based on the acceptance and implementation of the preceding strategies. Furthermore, as the plan is adjusted and expanded a more detailed implementation plan may be developed.

DEFINING AN END TO POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS

The community consultations revealed ending poverty and homelessness is a subjective concept. People's values, attitudes, beliefs and emotions all factor in to what ending poverty and homelessness means for them. Participants in the consultations used varying degrees of the definition. Additionally, research has found that quite often the institutional definition of homelessness differs from the definition as described by those with lived experience. This is because most homelessness definitions exclude the views of those with lived experience⁶. In Stony Plain's quest to define homelessness and reduce the issue, it is also important to combine the perspectives of the community at large, and more specifically, individuals who have experienced homelessness with the important indicator measures.

Proposed Strategy: Defining an End to Poverty and Homelessness	
1	Define the parameters of what ending poverty and homelessness means for Stony Plain. Ensure adequate community feedback through the facilitation of methods allowing individual's voices to be heard. It may be beneficial to utilize a functional zero approach, and consider established definitions when developing Stony Plain's definition.

As a starting point, the following working definition has been developed for Stony Plain. This definition is based on feedback from the community consultations, literature review, and environmental scan. It is considered a working definition to provide basic parameters for the action groups to use in implementing specific strategies.

***Stony Plain and area residents are enriched through a strong,
healthy, connected community.***

⁶ (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese, 2016)

LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVES

For a balanced approach to ending poverty and homelessness, individuals with lived experience must be included in all aspects of the process. It is important to remember that individuals who are living it, or who have lived it, often have the best understanding of underlying causes and what needs to be done to address the problem and root causes of poverty and homelessness⁷. Please refer to the Literature Review Appendix for 7 Key Principles to be cognizant of when including individuals with lived experience in all aspects of the process (listed under Appendix B).

We must solicit feedback from people with lived-experience to develop the most effective plan possible. Individuals who are living in poverty, or are homeless, need to be involved in the development of plans and initiatives. They know best what they need and what will benefit them, they also know best what methods will or will not work. It is essential to engage these individuals at all levels of the process—from planning to implementation.

Proposed Strategy: Lived Experience Perspectives	
2	Foster and develop relationships with individuals who have lived experience. Ensure that their voice and perspectives are heard in all stages of the process—from development, to implementation and evaluation of the community action plan.

⁷ (Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016)

TRI-REGIONAL APPROACH

Due to Stony Plain's location, this is an issue and concern that should have a tri-regional approach and solution. Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Parkland County need to work together to address poverty and homelessness within our community. A plan cannot be developed in isolation, it needs to be a collaborative process and developed together. Clients do not operate in a silo, they access services from all three, and as such, the plan should not be siloed. It will also be important to partner and develop relationships with Indigenous communities and leaders in the area.

Proposed Strategy: Tri-Regional Approach	
3	Recognizing the unique location of Stony Plain, in respect to its proximity to Spruce Grove, First Nations Reserves, and its location within Parkland County, work with local leaders to develop a collaborative plan to combat poverty and homelessness in our area. Further, once this has been achieved, it will be important to approach Federal and Provincial levels of government as a united front.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUES OF THOSE MOST AT-RISK

The Needs Assessment conducted revealed there are certain populations more at risk of experiencing poverty or homelessness within Stony Plain⁸.

In addition to the general, over-arching strategies that have been discussed, it will be important to develop mechanisms and initiatives to address poverty and homelessness within these populations.

YOUTH

Through various consultations, the unique needs of youth were discussed. Currently, as has been reflected in the Needs Assessment⁹, there is no place for homeless youth to go. Many couch surf, and the problem is that much more so hidden. Supporting youth was discussed extensively in the consultations. Supports included expanding programming, to ensure youth receive the developmental aids they need, as well as the ability to experience mentorship programs. Further, the need to support youth in development of employment skills, and eventual placement was discussed. Lastly, most felt that it was necessary to explore a facility where youth could go in the area, when they “have nowhere else to go.”

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Needs Assessment conducted by Richter & Peter, as well as the community consultations conducted in the fall of 2015, revealed that while there are support services available to individuals experiencing domestic violence, there are no facilities to shelter them in the Stony Plain area. If someone flees a domestic violence community, they are often referred out of the community for shelter.

According to the Needs Assessment, publicized in 2016, for those who access service:

- 51% of youth
- 35% of Indigenous individuals
- 35% of individuals fleeing domestic violence
- 30% of seniors
- 19% of individuals new to the community

**experience poverty and homelessness
OR experience poverty and are at-risk
of becoming homeless
in Stony Plain.**

(Richter & Peter, 2016)

⁸ (Richter & Peter, 2016)

⁹ (Richter & Peter)

SENIORS

With seniors representing a significant portion of the Stony Plain population, it will be important to continue to monitor and ensure the availability of high quality programming for seniors.

Please note, specific strategies related to Indigenous Individuals and newcomers to the community are discussed in the Cultural Awareness section.

Proposed Strategies: Addressing the Issues of Those Most At-Risk	
4	Support the development, and where applicable, expansion, of youth mentorship programs, employment opportunities, and volunteer programs.
5	Continue to monitor the effectiveness of current programs offered locally to seniors.
6	Determine the feasibility of operating a youth emergency shelter. Assess the possibilities ranging from a temporary program to that of a permanent structure.
7	Explore the feasibility of developing and operating an emergency shelter for individuals experiencing domestic violence.

ENHANCING CULTURAL AWARENESS

Individuals who are new to the community and Indigenous individuals were populations identified as being at high-risk to experience poverty or homelessness in Stony Plain, per the Needs Assessment.¹⁰ In developing programs and initiatives to address poverty and homelessness, it is essential to remain cognizant of the needs, values and cultural customs of all both individuals new to the community, and Indigenous individuals.

Research has indicated most models for social services do not meet the needs of culturally or racially diverse groups, as they reflect white, middle class values. The inability to address cultural differences can create mistrust and conflicts between clients and service providers. To promote positive outcomes among diverse groups, it is important to strive for the delivery of culturally competent programs¹¹. Cultural competence includes a cognitive, behavioral and organizational component. Essentially, one must understand the culture, history, context and their own biases to build trust with the client, and create an environment to achieve cultural competency. Such a process is ongoing and fluid, service providers must be willing to provide services in different ways to reflect the needs of clients, and learn from different opportunities.¹²

Indigenous individuals are disproportionately represented in homeless populations, often representing a large percentage of the population¹³. To appropriately and effectively address the needs of Indigenous individuals, culturally safe services are required. To do this, staff providing services must be culturally competent to ensure the programs and services provided meet the needs of Indigenous people¹⁴. As a service provider, “we can frame indigenous encounters with non-indigenous spaces through the concept of culturally appropriate services...those that create a social environment that observes and respects the cultural beliefs and practices of the individual receiving services,”¹⁵. It is important for organizations to remain consistent in the services they provide, and establish a routine structure for Indigenous clients. Indigenous elders feel this is a necessary component to build trust among the worker and client¹⁶.

Oelke, Thurston and Turner argue “Cultural safety is important for all organizations and their staff to provide a foundation for respectful and appropriate services for (Indigenous) homeless people,”¹⁷. Therefore, cultural safety training is needed for staff at all levels within an

¹⁰ (Richter & Peter)

¹¹ (Calzada & Suarez-Balcazar 2014)

¹² (Calzada & Suarez-Balcazar)

¹³ (Gaetz et al; Bird et al; Waagemakers-Schiff & Turner)

¹⁴ (Bird et al, 2013)

¹⁵ (DeVerteuil & Wilson, 2010, pg. 499)

¹⁶ (Bird et al)

¹⁷ (Oelke, Thurston and Turner, pg. 11, 2016)

organization to ensure services are delivered in an appropriate manner for Indigenous peoples. In addition to training, it is important for the organization to review policies, practices and the environment to ensure cultural safe consistency¹⁸. Further, organizations should create partnerships with others to create “collaborative structures and processes to address the varied needs of (Indigenous) homeless individuals,”¹⁹. It is important for the organization to develop partnerships with Indigenous organizations as well; both to ensure staff are well versed in cultural safety, and to ensure Indigenous individuals receive access to the largest degree possible of appropriate services. Providing culturally safe services to Indigenous individuals can be a costly endeavor, but it is useful to frame funding requests in terms of the proportion of the population that is Indigenous to justify the need²⁰. Such culturally safe training and practices can be extended beyond the Indigenous individual context. One can ensure that all agencies operate in a culturally competent way with all clients they interact with, and keep in mind the key principles and considerations of such a concept.

Proposed Strategies: Enhancing Cultural Awareness	
8	Host a “Cultural Awareness” workshop. Ensure staff and action group members attend, and open up registration to other stakeholders within the community. Such a workshop will foster awareness, learning and growth; and help us to serve individuals in the most culturally competent way possible.
9	Develop partnerships and foster relationships with Indigenous leaders in surrounding communities, as well as individuals from immigrant communities. Ensuring a broad range of representation will ensure the unique needs and customs of individuals from Indigenous and other cultural backgrounds are represented.
10	Promote multiculturalism in the community through awareness, activities, events, and opportunities for interaction.

¹⁸ (Oelke, Thurston & Turner)

¹⁹ (Oelke, Thurston & Turner, pg. 11)

²⁰ (Oelke, Thurston & Turner)

FOOD SECURITY

While many definitions exist of food security, an enduring definition seems to be the below statement agreed upon at the World Food Summit in 1996.

'Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.'

(http://www.agr.gc.ca/misb/fsec-seca/pdf/action_e.pdf, pg. 9)

As was demonstrated in the trends section, food bank usage across the province, and specifically across the county, has been trending upward. Experts agree that food bank statistics cannot be the sole measure of food insecurity within a community. Some individuals will never access a food bank, some do not meet the requirements necessary to access food banks, and those who do, have limits to the amount of times food bank services can be accessed in a given time period. As such it is necessary to establish the prevalence of food insecurity within a community, using food bank usage as only one number in a set of measures. However, food bank usage is one measure of food insecurity, and with the rising numbers, one can extrapolate, that this increase means there are more food insecure individuals in the area. Food Banks Canada states, “Poverty is the key driver of food insecurity, and food insecurity is the key driver of food bank use,”²¹. As such, reducing poverty and increasing food security are needed.

Food insecurity can be further compounded by limited access to food, for example, individuals unable to access temporary emergency food sources such as food banks or grocery stores due to lack of transportation or mobility.

²¹ (Food Banks Canada, pg. 9, 2016)

Addressing food insecurity is essential in meeting the needs of an individual. The first step in doing so is meeting the immediate need of the food insecure individual. This can be achieved through warm meal programs, food bank usage and hamper distribution. Such services provide temporary reprieve from food insecurity²². Lee and Briggs have found that research indicates, as critical as these services are in meeting the needs of individuals, they do not increase food security permanently because such systems do not address long-term access to food²³. Increasing an individual's income, enhancing food literacy within Stony Plain and decreasing barriers to food access (ex. Transportation) may all help in alleviating the issue of food insecurity within the community.

In addressing both poverty and homelessness in Stony Plain, it will be important to support current efforts that address the immediate need of food insecure individuals. It will be equally important to explore methods to enhance long-term food security for individuals within Stony Plain.

