



HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN

2020 Annual Progress Report



Acknowledgement

The County of Lambton would like to thank the following community partners for their participation on the Lambton County Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee:

Bluewater Health	Rebound, Sarnia-Lambton
Canadian Mental Health Association - Lambton-Kent	Red Cross Sarnia-Lambton Branch
Canadian Red Cross, Sarnia-Lambton	Salvation Army, Sarnia
Community Legal Assistance Sarnia	Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society
County of Lambton	Sarnia-Lambton Native Friendship Centre
John Howard Society	Sarnia-Lambton Rebound
Kettle and Stony Point Housing Services	Sarnia Police Service
Lambton Elderly Outreach	The Inn of the Good Shepherd
North Lambton Community Health Centre	The Sarnia Jail - Ministry of the Solicitor General
Sarnia Lambton Ontario Health Team	The Unity Way Sarnia Lambton
Ontario Provincial Police - Lambton Detachment	The Women's Interval Home

Message from the General Manager, Social Services

I am pleased to introduce the 2020 Progress Report on the County of Lambton's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan (2014-2023). In 2020 Lambton County Council approved the updated plan with the vision that *"Every person has an affordable, suitable and adequate home."* The Plan outlines the strategic directions we will follow as we continue on the journey to advance the vision. The County of Lambton relies on strong, collaborative and innovative partnerships with community agencies working together to accomplish this vision.

In 2020, Lambton County achieved many goals outlined in the plan including increased housing supply, increased access to affordable housing and supports, expanded collaboration and partnerships and the implementation of numerous tools that will assist us in the goal of ending homelessness. I look forward to watching our community work together as we continue to implement the goals in the plan and ensure that every individual living in Lambton County has a place to call home.

Valerie Colasanti

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN

The County of Lambton's Housing and Homelessness Plan, 2020-2024 frames the planning and delivery of housing and homelessness supports within our community. Each year Lambton works towards the four strategic goals outlined by the plan to achieve the vision:

“Every person has an affordable, suitable and adequate home.”

GOALS:

- 1. Increase and sustain supply and appropriate mix of affordable housing;**
- 2. Increase access to affordable housing and supports that meet people’s needs to achieve housing stability;**
- 3. Coordinated housing and homelessness service systems;**
- 4. Ending homelessness.**



In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic presented the Social Services system with unprecedented challenges, particularly in homelessness prevention and housing stability. Through strong partnerships with community agencies, Lambton was able to make significant advances towards the Housing and Homelessness Plan goals while serving an extraordinary number of households who experienced housing insecurity due to the hardships of COVID-19.

COVID-19 RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

1302

Households receiving rental assistance, including rent-geared-to-income supports.

696

Unique households assisted by the homelessness prevention system.

136

Households diverted from emergency shelter.

87

Households assisted to progress from emergency housing to more permanent housing.