Proposed Strategies: Food Security	
11	Continue programming to enhance individual's food literacy. This could include tips, tricks, classes and/or recipes, aimed at stretching a basket of goods over the week.
12	To address the barrier transportation can play in access to temporary support at food banks, assess the possibility of operating a satellite depot of Parkland Foodbank within Stony Plain.
13	Examine trends, best practices and current initiatives that are occurring to address individual food security. Examples include community gardens, community kitchens, and grocery share programs.

²² (Lee and Briggs, 2013).

²³ (Lee and Briggs).

PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

There is a significant amount of evidence that indicates opportunities for well-being in one's life are often determined in an individual's early years, when child development is forged. As such, to address poverty from a systematic approach, one must ensure communities have access to early childhood interventions and supports.

“Literacy is the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work, and in the community in order to achieve personal goals and to develop individual knowledge and potential...”

48% of adult Canadians aged 16 and over are estimated to be below the international literacy standard for coping in a modern society.”

(Torjman, n.d., pg. 6)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Research indicates low literacy, lack of training and education often play a role in contributing to individuals experiencing poverty²⁴. As recognized poverty drivers, it is important for communities to address such issues when attempting to alleviate the effects of poverty and homelessness within the community.

Low literacy has substantial negative impacts, both socially and economically, for individuals and overall society. Literacy differences are correlated with disparities in employability, wage rates, and reliance on income programs between individuals. Higher literacy rates often equate to longer employment histories, more opportunities, less unemployment rates, and less reliance on income support program.²⁵ Lower literacy rates often equate to more difficulty obtaining and maintain employment, are linked to health issues, and decreased community engagement. Torjman asserts it is in the best interest of communities to raise literacy rates through the facilitation of programs offered to individuals (n.d.). Programs should be targeted, as there is no one-size-fits all solution to enhancing community literacy.

Such programs could be aimed at potential workers, increasing employment related literacy, or families, aimed at increasing basic literacy throughout the entire family unit²⁶. Further, training

²⁴ (Torjman, n.d.)

²⁵ (Torjman, n.d.)

²⁶ (Torjman, n.d.)

programs aimed at developing skills in individuals that area employers are seeking have proven beneficial in affecting poverty positively. It is important for communities to ensure training programs are reflective of area demand—teaching skills that employers need in employees²⁷. Allowing citizens the opportunity to further develop their skillset increases their employability. An employed citizen base can increase income security within a community²⁸. Increasing community literacy and training has the potential to have a significant impact on improving poverty rates within the community.

PREVENTION FOCUSED PROGRAM

Many communities and agencies are recognizing the merit of prevention in terms of homelessness, and have developed programs and initiatives intended to act as a buffer against homelessness²⁹. Such programs leverage the power of partnerships to work together to provide the necessary supports required to prevent homelessness among clients in dire need. Essentially, such programs are a rapid response intervention to stop imminent eviction, and provide follow-up supports to address the issues that lead to the problem, to mitigate reoccurrence³⁰.

Most programs offer funds that can be utilized to cover delinquent rents, utilities and other costs when required. The funds are distributed with little to no stipulations, as the primary goal, and thus often, the only criterion, is to avoid homelessness³¹. Essentially, this is the “buffer” component of the program³². Some programs combine the fund distribution with follow up support. Agencies work with the individual to address the underlying factors that led to the problems at hand. This could include income, employment or other contributing issues that must be addressed to sustain housing in the future³³.

Some agencies, such as Bissell Centre in Edmonton, Alberta add a third component to their program. Bissell Centre works to build relationships and collaborate across sectors, with stakeholders such as community service agencies, landlords, and utility companies. The goal is to combine efforts to achieve shared goals and mutual benefit³⁴.

²⁷ (Torjman, n.d.)

²⁸ (Torjman, n.d)

²⁹ (Medicine Hat Community Housing Society, 2014)

³⁰ (Bissell Centre, 2016)

³¹ (Bissell Centre, 2016)

³² (Medicine Hat Community Housing Society, 2014)

³³ (Bissell Centre, 2016)

³⁴ (Bissell Centre, 2016)

Proposed Strategies: Promoting Lifelong Learning	
14	Engage with experts in the community to determine the strengths, and possible opportunities, for early childhood development initiatives and programs within the community.
15	Literacy and numeracy skills are emphasized in educational and training programs.
16	Continue to work with Neighbourlink, and consult with other municipalities and agencies currently offering emergency rent or subsidy programs to learn about best practices, successful methods, and possible partnership opportunities available.

ACCESS TO RECREATION, SOCIAL, AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

A comprehensive poverty reduction strategy must also focus on community, and the amenities that make up community and contribute to a better quality of life for individuals³⁵. The development of community, and one's role in such a community, as well as individual's access to programming and amenities that promote social development have proven to help improve an individual's resiliency³⁶. Participation in social environments are crucial to assisting an individual's ability to cope with the stresses of poverty. Further, research has demonstrated the impact of social inclusion on mitigating the impact of low-income. As such, in taking a holistic approach to solving issues of poverty and homelessness, one must incorporate initiatives aimed at developing social environments, and increasing community inclusion.

Living in poverty can limit an individual's opportunity to participate in recreation, leisure and social activities³⁷ and subsequently, the benefits associated with such participation. Participation in recreation, leisure and social programs offer individuals the chance to overcome the constraints they often face, and reap the many benefits of such participation.

Recreation, leisure and social pursuits are increasingly considered an important component of healthy lifestyle behaviors, and help individuals to see the advantages of such a lifestyle³⁸. Such lifestyle behaviors are shaped through the benefits that individuals experience through participation in social inclusionary activities, and subsequent social development that results. Studies have proven that such benefits to individuals include, but are not limited to³⁹:

- Provide a sense of achievement
- Add a sense of purpose and structure to their days
- Increase socialization with others
- Help develop their identities
- Help to decrease anxiety and depression
- Increase psychological well-being
- Decrease defensiveness and foster sociability
- Reduce drug use
- Reduce stress and Promote cognitive functions
- Increase self-esteem and Increase feelings of happiness
- Foster a sense of community
- Stronger school performance

³⁵ (Torjman, n.d.)

³⁶ (Torjman, n.d.)

³⁷ (Hinch, T. & Walker, G, 2009)

³⁸ (Hutchinson, S., 2011)

³⁹ (Hutchinson, S., 2011; Street, G. & James, R., 2010; Torjman, 2015; Totten, M. 2007; Walsh, R., 2011)

Additionally, participation in such programs provides a safe and flexible environment for individuals; often allowing participants to exercise a “sense of self-control and self-determination”⁴⁰. This is something that they may not have the opportunity to do in other facets of their lives. Individuals have the freedom to choose what they will participate in, when they will participate, to what degree; in essence individuals choose the benefits they will reap. Research also indicates that the environment in which a child grows up is a determinant of their development, further demonstrating the importance of fostering social inclusion within the community. Social inclusion is also important because it can help develop internal networks which can lead job seekers to recommendations, employment possibilities, etc., which can lead to jobs-- and more financial stability for the individual⁴¹.

Due to the many morale and development benefits, it is important to develop initiatives that foster social capital: relationships that are created and fostered when individuals come together for common purpose. This can be in the form of both place (i.e. recreation centres) and programs (ex. Community meals). Through the development of such social capital, communities help foster overall well-being for individuals and the community at large⁴².

Proposed Strategies: Access to Recreation, Social and Community Opportunities for All	
17	Build, develop and foster community capital. For example, through the hosting of community meals monthly.
18	Ensure there are methods and initiatives to make recreation, cultural and social pursuits accessible for individuals with low-incomes.

⁴⁰ (Hutchinson, S., 2011)

⁴¹ (Torjman, 2015)

⁴² (Torjman, 2015)

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is often a barrier for people needing to access services. Due to the geographic nature of the area, and the spread of services, accessing multiple services is difficult for individuals without access to a vehicle. Community transit is an excellent way to offset transportation costs, especially for persons with low or fixed incomes. Public transit that is accessible helps build communities where everyone belongs⁴³. Often, public transportation options are the only option for people in poverty, and thus, a necessity to ensure individuals are connected, and able to access the community and its services⁴⁴. Access to an affordable and accessible system gives individuals greater transportation options, and has the ability to enhance quality of life and social inclusion, through increased access to employment, recreation, social and other opportunities. Opportunities that, without transit, may not be available to those without an automobile⁴⁵.

While public transportation is often the method initially thought of to address barriers and issues, other creative options can also be part of the solution. Car shares, co-operatives, and other innovative ways to reduce transportation barriers within the community can be explored⁴⁶. This could include an expansion on the Stony Plain Handi-Bus program that is currently offered within the community. Respondents in the community consultations have suggested perhaps leveraging the strength and commitment of area volunteers to develop a ride-share network.

Further, it is essential to engage citizens to accurately assess the barriers they face in terms of transportation, as well as the possible opportunities to pursue⁴⁷. Researchers and community engagement experts agree it is essential to gather such perspectives to ensure the development of the most comprehensive plan possible.

Proposed Strategies: Transportation	
19	Encourage the continuance of the transportation needs assessment to ensure that residents can readily services, employment, medical appointments, and food.
20	Engage the community to solicit feedback regarding the barriers and opportunities for transportation within the town of Stony Plain.
21	Support the development of public transportation methods for individuals in Stony Plain.

⁴³ (Torjman, 2015)

⁴⁴ (Carlton and Born, 2016)

⁴⁵ (Associated Engineering, 2011, Littman, 2003)

⁴⁶ (Lee & Briggs, 2013)

⁴⁷ (Lee & Briggs, 2013)

AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

More work needs to be completed to generate awareness and understanding of poverty and homelessness in the area. The public needs to be better informed of the magnitude, causes, and effects of poverty and homelessness within our community. The consultations revealed the public is not aware of the depth of the issue—some believe that our area is not affected by homelessness or poverty. Others simply did not know about the issue. Further awareness and understanding will also help to lessen the stigma associated with poverty and homelessness. Participants in consultations repeatedly stressed the need to destigmatize the issue. Respondents felt once the public was aware of and understood the issues at hand, we could more successfully pursue community plans and initiatives.

It will be important to increase and expand people's knowledge, awareness and perceptions about housing and poverty issues within the community through education. Once educated, advocacy plays a role in encouraging support for said cause. An individual must be aware of and understand the issue at hand before they can garner support⁴⁸. Housing Strategies Inc. (2009) proposes a focus on three general areas for education and advocacy regarding affordable housing. For this report, the three general areas can also be expanded to poverty and homelessness in general.

1. Raise and enhance awareness in the community about local issues, needs and opportunities. With enhanced awareness, garner support and understanding for local issues and proposed initiatives.
2. Encourage and support opportunities for active participation in the initiatives. Essentially, implement initiatives with a community based approach.
3. Through increased awareness, support and participation, develop and build strong networks between individuals to achieve positive results.

Once the community is more aware of the issues at hand, it will be important to engage the community through the development and implementation of the poverty and homelessness strategy. More than consultation, active engagement is about community participating in the process. Participation whereby individuals have a voice and can contribute to the formation of responses to eradicate poverty and homelessness within our community. It will be important to use a multitude of approaches to avoid alienation, and ensure the farthest reach⁴⁹.