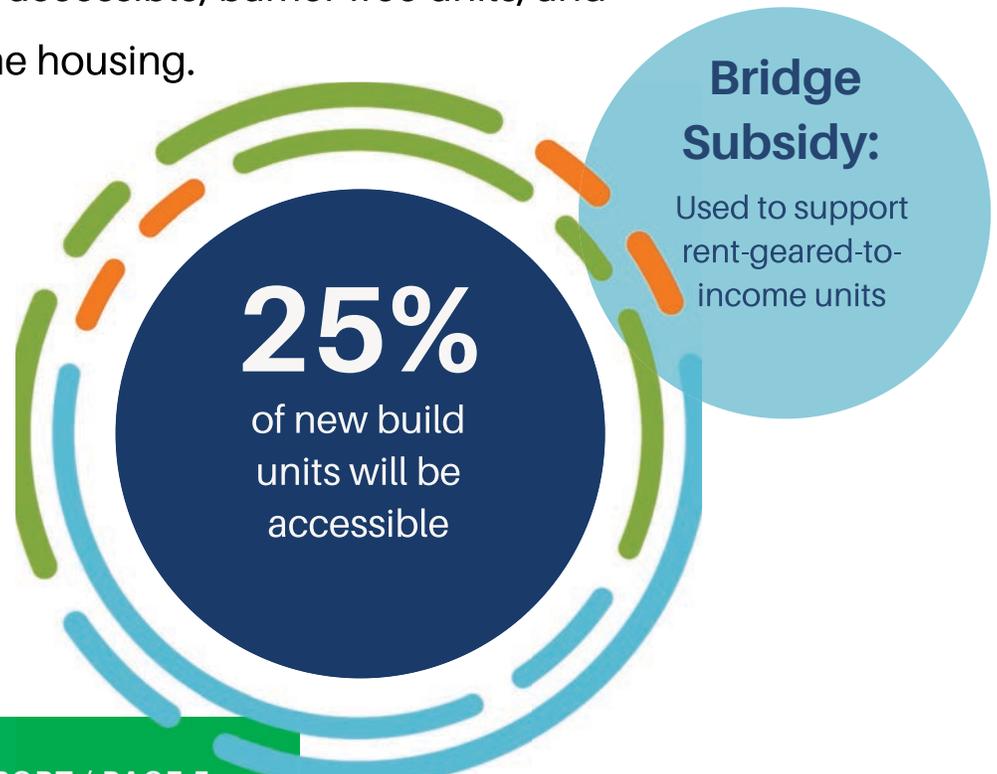


Goal #1: Increase and sustain supply and appropriate mix of affordable housing

Through the Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative, **\$1.3 million** in funding has been secured for an affordable modular housing development. Utilizing existing County owned property there is the opportunity to expand on an existing housing facility. Construction of a 24 unit build at Maxwell Park Place is anticipated to begin in the summer of 2021. This build will include 6 barrier free units.

Priorities from the Housing and Homelessness Plan Addressed:

- » Developing affordable housing with Indigenous organizations;
- » Leveraging both federal and provincial funding strategies;
- » Prioritizing creation of accessible, barrier-free units; and
- » Creating-mixed income housing.



Leverage Federal, Provincial and Municipal funding to repair existing Social Housing units and renovate to support accessibility.



830
County-owned social housing units assisted



\$4,000,000
allocated annually to repair identified needs

2020 marked the fifth year of the County of Lambton's 10-Year Capital Asset Management and Funding Plan. The amount of \$4M dollars annually assists in addressing identified capital needs of the 830 County owned social housing units. Work is required for each major building component including substructure, shell, common area interiors, services (mechanical, electrical, plumbing, HVAC), site work and unit interiors.

Establish Supportive Land Use Regulations

To support local municipalities in establishing supportive land use regulations and incentives to reduce barriers and increase the supply of affordable housing, The Housing Services Department has secured the services of J. Consulting Group. J. Consulting Group will conduct background research, complete a scan of current municipal by-laws and outline policy considerations. In the fall of 2021, this information will be presented to local municipal Chief Administrative Officers, Treasurers, Planners and interested members of Council.



Background Research



Impact Analysis



Present Findings



Goal #2: Increase access to affordable housing supports that meets people's needs to achieve housing

Affordability Assistance

Rent supplement and housing allowances offer rental assistance to address affordability issues and assist with housing stability. In 2020 approximately 282 households received monthly subsidies. This is an increase of eight households over the previous year.



Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB)

The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) program is a joint initiative between the federal and provincial government under the National Housing Strategy. The County of Lambton is responsible for identifying and selecting households for the program and assisting individuals with the application process.

The County referred individuals from the centralized wait-list for rent geared-to-income assistance who were precariously housed, as well as individuals who were experiencing homeless and receiving support through emergency shelter.

The COHB program began on April 1, 2020. The introduction and uptake of a new program during the early stages of COVID-19 presented numerous challenges for staff and clients. COHB roll-out required flexibility, creative thinking and additional staff resources not only from the Housing Services Department but across the Social Services Division and community partners.

Deborah's Story

*Names have been changed for confidentiality of clients.