Additionally, it will be necessary to work with area service providers to facilitate community engagement sessions with individuals with lived experience. There are a few considerations for these meetings, as has been suggested through previous consultations and research. This

⁴⁸ (Housing Strategies Inc., 2009)

⁴⁹ (Torjman, 2016)

includes including a meal component when facilitating the sessions. Food is often a great way to bring people together, entice people to come, participate, etc. It will be important to have, or to develop, a relationship with individuals before asking deep questions. For this reason, enlisting the assistance of service providers who are familiar with individuals to facilitate the sessions would be ideal. This paves the way for a more open, trusting atmosphere in which to discuss sometimes difficult subject matter.

Beyond educating the public, there is a need to better educate individuals in need about the services available. It is essential people know what programs, services and resources are available to be accessed, and how this can help them. This could be achieved through a variety of methods, including, but not limited to, outreach work, distribution of informational tools (diagrams/infographics, resource booklets, information sheets, business cards/magnets), and community presentations.

Additionally, the community consultations revealed a need to enhance information sharing among area service providers. Doing so will increase knowledge of what is offered in the community, help with internal networking, and further enhance the ability of service providers to direct clients to the appropriate resources.

Finally, to shift the focus from managing homelessness to ending homelessness, many community coalitions and committees have been established nationwide. The focus has been adjusted from one of emergency supports and short-term responses to a pro-active approach focusing on long-term interventions and solutions⁵⁰. Action groups can act as the steering board: developing strategy, fostering relationships and partnerships, advocating for the cause, educating the public, implementing plans—essentially ensuring momentum for a project is created and maintained. Action groups form the crucial component that see a plan develop from an idea to tangible, actionable courses of action. The development of such action groups within the Tri-region, and the affiliated awareness and advocacy campaigns, are critical to ensuring continued momentum for this project.

⁵⁰ (Pauly, Carlson, & Perkin, 2012)

Proposed Strategies: Awareness, Education & Advocacy	
22	Form Poverty and Homelessness Action Groups specific to the strategies. These groups should consist of a myriad of members, ranging from service providers, elected officials, business people, and individuals with lived experience. Diverse groups allow for a wider range of impact. It is important the groups have an action focus to ensure progress.
23	Commit staff time to lead the project. With issues of this nature and magnitude, continuity and commitment are important. Allot staff time to carry out the work required to develop and implement the various initiatives listed in this plan. This is important to continue to build on the momentum, relationships, and work completed to date, and ensure it continues into the future. Further, dedicating staff time will allow the resources necessary to recruit members for, and facilitate the formation of action groups.
24	Develop and implement a comprehensive awareness campaign. Such a campaign could have a general audience, with material intended to reach everyone
25	Continue engaging with the community through consultations and engagement sessions.
26	Develop a comprehensive list of services available. This could be an electronic resource for ease of distribution. It could highlight all of the services available within the community, along with contact information.
27	Develop and distribute a small resource book for clients. This could be pocket-sized, modelled after the green book, listing resources and services to access in times of crisis. The small size would be discreet, convenient and easy to carry for clients.
28	It will be important to develop shared mechanisms to ensure community events, programs and initiatives are promoted adequately. Through developed and targeted marketing strategies, we can ensure the furthest reach and effect of said programs is felt.

HOUSING

In 2016, the Capital Region Board (CRB) released a Housing Needs Assessment Report for Parkland Housing Sub-Region⁵¹. The CRB needs assessment revealed there is an insufficient supply of rental and high density units available in the area. This leads to limited options for small or low income households, and puts an upward pressure on rents. The CRB contends a more diverse housing stock would help rental families with lower or modest incomes. Further, more rental housing may help maintain youth, seniors, and non-elderly singles in the area. According to the assessment, county rent distribution does not match county income distribution, resulting in an insufficient supply of low rent units. CRB assessed a need for more rental housing costing under \$800/month to meet the needs of lower income households in the area. With the current gap in affordable renting options, many renters are living in homes very expensive compared to their income, paying over 30%, sometimes over 50% of their income for shelter⁵².

According to their measure, the CRB found that within Parkland Housing Sub-Region, about 4% of homeowners are in core need. That percentage jumps significantly when looking at renters, where about 24% of all renters are in core need. 43% of lone parent renter families are in core need, and 52% of senior rental households are in core need.

CORE HOUSING NEED MEASURE

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has developed a Core Housing Need measure, which uses a two-step process to identify the number and incidence of households in need of housing:

- Does a household experience any one of or a combination of problems based on three standard measures of suitability (number of bedrooms compared to household composition), condition (need for major repair) and affordability (paying greater than 30% of income)? And,
- Is the household's gross income below a specified threshold (which is calculated separately for each Census Metropolitan Area [CMA] and for each household size, such as one-person or two-person households)?

Another approach is to examine households experiencing severe shelter cost burdens. This is represented by housing costs in excess of 50% of income from the 2011 National Households Survey (NHS). This measure of acute need is used alongside core need (which uses 30% of income) as a way to help understand which households face a significant housing cost challenge.

(<http://capitalregionboard.ab.ca/Website/files/d1/d1d4d024-a221-44cc-901f-1dee6b892b06.pdf>, pg. 26)

⁵¹ In the report, Parkland Housing Sub-Region includes the County and all municipalities within, including Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and Wabamun.
⁵² (Capital Region Board, 2016)

Thus, CRB recommends more housing appropriate for lower income families and seniors. Further, in terms of individuals in need, approximately 1 in 8 single person households pays more than 50% of income on rent, reflecting the need of more small and affordable housing units. The current Parkland non-market housing portfolio consists of units for families (46%), seniors (45%), and singles (9%). As such, CRB recommends prioritizing non-elderly single units, followed by low-income families⁵³.

HOUSING SPECTRUM

Understanding the myriad of options on the housing spectrum is important in developing a comprehensive housing strategy⁵⁴. A community with a diverse range of housing options is better able to meet the needs of all its citizens. As has been identified in the 2016 Capital Region Board Needs Assessment, Stony Plain and Parkland County have an insufficient supply of non-market housing options available to citizens. This assessment is substantiated through the needs assessment of poverty and homelessness in Stony Plain⁵⁵ and what was heard in the community consultations. Increasing the supply of non-market housing will increase the livability of the region, enhancing overall quality of life, and potentially help to retain more individuals within the area (if a person can afford to stay in the area, they are less likely to leave).

The housing spectrum consists of the range of housing options available to households of all income levels, extending from emergency shelters and housing for the homeless through to affordable rental, market rental, and homeownership.

([https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/City%20of%20Edmonton%20Affordable%20Housing%20Strategy%20\(2016-2025\).pdf](https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/City%20of%20Edmonton%20Affordable%20Housing%20Strategy%20(2016-2025).pdf), pg. 3)

⁵³ (Capital Region Board, 2016)

⁵⁴ A useful diagram explaining the Housing Spectrum is available in the “Housing Spectrum” section of the Literature Review in Appendix B.

⁵⁵ (Richter & Peter, 2016)

Proposed Strategies: Housing	
29	Stay aware of the upcoming Federal National Housing Strategy and the report to be released by the Provincial government. Upon release, identify opportunities for partnerships, funding, and implementation of strategies.
30	Upon formation, an action group should work to develop affordable housing partnerships among local stakeholders (developers, funders, non-profits).
31	Forge relationships with local landlords to explore the possibility of partnering. (Ex. Find ways to exploit high vacancy rates through lowering of rent)
32	Assess the need for a formal housing first program within the Town. Determine if such a program is better served as a tri-regional approach.
33	Explore the feasibility of establishing an emergency shelter program.
34	Bring awareness to secondary suite requirements within Stony Plain, as such suites offer the potential to capture an existing housing base to offer more affordable options to the community.
35	Develop a comprehensive and diverse housing strategy to ensure Stony Plain is an attractive place for people of all income levels to stay.

CONCLUSION

The approaches to ending poverty and homelessness in the Stony Plain will require a concentrated effort to work collaboratively across the Tri-region area and within the greater capital region area. There is not a single action that will resolve poverty and homelessness but rather a full range of action that can support our community to become stronger. The action group model will help to support subject matter experts in advancing the piece of the poverty and homelessness puzzle where they are best equipped while doing so within the broader framework.

In trying to manage restricted and instable incomes, residents make service decisions to meet their needs as best they can. It is important that the service provider community continues to understand this and works to provide a spectrum of service options that reflect the changing address of their client base.

Future progress and developments on the provincial and national levels also needed to be taken into consideration. There could be opportunities to align our approach or to develop new strategies. This plan represents an approach based in community consultation that will allow Stony Plain and area to address poverty and homelessness now and to strengthen our community to reduce incidences of poverty and homelessness for the future.

APPENDIX

The proceeding pages contain the appendices referenced throughout the report. They are as follows:

- A. Summary of Proposed Strategies
- B. Literature Review
- C. Environmental Scan
- D. Community Consultations

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF PROPOSED STRATEGIES



Town of Stony Plain Plan to End Poverty and Homelessness Summary of Proposed Strategies

The below is a summary of the proposed strategies, as listed in Stony Plain's Plan to End Poverty and Homelessness: Final Report: Phase 2.

Defining an End to Poverty and Homelessness

1

Define the parameters of what ending homelessness and poverty means for Stony Plain. Ensure adequate community feedback through the facilitation of methods allowing individual's voices to be heard. It may be beneficial to utilize a functional zero approach, and consider established definitions when developing Stony Plain's definition.

Lived Experience Perspectives

2

Foster and develop relationships with individuals who have lived experience. Ensure that their voice and perspectives are heard in all stages of the process—from development, to implementation and evaluation of the community action plan.

Tri-Regional Approach

3

Recognizing the unique location of Stony Plain, in respect to its proximity to Spruce Grove, First Nations Reserves, and its location within Parkland County, work with local leaders to develop a collaborative plan to combat poverty and homelessness in our area. Further, once this has been achieved, it will be important to approach Federal and Provincial levels of government as a united front.

Addressing the Issues of Those Most At-Risk

4	Support the development, and where applicable, expansion, of youth mentorship programs, employment opportunities, and volunteer programs.
5	Continue to monitor the effectiveness of current programs offered locally to seniors.
6	Determine the feasibility of operating a youth emergency shelter. Assess the possibilities ranging from a temporary program to that of a permanent structure.
7	Explore the feasibility of developing and operating an emergency shelter for individuals experiencing domestic violence.

Enhancing Cultural Awareness

8	Host a “Cultural Awareness” workshop. Ensure all committee members attend, and open up registration to other stakeholders within the community. Such a workshop will foster awareness, learning and growth; and help us to serve individuals in the most culturally competent way possible.
9	Develop partnerships and foster relationships with Indigenous leaders in surrounding communities, as well as individuals from immigrant communities. Ensuring a broad range of representation will ensure the unique needs and customs of individuals from Indigenous and other cultural backgrounds are represented.
10	Promote multiculturalism in the community through awareness, activities, events, and opportunities for interaction.

Food Security

11	Continue programming to enhance individual’s food literacy. This could include tips, tricks, classes and/or recipes, aimed at stretching a basket of goods over the week.
12	To address the barrier transportation can play in access to temporary support to food banks, assess the possibility of operating a satellite depot of Parkland Foodbank within Stony Plain.
13	Examine trends, best practices and current initiatives that are occurring to address individual food security. Examples include community gardens, community kitchens, and grocery share programs.

Promoting Lifelong Learning

14	Engage with experts in the community to determine the strengths, and possible opportunities, for early childhood development initiatives and programs within the community.
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15	Literacy and numeracy skills are emphasized in educational and training programs.
16	Continue to work with Neighbourlink, and consult with other municipalities and agencies currently offering such a program to learn about best practices, successful methods, and possible partnership opportunities available.

Access to Recreation, Social and Community Opportunities for All

17	Build, develop and foster community capital. For example, through the hosting of community meals on a monthly basis.
18	Ensure there are methods and initiatives to make recreation, cultural and social pursuits accessible for individuals with low-incomes.

Transportation

19	Encourage the continuance of the transportation needs assessment to ensure that residents can readily services, employment, medical appointments, and food.
20	Engage the community to solicit feedback regarding the barriers and opportunities for transportation within the town of Stony Plain.
21	Support the development of public transportation methods for individuals in Stony Plain.

Awareness, Education & Advocacy

22	Form Poverty and Homelessness Action Groups specific to the strategies. These groups should consist of a myriad of members, ranging from service providers, elected officials, business people, and individuals with lived experience. Diverse groups allow for a wider range of impact. It is important the groups have an action focus to ensure progress.
23	Commit staff time to lead the project. With issues of this nature and magnitude, continuity and commitment are important. Allot staff time to carry out the work required to develop and implement the various initiatives listed in this plan. This is important to continue to build on the momentum, relationships, and work completed to date, and ensure it continues into the future. Further, dedicating staff time will allow the resources necessary to recruit members for, and facilitate the formation of action groups.
24	Develop and implement a comprehensive awareness campaign. Such a campaign could have a general audience, with material intended to reach everyone.
25	Continue engaging with the community through consultations and engagement sessions.

26	Develop a comprehensive list of services available. This could be an electronic resource for ease of distribution. It could highlight all of the services available within the community, along with contact information.
27	Develop and distribute a small resource book for clients. This could be pocket-sized, modelled after the green book, listing resources and services to access in times of crisis. The small size would be discreet, convenient and easy to carry for clients.
28	It will be important to develop shared mechanisms to ensure community events, programs and initiatives are promoted adequately. Through developed and targeted marketing strategies, one can ensure the furthest reach and effect of said programs is felt.

Housing	
29	Stay aware of the upcoming Federal National Housing Strategy and the report to be released by the Provincial government. Upon release, identify opportunities for partnerships, funding, and implementation of strategies.
30	Upon formation, the action group should work to develop affordable housing partnerships among local stakeholders (developers, funders, non-profits).
31	Forge relationships with local landlords to explore the possibility of partnering. (Ex. Find ways to exploit high vacancy rates through lowering of rent).
32	Assess the need for a formal housing first program within the Town. Determine if such a program is better served as a tri-regional approach.
33	Explore the feasibility of establishing an emergency shelter program.
34	Bring awareness to secondary suite requirements within Stony Plain, as such suites offer the potential to capture an existing housing base to offer more affordable options to the community.
35	Develop a comprehensive and diverse housing strategy to ensure Stony Plain is an attractive place for people of all income levels to stay.

APPENDIX B: LITERATURE REVIEW

An extensive literature review was conducted pertaining to best practices, research and strategies surrounding homelessness and poverty elimination or alleviation. The overarching document, complete with detailed summaries of the resources can be found in Appendix Below is a summary of the literature about plans, rural homelessness, prevention, housing first and evaluation. More detailed objectives and topic-specific literature is summarized in the recommendation section.

POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS ALLEVIATION PLANS

Poverty is a culmination of interconnected factors and causations contributing to an individual or family living in poverty. Similarly, just as the factors influencing poverty are tightly connected, and integrated, so too must be the solutions to poverty. Poverty and homelessness are a combination of “inter-connected cause and effect factors” (Loewen, pg. 123, 2009; Gaetz et al, 2016, Torjman, n.d.), therefore, we must address the groups of factors if we hope to develop a successful reduction plan (Cabaj, 2011). Solutions that help alleviate the effects of poverty are not good enough on their own. Good housing, reliable transportation, or careful budgeting are not solutions in of themselves (Loewen). There must be a series of supports and solutions in place to truly address and work towards alleviating the effects of poverty within the community. Because of the complex nature of poverty, and the complex level of solutions, the effort to address it must be multi-sectoral and collaborative in nature. We need a comprehensive approach when developing poverty reduction plans (Cabaj, 2011; Gaetz et al; Loewen, 2009; Torjman, n.d.). Further, Loewen suggests, based on a review of 147 strategies, that poverty reduction must have levels. Initially, one should be provided with foundational supports aimed at moving people out of crisis. However, to continue to move forward, it is important to assist individuals through additional interventions that assist individuals in moving out of poverty. Further, it has been suggested that it is crucial to ensure individuals with lived experience perspectives, ideas, and opinions are heard throughout the process (Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016; Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese; Torjman, 2016). A successful poverty reduction plan will be inter-sectoral, collaborative, and contain multiple levels of supports and interventions, to assist an individual from moving from crisis, to maintenance, to exit from poverty. As such this plan, and the associated recommendations has been developed with that in mind.

RECOMMENDED CONTENT AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Much information is available about recommended contents and sections to be included within a community’s plan to end poverty and/or homelessness. Below is a brief description of the

common elements and key considerations experts agree are essential to building the most strategic, comprehensive, and effective plan possible.

- **Address access and availability of a whole continuum of housing in the strategy.** Safe and affordable housing is fundamental to raising a family and living a decent life, and should be a top priority for all communities. This can be addressed through a combination of means, including developing a new supply of housing, the repair or retro-fit existing stock, municipal Policy (land use and development, change zoning bylaw, incentives to developers), and assisting households in paying rent through subsidies or rent banks. Further, when addressing homelessness “successful community plans include strategies for rapid re-housing, housing support services and coordinated systems with the express intent to shorten the duration of homelessness,” (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, pg. 4). Housing First is a good example of a successful application of this element.

(Carlton & Born, 2016; Torjman, n.d.; Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness).

- **Include affordable and accessible transportation in your strategy** (Carlton & Born, 2016).
- **Develop systems and programs to ensure the community has a strong social infrastructure.** Social environments can mediate the effects of poverty, helping individuals and families overcome the stress and build resiliency, and can also protect children from the risks associated with poverty. Torjman argues that local government should focus on community design, ensuring sufficient community spaces (n.d.). Further, it should be ensured that programs and infrastructure contribute to safe community spaces, positive participation and overall well-being for all citizens (Torjman). Carlton and Born assert the need to ensure finances are not a barrier to accessing community services (2016). They argue that no matter their income, citizens deserve access to all municipal services. Offering initiatives to ensure this fosters participation, increases access to social supports, and helps create healthy, vibrant communities (2016). It is through the development of social structures that neighborhoods can be strengthened. With a focus on making neighborhoods great places to work, live and play, lives are improved (Carlton & Born).
- **Ensure learning and development opportunities offered for individuals of all ages.** It is essential to ensure communities have adequate opportunities to ensure early childhood development for all. Communities should promote healthy development through health, education, social services and family supports. Further, it is recommended communities strive for overall high levels of high school completion rates, population literacy, and the promotion of customized training programs for individuals of all ages in need. (Torjman, n.d.; Loewen, 2009;
- **Opportunities for income security and creation of assets.** Communities should advocate for and support good jobs and a living wage. A living wage helps create adequate incomes, and such a strategy can be a catalyst for community change. Further, communities can provide citizens assistance with the creation and building of assets. This can be through such

initiatives as savings programs, community loans, learning bonds, microenterprises, etc. Through such help, an individual builds the capacity to overcome poverty.

(Loewen, 2009; Torjman, n.d.; Carlton & Born; Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness)

- **Multi-sector collaboration, integration and leadership are essential through all aspects of the plan.** Experts recommend the strategy be created as a city-wide multi-sectoral initiative, as this is the key to success. Poverty and homelessness are complex issues with a multitude of integrated contributing factors, as such, the solution must also require a comprehensive, encompassing, integrated approach.

(Cabaj, 2011; Carlton & Born; Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013; Homeless Hub, 2016)

“Much of the creative work on poverty reduction in the last decade has to do not so much with the individual strategies that groups have employed, as with the particular way they have combined or packaged groups of strategies to obtain maximum impact. Most of these initiatives have attempted in one way or another to move towards greater levels of comprehensiveness,” (Loewen, pg. 23, 2009). It is important to not only strive for comprehensiveness, but to attempt to integrate the various strategies. Consciously linking strategies to work on issues is a way to ensure “the sum of these strategies is greater than their total,” (pg.33).

- **It is crucial to engage the entire community in the process.** Provide opportunities for consultation, feedback, education, and awareness. Additionally, build on local strengths and assets to execute the plan to its full capacity. Through active engagement, individuals become active agents in their own lives and in society generally. (Cabaj, 2011; Loewen, 2009; Torjman, n.d.)
- **Similarly, for a balanced approach to ending homelessness, individuals with lived experience must be included in all aspects of the process.** It is important to remember that individuals who are living it, or who have lived it, often have the best understanding of underlying causes and what needs to be done to address the problem of homelessness (Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016).
- **The plan must clearly demonstrate the intended impact, and have methods to demonstrate impact through sound evidence.** Communities should ensure the plan is evidence based and has measurable outcomes and key milestones. Further it is important to develop the plan with the understanding it is an adaptable, living document, based on lessons and learnings throughout. (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness; Canadian Homeless Research Network)
- **Finally, it is important the plan focus on ending homelessness.** It is through an explicit focus on ending homelessness, that a plan becomes more than just a response to

homelessness (Canadian Homelessness Research Network). Through this, and the recommendations above it becomes a “community-based approach that shifts the focus from managing homelessness to a system focused on ending it,” (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, pg. 3, n.d.). Such a focus is also consistent with similar community plans, and aligns with provincial and national strategies.

RURAL HOMELESSNESS

Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner conducted a study in 2014 on rural homelessness. The study examined the dynamics of rural homelessness in Alberta across 20 communities. It aimed to develop an understanding of the nature and context of the issue. Rural homelessness is often a hidden problem, making the task of addressing the issue even more difficult (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner, 2014).

The study found that Indigenous, youth, seniors, and newcomer homelessness is of large concern, meriting further investigation. Domestic violence is also a large contributor to housing instability and homelessness (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner). There are unique factors contributing to the increased risk for each demographic. Such findings are consistent with the populations cited as most at-risk in the Stony Plain Need’s Assessment. Youth homelessness is often less visible in rural areas, as often youth couch surf or double up⁵⁶. Because of the decreased visibility, many rural areas do not officially recognize youth homelessness as an issue, but have commented on it as an emerging issue. Quite often, youth migrate into urban centres to access services, as is reflected in the reports of Edmonton youth serving agencies. They report that approximately 40% of the youth they serve are from rural communities (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner). Indigenous individuals are often overrepresented in the homeless population throughout Canada, both in urban and rural contexts. Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner state “Aboriginal migration impacts homelessness in rural communities significantly, particularly where proximity to Aboriginal communities exists and where rural centres act as access points

**“Alberta’s rural communities
(have) ...unique local dynamics
that render the
(homelessness)phenomenon
distinct from homelessness in
urban regions”**

(Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner, p. 5, 2014).