Deborah has been experiencing housing insecurity for three years. She was staying with a family member, but became homeless due to a relationship breakdown in October of 2020. Deborah has not worked in several years due to ongoing back and knee pain that has gone untreated. She has not had a primary health care provider for several years, and will not present at the emergency department due to concerns about COVID-19. Her physical ailments cause her a lot of pain which she copes with as best she can, and she says that it depresses her mood in general.

Program Involvement

- » Referred to the Inn of the Good Shepherd's Income Tax Program to complete several years of income taxes
- » Received support at Service Ontario to reactivate her OHIP card
- » Assisted to purchase a cell phone through the County of Lambton's cell phone program
- » Supported by the Landlord Engagement Support Worker with apartment viewings

Outcomes

- » Once Deborah's OHIP card was active, she became eligible for referral to the Pain Management Program offered through the Victorian Order of Nurses.
- » She was able to connect with the VON nurse for counselling and referrals using her cell phone.
- » She was supported in applying for an apartment, and was the successful applicant.
- » Deborah's previous income tax completion made her eligible to apply for COHB. The \$210 balance due to her landlord each month was switched from temporary RAP funding to a stable COHB payment.

Deborah has been successfully housed for two months. When the pandemic has concluded, she will begin the search for a primary care provider in order to apply for more permanent, stable funding through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

Rental Assistance Program (RAP)



RAP is a short term supplement meant to help individuals cover the cost of rent while waiting for additional financial supports or employment to begin.

Clients who were eligible for RAP and in receipt of social assistance in 2020 received funds to temporarily cover the difference between their rental benefits and rent payments. This support empowered recipients to maintain their housing through difficult financial circumstances, and avoid the hardships of entering the emergency shelter system.

Emma and Chris's Story

Emma and Chris previously owned their home. Chris had a good job and was making a decent salary while Emma mostly worked odd jobs. Unfortunately, Chris suffered from a stroke and was no longer able to work. Through many years on and off, he struggled with alcohol use and Emma struggled with drug use. When Chris lost his job, he struggled mentally and coped with the use of alcohol. As there was limited income, he took another line of credit out on his mortgage. Chris and Emma ended up losing their home as they could no longer make the mortgage payments. The couple lived out of their car for a few months before contacting the Inn of the Good Shepherd and being placed at an overflow shelter site.

This is how they came to meet their Community Support Worker (CSW). With the help of Social Services' Integrated team, the couple was able to find permanent housing, and receive RAP payments to make up the difference between their income and rental payments. With the help of the Municipal Residency Benefit, they were able to cover first and last month's rent, moving expenses, as well as some household items and groceries. The CSW is now working with the couple to complete their taxes in order to qualify them for COHB in the future.

Home Ownership

In 2020, the County's Housing Services Department continued to provide housing assistance to residents in Lambton County.

3 households received down-payment assistance



14 households received funds for repairs and renovations



Habitat for Humanity Sarnia-Lambton completed two affordable homeownership builds in 2020, housing a family of five and a family of two. The County and Habitat have begun an agreement to partner on three more affordable housing builds in 2021-2022.

Supportive Housing

255

Individuals assisted on a monthly basis through the **Housing Advocacy Program**



Increase from 2019 access to Housing Advocacy (132 households)

In 2020, Community Support Workers (CSWs) assisted 255 individuals a month through the Housing Advocacy Program. While Community Support Workers (CSWs) have caseloads that consist of many hard to serve individuals with complex needs, their responsibilities changed as a result of the department's COVID-19 response. In addition to assisting their caseloads, CSWs were tasked with regular telephone check-ins for tenants living in County-owned units. This contact ensured tenants had access to necessary supports and services.

153 families received food and activity boxes in collaboration with the YMCA.

102 households received Meals on Wheels.

36 vulnerable adults with limited finances received supportive housing from the Domiciliary Hostel Program, meeting their need for supervision and support with the activities of daily living.