⁵⁶ Couch surfing/Doubling up: this describes people are staying with relatives, friends, neighbours or strangers because they have no other option. They generally are not paying rent, it is not a sustainable, long-term living arrangement but they do not have the ability to secure their own permanent housing immediately or in the near future (<http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/hidden-homeless>).

to services and opportunities,” (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner, p. 5). Many rural communities report seniors as a population that is becoming increasingly vulnerable to homelessness. This is often due to limited incomes, reduced transportation options, and increasing accessibility needs making it more difficult to stay in the home (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner). We need to create tailored responses to homelessness that address the unique needs and causes of different demographics. It will be necessary to create and implement targeted strategies to address the needs of specific subpopulations (Gaetz et al, 2016).

The report discussed many of the unique barriers faced by rural communities. A limitation of the Housing First Model in the rural context is “the availability of access to support resources” (pg. 30), the lack of an established network of support services, and the sustainability of support programs. Low population densities, large geographic distances, limited public transportation, workforce shortages, and limited housing stock are among the challenges rural areas encounter when implementing housing first programs (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner). This often results in less services, fewer staff to support clients, and less coordination (Stefancic et al, 2013). It was also found that, often an issue unique in the rural homelessness context is the availability of suitable housing options. As opposed to their urban counterparts, rural centres typically have fewer housing units available, less multi-unit options, and with few developers willing to build low cost or affordable housing in these centres (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner). Another issue identified in the study likely relevant to Stony Plain is the proximity to a large urban centre (Edmonton). With such proximity, regional migration for services often becomes accepted and encouraged, resulting in less crucial services available in the immediate area (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner). Further exasperating many of the issues faced by ruralities in terms of poverty and homelessness, is quite often less funding may be available. Many government funding models are based on population ratios to determine dollar allocation. As such, with limited dollars, there is the need to be creative and innovative in the approaches to addressing the issues.

Many of the key findings within the report are applicable to the Town of Stony Plain. The town may face similar barriers, and experience similar trends, which can be unique to ruralities. Such uniqueness means alterations may need to be developed from the standard best practices for alleviating poverty and homelessness in cities. Due consideration will be given to the unique context of Stony Plain when developing the plan.

PREVENTION

The Homeless Hub (2016) asserts a strategic response to addressing homelessness involves a strong focus on prevention and moving people out of homelessness, while retaining some emergency services, as people will still experience crises. They further ascertain the most

successful and strategic approaches to homelessness are heavily invested in prevention (Homeless Hub). The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness also reiterates the importance of a comprehensive prevention strategy, with programs and initiatives in place to prevent people from becoming homeless (n.d.). One could surmise that prevention is key in poverty alleviation, just as it is in the elimination of homelessness.

Prevention occurs on a continuum of preventative interventions: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Homeless Hub (2016) describes the three interventions as follows:

PRIMARY: Works “upstream” to reduce risks, using universal interventions aimed at the whole community, and some targeted interventions directed to “at-risk” communities. This could include information campaigns, educational programs, and strategic interventions addressing “problems that may eventually contribute to homelessness.” *Ex. Poverty reduction plans, Anti-violence campaigns, Early Childhood Supports*

SECONDARY: Programs and initiatives that target people who are at risk of becoming, or who are, homeless. Includes coordinated assessments and case management to deliver strategies used to help individuals or families remain in their homes, or where that is not possible, implement a rapid re-housing plan. *Ex. Rent banks, landlord-tenant mediation*

TERTIARY: Programs meant to slow the progression of, and treat a condition through rehabilitation, reducing the chance of recurrence. It involves moving people into housing and offering ongoing supports to increase housing stability—increasing the likelihood the person(s) will stay in their home long-term. *Ex. Housing First*

Numerous studies have found that it is far cheaper to prevent homelessness and alleviate poverty or help individuals move out of homelessness through established supports and programs, than it is to let individuals remain homeless. Part of the reason is due to the dependency on emergency services when homeless, and the strain this puts on the system (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, n.d.). Strategies should focus on preventing homelessness, with early intervention approaches for individuals in crises, while also



The most successful programs utilize a prevention approach, offering a range of programs and initiatives along the prevention continuum. “In all cases, a strong prevention approach requires a coordinated and strategic systems approach, and must necessarily engage, include and mandate action from mainstream systems and departments of government, as well as the homelessness sector.”

[http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention?__utma=1.931707696.1470949238.1470949238.1470949238.1&__utmb=1.1.10.1471359287&__utmc=1&__utmz=1.1470949238.1.1.utmcsr=bing|utmccn=\(organic\)|utmcmd=organic|utmctr=rural%20homelessness%20in%20canada&__utmv=-&__utmk=68738577](http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention?__utma=1.931707696.1470949238.1470949238.1470949238.1&__utmb=1.1.10.1471359287&__utmc=1&__utmz=1.1470949238.1.1.utmcsr=bing|utmccn=(organic)|utmcmd=organic|utmctr=rural%20homelessness%20in%20canada&__utmv=-&__utmk=68738577)

developing rapid response plans for housing individuals appropriately if they become/are homeless (Gaetz et al, 2016).

THE HOUSING SPECTRUM

Understanding the myriad of options on the housing spectrum is important in developing a comprehensive housing strategy. Pictured below is a chart depicting the housing spectrum (sometimes referred to as continuum in other literature).

(Diagram adapted from: https://www.edmonton.ca/assets/NMH_Toolkit.pdf)

Non- Market Housing (sometimes referred to as Attainable Housing)						Market Housing
Short-Term Accommodation		Affordable Housing				
Shelter Spaces	Transitional Accommodation	Supportive Housing	Supported Housing	Social Housing	Independent-Living Affordable Housing	Rental and Ownership Housing
Facility offering emergency spaces overnight	A supportive, temporary housing structure meant to bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing.	Rental housing with staffed, on-site support services for tenants. Ex. Senior’s lodges	Rental housing with mobile, off-site support services. Ex. Housing-First Units	Rental housing with rent geared to income (no more than 30% of income)	Rental or ownership housing with rent or payments below average market cost. Ex. Habitat for Humanity homes	Private sector housing, with rents or payments at market rate.

HOUSING FIRST

As the environmental scan will demonstrate, most communities have adopted a housing first philosophy when addressing homelessness. Housing First is rooted in the philosophy that all people have the right to a home. It is not contingent upon readiness; rather, it focuses on housing a person first and then offering them the supports they need (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, 2013).

Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to homelessness that involves moving people who experience homelessness into independent and permanent housing as quickly as possible, with no preconditions, and then providing them with additional services and supports as needed. The underlying principle of Housing First is that people are more successful in moving forward with their lives if they are first housed. (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, pg. 2, 2013)

The housing first model is typically operationalized as follows (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver):

1. Through a targeted approach or outreach individuals who are homeless are presented with the option of housing. This option is not contingent upon the meeting of any behavioral, lifestyle, or treatment expectations.
2. Housing options are determined, with affordability and availability acting as considerations. The individual has the opportunity to contribute to this decision. Housing is expected to be of reasonable quality.
3. People are re-housed as quickly as possible, therefore minimizing any additional time spent in homelessness.
4. Ongoing services and supports are made available to individuals who want and need them. Examples of supports include rent supplements, case management, community connections, addiction supports, mental health supports, among others.

There are 5 core principles of housing first, as summarized below (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver):

- 1. Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirement.**
People do not need to first demonstrate they are ready for housing.
- 2. Consumer choice and self-determination.**
Housing first is a client centred approach that emphasizes the clients right to exercise their right to choice in terms of housing and the supports they receive.
- 3. Recovery orientation.**
More than meeting the basic needs of clients, housing first is also focused on supporting recovery. To do so it ensures clients have access to the necessary supports and enables

them to develop connections. Such an orientation is based in the harm reduction philosophy.

4. Individualized and client-driven supports.

Housing first recognizes that an individual and their needs are unique. Based on a client's choice and needs, access to supports are offered.

5. Social and community integration.

To reduce the possibility of social isolation, people are given the opportunity to integrate in their community through supported engagement and opportunities to participate in meaningful activities.

These principles are key to the housing first model, however the way in which they are applied varies according to the local community context, population served, and resources available (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver).

There is significant evidence pointing to the effectiveness of housing first as compared to other models. Such effectiveness is demonstrated through the successes seen in communities (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver). Further, there is a claim that housing first can save the system money over the long-term treatment as usual for homeless individuals (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver). More information about the housing first model—its roots, applications, framework, success and costs can be found in the *Housing First in Canada Report* by Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver (2013).

DEFINING AN END TO HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

“...The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), the University of Calgary School of Public Health (SPP), and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) are supporting a collaborative process to develop a national definition to end homelessness. Through this process, (they) aim to also outline critical measures needed to confirm an end to homelessness and propose a set of indicators based on an international review of targets and on-the ground experience of communities working in this direction,” (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese, 2016, pg.2). The pursuit and development of a common definition and indicators will enable localities to communicate their achievement aspirations more consistently, allowing for a more “comparable analysis across jurisdictions and evidence-based assessment of policy implementation for government and funders,” (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese, pg. 3).

Researchers are attempting to develop a definition and indicators through a Functional Zero lense. Functional Zero is an approach whereby homelessness within a community has become a manageable problem. “That is, the availability of services and resources match or exceed the demand for them from the target population. Further, such resources are optimized, performing as intended with maximum efficacy,” (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese, pg. 5). It recognizes that homelessness cannot be completely eradicated. A community achieves Functional Zero when there are enough services, housing, and beds for all that need it.

Functional Zero's goal is permanent housing for all individuals, and considers emergency shelters a temporary measure (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese). Supports within the Functional Zero approach aim to focus on preventing homelessness, while remaining responsive and fast-acting when crises do occur. Adopting the concept of Functional Zero adds a degree of flexibility to community plans, offering the ability to tailor performance targets according to local priorities and realities (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese). Functional Zero is currently a working concept—the researchers are facilitating community consultations to work towards a common definition and standards. Researchers aim to combine 3 dimensions within the definition, standards and performance measures. These dimensions include individuals with lived experience, individuals within the homeless serving-system, and public systems (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese).

Another approach, "Absolute Zero," defines ending homelessness as "a complete eradication of homelessness within a community," (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese, pg. 5), that is when the total number of homeless people within a community equals zero. Such an approach is universal, and sets a clear, easily assessed standard across all communities. Communities need not see the two approaches as opposites (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese). Rather, communities can view achieving Functional Zero as a step towards achieving Absolute Zero, though "the latter may be more aspirational," (pg. 5). A community plan based in the Functional Zero approach is one that aims to be effective and efficient as it works toward achieving Absolute Zero (Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese).

To advance the plan, it will be necessary to ascertain what ending homelessness looks like for Stony Plain, and what approach will be adopted. Additionally, the way in which we define poverty influences the goals and strategies we establish to address it. The varying definitions of poverty carry with them different causes and solutions to the issue (Loewen, 2009). Just as it will be important for Stony Plain to define homelessness, it is important to define poverty elimination, to establish the most effectual goals, strategies, and implementation plan. Further, in the community consultations, a reframing of the plan from reducing poverty and homelessness, to ending or eliminating both was recommended. Such recommendation is consistent with the literature, and ensures Stony Plain alignment with Federal, Provincial and other municipal initiatives.

Before Stony Plain can evaluate the success of the plan in ending homelessness and poverty, the parameters of what this means for Stony Plain means must be defined and established. In surmising a definition, it will be important to understand the current literature, best practices, and recommended approaches to developing definitions, as above. It is also beneficial to be aware of approaches other communities and levels of government have used when developing definitions. There are multiple views, perspectives, and definitions regarding this. Critics argue

many of the current definitions are ambiguous, however, necessary, to determine a clear path. Below is a sample of some of the current definitions:

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness: The problem of homelessness and housing exclusion refers to the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing. The goal of ending homelessness is to ensure housing stability, which means people have a fixed address and housing that is appropriate (affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and suitable in size), and includes required services as needed (supportive), in addition to income and supports. (http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition1pager.pdf?_ga=1.235129031.790148518.1473192264, pg. 1)

Government of Alberta: (Ending Homelessness)...will mean that even though there may still be emergency shelters available for those who become homeless, those who become homeless will be re-housed into permanent homes within 21 days. (http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/PlanForAB_Secretariat_final.pdf, pg. 14)

City of Calgary: By January 29, 2018, an individual or family will stay in an emergency shelter or sleep outside for no longer than one week before moving into a safe, decent, affordable home with the support needed to sustain it. (<http://calgaryhomeless.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/10-Year-Plan-Update.pdf>, pg. 1)

Waterloo Region: Housing stability (adequate housing, income and support), community inclusion and sense of home are the essential elements to ending homelessness because they ensure that people have what they need to retain adequate housing over the long term. (http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HHSS_WaterlooRegion_Strategy_2012.pdf, pg. 4)

City of Medicine Hat: An end to homelessness means that no one in our community will have to live in an emergency shelter or sleep rough for more than 10 days before they have access to stable housing and the supports needed to maintain it. (<http://www.mhchs.ca/static/main-site/files/housing-development/Refocused-Plan-to-end-Homelessness.pdf>, pg. 10)

EVALUATION

This section is intended to inform the reader of current trends and practices in the evaluation of poverty and homelessness elimination plans. It discusses the common practices used by many municipalities when evaluating their frameworks, as well as explores newer, trending methods and approaches. Upon approval of an implementation plan, it will be crucial for Stony Plain to develop evaluation mechanisms to measure successes and opportunities for growth as the plan progresses.

CURRENT APPROACHES

In a literature review of current approaches to ending homelessness and their evaluation frameworks commissioned by the Homeless Hub, the following common practices were found (Pauly, Carlson, & Perkin, 2012):

- When monitoring the effectiveness of a housing first or permanent independent living program, of the plans reviewed, most used housing status as the key outcome/indicator of success. Evaluations generally focused on the individual-specific measures of change. Such measures included: changes in use of social institutions, quality of life, staff perceptions, self-sufficiency, client self-reported substance use, among others. Most of the programs reviewed used an outcomes based method of evaluation.
- The success of transitional housing programs were often evaluated in terms of unique user-groups ex. Youth, low-income families, survivors of domestic violence, etc.
- In attempts to monitor the effectiveness of monetary assistance programs (ex. Rent or housing subsidies), the most common outcome tracked was housing status. Some programs also tracked self-sufficiency and substance use.
- Self-sufficiency was the most common indicator used to measure success in housing mediation programs, followed by housing status, and client- staff perceptions.
- A list of common evaluation indicators used among all programs include:
 - housing status
 - use of health, social, and justice services
 - psychiatric symptoms
 - general health
 - substance use
 - client perception of success
 - staff perception of success
 - quality of life
 - self-sufficiency

Authors of the report suggested reviewing more than a client's ability to be housed and remain housed (housing status) as an evaluative mechanism. It is important to evaluate the environment—what kind of affordable housing options are available, how often do affordable options become available, etc. What structures are in place to support access to housing and other resources...we need to evaluate the structural conditions that either impede or further the goal of ending homelessness and reducing poverty (Pauly, Carlson, & Perkin). It is important to understand client's perspectives when evaluating programs. We must learn and hear what works for individuals, and how a program is working (or can be improved) when moving an individual from homelessness to housed. This critical piece can also be extended to poverty

reduction plans, as research has stressed the need for a lived experience perspective in all aspects of planning and implementation (Pauly, Carlson, & Perkin).

GAME CHANGERS

“A poverty reduction game changer is a priority area or strategy that not only aims to deliver on its own specific goals or outcomes, but also elicits an array of other significant positive outcomes that cascade both within and outside its area of emphasis, and consequently profoundly impacts the course, character or extent of poverty experienced by human beings, both individually and collectively,” (Holmgren, pg. 3, 2016).

Poverty is an issue that requires many integrated initiatives, programs, and partnerships aimed at its alleviation. The task of addressing it can be daunting and filled with an extensive list of strategies, actions, and identified priorities (Holmgren, 2016). When developing a plan, it can be useful to adopt the notion of game changer priorities so as to not get lost in the depth and extensiveness of the plan.

In developing a poverty reduction plan focused on game changer priorities, one can create “focus on the big impacts that matter the most”, and avoid the lofty task of trying to make sense and direction of the hundreds of strategies and initiatives required to address poverty (Holmgren). Using a game changer approach allows one to effectively focus a strategy on priorities that will have the widest and furthest reaching impacts.

When evaluating the effectiveness of such priorities, one can also stray from the typical evaluative format of emphasizing proof, and rather focus on emphasizing progress (Holmgren). By doing so, outcomes become more than a simple measure within evaluation, but also strategic drivers used for “planning, organizing, innovating, and allocating resources...outcomes become not so much what we are trying to prove, but rather, more about our strategic intent of our commitment to allocating more of our limited resources to strategic imperatives,” (Holmgren, pg. 4). The approach accepts the subjectivity of monitoring poverty reduction efforts, knowing that quite often, due to the sheer nature of the issue, said efforts cannot be monitored objectively.

In evaluation it focuses more on “Contribution Analysis” whereby an organization focuses on its contribution to the outcomes or priorities, and how that helped the priority. Such analysis recognizes the multi-sectoral and inter-agency nature of poverty reduction—no single organization can address or solve poverty on its own (Holmgren). Rather than attributing the success or failures of a program to a sole organization, with this approach, an organization attempts to account for their contribution to the efforts. Additionally, evaluation should focus

on what was done well, what should be changed, lessons learned, and stories that can breed further innovation (Holmgren). Further, adopting a game changer approach is easier to communicate to the public—and due to its clarity, provides an easily understandable, “compelling cause” which the public can get behind and support (Holmgren).

Like the game changer approach, Cabaj recommends integrating interventions into a cluster of activities when evaluating. Put the focus on programmatic and strategic initiatives, rather than evaluating every activity (2011). Further, Cabaj advises groups to be persistent with appropriate expectations. Understand that real, systemic change takes a significant amount of time (10+ years), and even the most promising initiatives cannot guarantee positive outcomes (Cabaj, 2011).

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

With poverty and homelessness, there is only so much research and analysis that can be done, it is important to also learn by doing. There is a need to see what works and what doesn’t through experiential learning to gain a truer, better understanding of poverty reduction and successful strategies. Such an approach also helps community development, as small wins are essential to gain and maintain momentum (Cabaj, 2011).

Poverty reduction efforts are more effective when part of an ongoing process of learning, evaluation, and change (Cabaj, 2011, pg. 153). It is important to understand that the current framework should, and will, change as we move forward with implementation. As the framework is evaluated, and we better understand what works, what has not, and what needs to be added or improved, the framework itself will need to be adjusted. Several communities have taken this approach, and frequently re-evaluate and adjust their plan to meet the realities of the day. It will be important for Stony Plain to be open to learning, evaluation, and making the necessary changes to the framework to ensure the best possible implementation plan moving forward.

APPENDIX C: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

An environmental scan of rural Canadian communities addressing poverty and homelessness through formal, publicized plans and models revealed the shortage of such plans. Academic literature also points to the apparent gap in addressing poverty and homelessness within a rural context (Waegemakers-Schiff & Turner). To gather more information, the search was expanded to rural communities within Canada, similar in size to Stony Plain, that had either a poverty or homelessness reduction plan, or had a social development plan addressing said issues. Many of social development plans had a similar focus on reducing poverty and homelessness. Because of Stony Plain's unique Tri-Regional location, some counties were also included in the scan. Also included in the environmental scan was Medicine Hat, an Albertan city that states to have eradicated homelessness in their community.

Poverty and homelessness are complex social issues that require integrated, multi-faceted approaches to work towards eradication of both (reference). As is supported in the literature review, the most successful plans are comprehensive and address an array of factors that contribute to both. The environmental scan revealed that communities understand the need for a holistic approach to poverty and homelessness eradication, as was reflected in their respective plans and models. Most communities created initiatives or priorities that addressed not only housing issues, but also the overall well-being of an individual. A thorough review of said community plans is available, and is listed under Supporting Documents. Below is an overall summary of the commonalities municipalities share in their plan, and highlights some of the innovative initiatives and approaches to poverty and homelessness eradication. For ease of readability, the summary is grouped into common areas each community addresses--areas research indicates are necessary to ensure a holistic and comprehensive person-centered approach (reference).

INCREASED INFORMATION SHARING, NETWORKING, AND COMMUNICATION

Most communities formed a poverty coalition or committee that worked to address poverty and homelessness in their communities. Committee membership consisted of individuals from diverse backgrounds and sectors, reflecting the need for a multi-sectoral approach to poverty alleviation as cited by Dr. Richter in Stony Plain's Needs Assessment (Richter & Peter, 2016). The importance of individuals with lived experience having a voice, and the opportunity to shape community plans has been stressed in many articles and literature (Lived Experience Advisory Council; Pauly, Carlson, & Perkin, 2012; Turner, Pakemanm & Albanese; Torjman, 2016). Some communities, understanding the importance of lived experience perspectives, and the role they play in developing the plan, ensure membership of individuals with lived (or current) experience on their community committee or coalition. The goals of the committees' range, but share some commonalities. Most exist to ensure an integrated approach to poverty

and homelessness alleviation through the development of priorities, barrier reduction, advocacy, and the development of recommendations and actions for moving forward. Some committees are established to ensure organizations are working in a collaborative fashion to achieve goals. They take a community based approach to work towards solving the issue.

Most plans also recognize the need for increased awareness and understanding of the issues within the community---what poverty and homelessness is, the prevalence within the community, root causes and factors. Accordingly, many communities prioritize increased communication, education and awareness campaigns, and public consultations for the community at large. The responsibility of such falls on established committees, select organizations, local governments, or a combination of contributions from all different levels.

To successfully implement some of the identified priorities and enhance advocacy and awareness efforts, some communities have hired a full-time staff person. This individual often is responsible for successful execution of plan goals, effective information sharing, promoting stakeholder representation at the committee level, and overall social planning to ensure the plan is on pace with established timelines.

INCREASE INCOME SECURITY

Select communities explored the feasibility of implementing a living wage within their community, and the process required to successfully execute such an initiative. Many communities also partner with organizations that can provide employment services--placement, job readiness, job skill training, to enhance the ability of residents to find sustainable and paying employment opportunities, further contributing to income security. Others offer funding programs that aim to prevent homelessness, through rent supplements, rent geared to income subsidization, or assistance with delinquent accounts.

COMMUNITY WIDE AND INDIVIDUAL FOOD SECURITY

Most communities have some kind of food bank or depot to address the emergency food needs of individuals. Depending on the population size and services available within the community, many have some sort of hot meal service. Most such meals are offered at shelters, churches, or social service agencies.

A few communities have recognized the need for an informed and engaged population in terms of food literacy. Different programs are offered to meet such a need. Some encourage the development of a community kitchen program, wherein individuals cook healthy, nutritious meals with a set basket of goods. Such programs are an opportunity to educate the population about how to use the foods most commonly included in food baskets effectively. It works as a

class, teaching individuals how to prepare recipes, and as a catalyst for social inclusion. Individuals can interact with others, and in doing so, become less isolated.

In addition to such programs, Medicine Hat is exploring structural changes to address the root causes of food insecurity. Such exploration results from the understanding that current programs offered are often a Band-Aid solution to food security, and do not offer permanent, lasting solutions. Research has connected lower income to causes of food insecurity. As such, Medicine Hat is interested in exploring ways to improve people's incomes to address issues of food insecurity. Further, they are looking at the feasibility of enhancing a school lunch program, ways to optimize food programs to ensure low-income residents reap the highest level of benefit possible, and exploring additional useful data measures to better understand food security.

ACCESS TO RECREATION, SOCIAL, AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

Research has illustrated the positive effect of non-income resources in helping people cope with the stresses of living in poverty (Torjman, n.d.). Studies have also shown links between positive social places, amenities and community activities to health and social well-being (Torjman, n.d.). The demonstrated benefits of developing strong communities through social inclusion activities, whether that be programs, recreational pursuits, or the amenities that contribute to a good quality of life are clear. As such, many communities reviewed ensured a social component was included in their plan, and addressed barriers some citizens face when pursuing such.

Some communities offer either free or subsidized access to recreational, cultural, educational and social opportunities. This includes access to recreation facilities, classes, subsidized equipment purchases for children/youth programs, and the creation of community spaces allowing for intergenerational, intercultural interaction. Hinton, AB is reviewing infrastructure plans to strengthen the level of social and physical integration of all residents. Medicine Hat also offers subsidized recreation opportunities, to help support and develop community inclusivity, and is currently also reviewing methods to decrease other barriers, such as transportation, often faced by individuals when pursuing such opportunities.

IMPROVE ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND ESSENTIAL ITEMS

Communities have promoted, advocated for, or established programs to ensure citizens have ample access to necessary resources. Such programs include Harm Reduction initiatives, Mental Health programming, employment services, addiction services, awareness programs, information based resources such as 211, and web based information. Often such programs are offered by independent organizations such as CMHA, CNIB, or Health based organizations. The

committee role is fostering increased coordination among service providers and advocating for the programs.

Examples of resource improvement are abounding within the communities reviewed. In Revelstoke, BC the committee assists in the procurement of funding for childcare subsidies and a social justice advocate position. They have also approached medical professionals to offer opportunities for low-income residents to access services for free. Cochrane, AB has established an entire partnership project, “Let’s Touch the Skies”, that aims to empower women through financial security, emotional, and physical wellness through community supports and resources. The Hinton, AB Drug Action Committee has been established to provide health, wellness, social and recreational programming to reduce substance abuse among individuals. Additionally, many municipalities, committees, and community organizations work together to ensure quality of life essentials are available to residents. In some cases, this is through the distribution of essential care packages to homeless individuals.

INCREASE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND EMERGENCY HOUSING

A wide range of activities, initiatives and programs have been facilitated in relation to housing within the respective communities. Most communities have developed plans to meet the needs of many individuals along the different levels of the housing continuum.

In terms of meeting the immediate need of an individual, some form of an emergency shelter has been developed in many communities. In Drayton Valley, to meet the immediate need of individuals facing homelessness a volunteer-supervised community mat program has been developed. Operating in a church, on nights when volunteers are available, it provides a safe place for people in need to sleep out of the elements. The program is volunteer run, the mat program is offered when people volunteer to supervise a shift. The program itself is facilitated by a hired coordinator, part of whose duties are ensuring the program is promoted--both to those in need, and individuals who are willing to volunteer for shifts. Some communities have recognized the need for specialized emergency shelters, geared towards women and children. In communities where shelters have not been developed, plans have indicated the desire to work with all levels of government to explore the feasibility of, and possibly, construct and operate a shelter. To address the needs of individuals and families who are homeless many communities have adopted a housing First Strategy. Communities strive to house people first, and offer support services and a systems approach to care once they are housed.

Committees often liaise with municipalities. In doing so they explore housing options available to the community, methods to enhance affordability, best practices and successes. Committees often act as advocates and stewards of information, lobbying their local municipality can offer

the most comprehensive livability plan. Comprehensive meaning options for emergency shelters, supportive housing and affordable housing options in addition to market housing.

Many municipalities work with other stakeholders to identify barriers and opportunities for permanent housing for individuals. They work to develop plans to minimize the barriers, and exploit the opportunities. For example, communities use a multi-faceted approach, knowing affordable housing units are not the only way to meet the demand. This approach may encourage the development of secondary suites, within current housing stock to increase the affordable housing supply. Additionally, many communities have established programs to assist individuals in maintaining their current housing. This can be in the form of eviction prevention support, rental arrear programs, rent geared to income programs, subsidies offered, etc.

HOUSING- WHAT IS BEING OFFERED?

The Town of Cochrane has established Cochrane Society for Housing Options (CSHO), a non-profit society that works towards affordable housing alternatives for all. The CSHO is currently exploring the option of the town requiring affordable housing in all new subdivisions and areas of redevelopment. The town's housing strategy recommends the town make the best use of existing land resources through inventory of Town-owned lands that could be used for affordable housing. It further recommends the Town and CSHO facilitate partnerships with various sectors for affordable housing. The CSHO engages a broad range of stakeholders and develops partnerships with various sectors to implement and pursue a variety of affordable housing options.

In Nelson, BC a Transitional Accommodation Program exists, offering financial support for leases for individuals with mental health or addictions issues and had histories of homelessness. Medicine Hat, AB provides a diverse array of services across the housing and supports continuum, including a multitude of facilities (60 Emergency Shelter beds, 48 short term housing units, 547 units of affordable housing [247 dedicated to seniors]). Rent subsidies that act as a buffer against homelessness are also available to eligible individuals, equating to rent charged at 30% of income. Dufferin County works together with municipalities, to maintain and establish new social housing units, ranging from bachelor apartments to 3 and 4 bedroom family units. The units will have an array of costing options spread across the housing continuum, ranging from rent geared to income, to affordable housing to market-rate units. Prince Albert Housing Authority operates 500 units of social and affordable housing, and supports tenancy education programs. Within the city there is also a YWCA shelter for women and children and "Our House Emergency shelter" for men and women that includes a mat program, emergency and transitional housing services.

Many communities discuss incorporating social housing units into established neighbourhoods; ensuring new development is mixed-use and mixed-residential, and working with multiple stakeholders to establish and develop diverse neighbourhoods are not dominated by one type of income level. Further, understanding housing needs are dynamic and require input from a variety of stakeholders, communities operate in a manner conducive to collaboration. Municipalities and committees foster relationships with a wide array of businesses, developers, property managers, agencies, non-profit organizations, other levels of government, citizens and other stakeholders. Through an integrated, interdependent approach the hope is that communities can develop a housing system that is accessible to all citizens.

IMPROVE LOW COST TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Transportation has been identified as a barrier in many community plans, meaning Stony Plain is not unique in this regard. Municipalities such as Hinton, AB have developed a transit network, using vans rather than costly buses to transport citizens, helping to reduce the “mobility gap” faced by many of their low-income residents. They additionally have another special bus network for seniors and individuals with special needs. Hinton is currently exploring the feasibility of expanding on this, utilizing funding support from Federal and Provincial levels of government. Cochrane, AB runs a subsidized taxi program for low-income individuals, and is ensuring the needs of their most vulnerable populations are considered when developing transportation plans. As a city, Medicine Hat, AB has an established transit program, and offers subsidized fares for select sub-populations. They are committed to further exploring options for other transportation modes, how to make transit more affordable, and ways to collaborate with employers to make transit more affordable. The committees are often responsible for working together with the municipality to investigate and support other transportation options. In Revelstoke, BC the focus is on increasing low-cost options for individuals in need, particularly in regard to medical appointments.

COMMUNITY WIDE SUPPORT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL RESIDENTS

Recognizing the importance of early development, many towns aim to ensure residents have access to high quality childcare within the community. Committees and municipalities also use promotion campaigns to ensure as many as possible in the community are aware of the various childcare services, programs and supports available. Nelson, BC has established the “Understanding the Early Years Community Action Plan”, of which service delivery is coordinated for children and families, including the advocacy for adequate family housing units. Committees understand the need to foster and strengthen the bond between the early childhood education and care sector and the broader community. Additionally, some play the

advocate role, speaking to provincial governments in an attempt to gain access to additional out of school care and early childhood learning funding.

Further, towns recognize the link between a more educated populous and less poverty. Many have committed to developing partnerships with schools, community organizations, and post-secondary institutions to ensure education and training opportunities are available for all residents. They play an advocacy role in ensuring the benefits of further learning and training are made available to all residents.

SUPPORT OF MARGINALIZED INDIVIDUALS AND THOSE IDENTIFIED AS AT-RISK

Within each community, certain groups were identified as being more at-risk of experiencing poverty or homelessness. To address the specific needs of each population, unique programs and initiatives were developed. While the specific programs varied, many followed similar themes. Youth programs often had a focus on the promotion of leadership development, empowerment, mentorship, and civic engagement opportunities. Further, some communities offered financial support for said youth programs, developed youth specific employment programs, and some ran a youth centre wherein many of these initiatives were executed. Many communities saw an increasing senior's population, and thus, have adjusted their plans to account for the additional need with the rising demographic. To address the needs of local seniors, many communities pursued aging at home and retrofit initiatives, explored, and in some cases, developed, more senior's housing and assisted living facilities, and promoted inclusionary programs to decrease isolation. For example, Hinton, AB liaises with schools to try to create intergenerational programming opportunities for seniors and youth within the community.

Municipalities and committees promote multiculturalism through awareness, appreciation, and opportunities for interaction and support. Committees link communities to Indigenous or cultural organizations, and ensure cultural integration, education, and programming. Further, they work with health organizations to address the unique needs faced by many populations. In Lanark County this is achieved through the simplification of application processes, advocacy and media exposure for established programs.

Understanding the unique needs of distinct populations, communities strive to develop an inclusive and diverse profile of housing and/or poverty needs and assets. They have worked to create more inclusive and accessible tools, programs, and supports to ensure people from vulnerable groups can access the services they need to when faced with poverty and

homelessness. While plans and initiatives vary, the goal is the same--to work towards alleviating poverty and homelessness in their community.

APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS: SUMMARY

Several community consultations were held in the fall of 2016 aimed at educating individuals about Phase 1 of the Poverty and Homelessness Reduction Plan and the results of the Needs Assessment, as well as soliciting feedback and input for Phase 2 and 3, and the development of a community action plan. Three targeted focus groups were facilitated on September 28, October 5 and October 18. Additionally, individual and group meetings were held to gather feedback from stakeholders within the area. Stakeholders included service providers working with children, families, food bank clients, and Indigenous populations.

Targeted questions were asked at each of the meetings and focus groups. The list of questions were developed based on best practice research, questions other communities asked, recommended questions from reputable poverty/homeless institutions and recommendations derived from Phase I's Needs Assessment. Though for most individuals, all questions were asked, depending on the background of the individual being interviewed, some questions were not asked. Below is a list of the questions, and the probing follow up questions that were used.

- 1. What are your thoughts and opinions on the Needs Assessment?**
 - *Any gaps? Anything to highlight?*
- 2. What are we doing that helps people out of poverty?**
 - *What else should be done?*
- 3. What does “ending homelessness” mean to you?**
- 4. How can we leverage the strengths of Stony Plain to meet/address the needs and barriers (issues) identified in the Needs Assessment?**
 - *What do you think is the biggest need/issue/barrier we need to address?*
 - *Keeping the populations most at risk in consideration, what supports and services are not currently available, but should be?*
- 5. What kind of education or awareness campaigns do you think could be successfully implemented?**
(Associated with recommendation 1)
 - *How can we educate at-risk populations of services available?*
 - *How do we get others/the public involved in the poverty reduction strategy?*
- 6. How can we best approach coordinated services and inter-sectoral collaboration?** (Associated with recommendation 2 & 5)
- 7. For this initiative to be successful, it will be important to drive momentum forward and generate support early. What are some low-cost, short term initiatives we could pursue to achieve this?**
(Associated with recommendation 6)
- 8. Do you have ideas about how to engage the homeless (or those at-risk of becoming homeless) population in developing the plan?**
- 9. What will want to make you stay/become part of this process?**

- *Would you be interested in becoming part of the committee?*
- *Does the proposed committee fit within another committee?*

10. Is there anything else you would like to say about the poverty and homelessness reduction plan?

Below is a summary of what was discussed in the consultations. It reflects what was said by respondents-- their opinions, thoughts and ideas. Several themes emerged throughout the course of the consultations. They are highlighted below, based on sub-category:

The largest issues that need to be dealt with are housing and transportation. Respondents felt that Stony Plain does not have truly affordable housing for the people we serve. Further, there is no low-income, subsidized or transitional housing available. This presents barriers to service providers—when an individual comes in with a housing need, they have nowhere to refer the client to, because there is nothing available. Participants in the community consultations felt that Stony Plain needs to develop a continuum of housing options for residents, ranging from emergency, supportive, transitional, low income, and affordable. Recommendations varied, but the most commonly cited were about developing relationships with current landlords to decrease rents in vacant rentals, mandating developers to include a percentage of affordable/low-income units in each new development, and The Town of Stony Plain developing by-laws and committing to more affordable, low-income units.

Transportation is often a barrier for people needing to access services. Due to the geographic nature of the area, and the spread of services, accessing multiple services is difficult for individuals without access to a vehicle. We need to work together to develop ways to ensure people's needs are met, regardless of said issue. This could be through the development of some sort of transportation framework, whether it be a formal transportation network within the municipality, or leveraging community commitment and capacity through a volunteer lead transportation service.

Due to Stony Plain's location, this is an issue and concern that should have a tri-regional approach/solution. Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Parkland County need to work together to address poverty and homelessness within our community. A plan cannot be developed in isolation, it needs to be a collaborative process and developed together. Clients do not operate in a silo, they access services from all three, and as such, the plan should not be siloed. It will also be important to partner and develop relationships with Indigenous communities and leaders in the area.

More needs to be done to generate awareness and understanding of the issue. The public needs to be better informed of the magnitude, causes, and effects of poverty and homelessness within our community. Many respondents felt that the public is not aware of the depth of the issue—believing that our area is not affected by homelessness or poverty. Further

awareness and understanding will also help to lessen the stigma associated with poverty and homelessness. Participants repeatedly stressed the need to destigmatize the issue. Respondents felt once the public was aware of and understood the issues at hand, we could more successfully pursue community plans and initiatives.

There is a need to better educate clients about services available. We need to reach more individuals in need, and ensure that people know what programs, services and resources are available to be accessed, and how this can help them. This could be achieved through a variety of methods, including, but not limited to, outreach work, distribution of informational tools (diagrams/infographics, resource booklets, information sheets, business cards/magnets), and community presentations.

Overall, there is a strong sense of community among service providers and we work well together. Respondents referred to the strong levels of respect and trust for one another, and the shared commitment to helping people through the pursuit of common goals.

However, there is room to improve collaboration and cooperation among service providers. The need for increased communication and information sharing was stressed. We all need to be aware of what local organizations, groups and agencies are doing, initiatives they are partaking in, what they are/are not mandated to, etc. Participants suggested this could be achieved through information nights, pages and documents.

More work needs to be done to move people out of poverty. Overall, most respondents felt that we help people out of crisis and help them maintain their current standard/level of living. Essentially, programs and services exist to make people's current situation better. However, the community is lacking the necessary supports, structures and programs required to move people out of poverty. Gaps cited included shelters, transitional/supportive/low-income/affordable housing, basic social services, and funding to enhance what is currently offered.

Ending homelessness is a subjective concept. People's values, attitudes, beliefs and emotions all factor in to what ending homelessness means for them. Participants in the consultations used varying degrees of the definition. To some, it meant everybody having a safe, warm place to call home. Others felt it meant having a place of refuge for all those who needed it, whether that meant housing, temporary refuge, or a shelter. A few felt that a housing first program, with a formal support system, would end homelessness. Some felt that homeless would be ended when there are absolutely zero individuals in that situation. In the development of future initiatives, more work will need to be completed to define what "ending homelessness" will mean for the Town of Stony Plain.

A centralized service model benefits individuals looking for assistance. Such a model prevents people from telling their story more than once, allowing a more dignified service approach for

the individual. There was a variation of opinions on what such a model would look like; ranging from a one-stop community hub, an intricate system of referrals with one entry point, to a travelling service model.

We must solicit feedback from people with lived-experience to develop the most effective plan possible. Individuals who are living in poverty or are homeless need to be involved in the development of plans and initiatives. They know best what they need and what will benefit them, they also know best what methods will or will not work. It is essential to engage these individuals at all levels of the process—from planning to implementation.

Great ideas were generated for future initiatives. Below is a summary of the various ideas. They have been grouped together in common themes; as many times, similar ideas were discussed at different groups and meetings, but the common thread remained the same. As a result, many of the ideas listed below are a combination of multiple individual's thoughts.

- **Develop a comprehensive list of services available.** This could be an electronic resource for ease of distribution. It could highlight all the services available within the community, along with contact information.
- **Develop and distribute a small resource book for clients:** This could be pocket-sized, modelled after the green book, listing resources and services to access in times of crisis. The small size would be discreet, convenient and easy to carry for clients.
- **Form a Housing Committee:** While respondent's opinions varied, it was agreed that committee formation was important. The committee should consist of a myriad of members, ranging from service providers, elected officials, business people, and individuals with lived experience. A diverse committee allows for a wider range of impact. It is important the committee have a clearly developed mandate and focus, and meetings are productive and rewarding for members.
- **Centralize Services:** Opinions varied on the importance of this, and how to do so. Some respondents suggested the development of a community hub, essentially one place/location where clients can come to access all the services they need. Each agency could send a different employee to staff the location each day/week. Other respondents suggested more periodic centralization, through information/service fairs, or events similar to Edmonton's Homeless Connect.
- **Host Community Meals:** Food is a great way to bring people together. Opinions varied about the individuals to be invited, whether the public as a whole, or specified, targeted groups of individuals. Respondents agreed community meals would be a great way to educate people, raise awareness, inform people of our services, and develop a larger base of people committed to the Poverty and Homelessness Reduction project.

- **Develop a comprehensive awareness campaign:** Such a campaign could have a general audience, with material intended to reach everyone. Different mediums would need to be used to ensure the largest reach: print, radio, mail-outs, flyers, presentations, electronic platforms, public Facebook pages and word-of-mouth. It was also suggested securing “community champions” to help promote the campaign. These individuals would be high-profile within our community, and through their support, the campaign would gain increased legitimacy and general appeal. The benefits of the campaign would be two-fold: it would increase awareness and understanding among the general public, and it would provide much needed information about support services and access points to those individuals in need.
- **Enhance information sharing among service providers:** A need to disseminate information about what each organization does was identified. Not only is there the need to understand the mandates of others, it is also important to know what the current climate in each organization is (initiatives they are working on, programs that are being offered, etc.). Doing so will increase our knowledge of what is offered in the community, help us with networking amongst ourselves, and further enhance our ability to direct clients to the appropriate resources.
- **Develop relationships with funders from Edmonton:** This could help us get funding that is currently unavailable to us. Developing relationships and partnerships will allow us to learn from what Edmonton does and provide a proven framework for development of our programs.
- **Develop transitional/education programs or initiatives.** Offer initiatives that teach people how to live comfortably within their means. This could be aimed at all, as the benefits extend to all. There could be classes or tips on how to grocery shop and prepare meals to last on limited budgets, money-saving tips within the home, budgeting classes, etc. Depending on need met, tips may suffice, as a class may not be well attended.
- **Commit staff time to lead the project.** With issues of this nature and magnitude, continuity and commitment are important. Staff time should be allotted to carry out the work required to develop and implement the various initiatives listed in the plan. This is important to continue to build on the momentum, relationships, and work completed to date, and ensure it continues into the future.

Other points for consideration. There were some other great ideas and thoughts that were captured throughout the consultations that do not fit “neatly” into a theme. They are highlighted below:

- In an effort to align our plan with provincial and federal initiatives, should we ensure consistency in messaging? Stony Plain’s plan is to “reduce” homelessness and poverty, whereas other levels of government have plans to “end” or “eliminate”.

- Keep an eye out for the “Change Summit”: coming soon—a local initiative, offering community driven ways to respond to community issues.
- Play on national days to host activities: ex. On National homeless day have a poverty simulation, on mental health day have individuals walk through an intake process, etc.
- Critical Connections meetings are great, we need to use the momentum of those meetings to further poverty and homelessness work.

Moving forward, it will be important to keep the momentum of this project moving forward. Individuals who participated in the various forms of consultations indicated the desire to be kept informed and “in-the-loop” of what was occurring relevant to this. Frequent, transparent and reciprocal communication and engagement-- from all affected parties-- will be one of the keys to success of the project.

CONTINUED CONSULTATION

There will be a need for periodic check-ins. Consultations with stakeholders, service providers, policy makers and the At-Risk population will be necessary to determine what is working, what can be improved, and what can be added, regarding the plan. Such check-ins and consultations will facilitate the need for the distribution of a re-focused plan periodically. This is discussed in further detail in the Evaluation section.

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