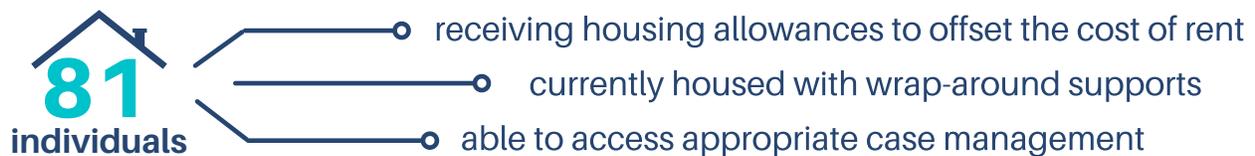
13 youth were assisted through the transitional housing program and intensive supports offered through Rebound at Ohana Landing.

47 seniors had access to safe, sustainable supportive housing through Lambton Elderly Outreach's Retirement Home Support Program.

32 households received vital supports to maintain quality of life and prevent housing loss through the Homemakers Program.

Addressing Complex Mental Health Needs

CMHA Supportive Housing Program



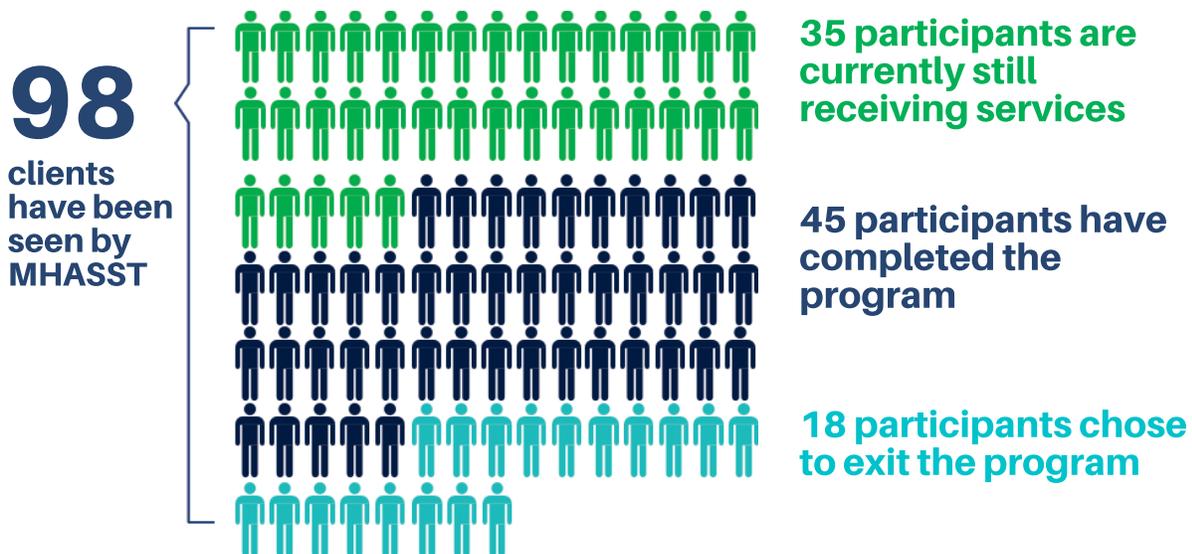
With funding through the Social Infrastructure Fund and the Home For Good Program, the County of Lambton has partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) for the Supportive Housing Program. This program offers access to case management and rental assistance to individuals coping with mental health and addictions. In 2020, CMHA continued to leverage their existing resources to provide appropriate supports to approximately 81 individuals while also providing housing allowances to offset the cost of rent.

Mental Health and Social Services Team

The Mental Health and Social Services Team (MHASST) was launched in partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in April of 2019. This two year pilot program was designed to directly support individuals in receipt of Ontario Works and/or living in social housing. CMHA and the County are working collaboratively using an integrated team approach to provide at risk individuals (16 and over) with services and supports to address complex needs.

The team is comprised of two CMHA mental health professionals with experience in assessment and the treatment of mental health and/or addictions who are paired with an employee from the Social Services Division.

MHASST Clients in 2020



Moving Through the Housing Continuum

Of the 45 clients who have completed the program, all have maintained or improved their housing status.

- » **19** in private market rentals;
- » **13** in social housing units; and
- » **4** staying with friends and family.



Goal # 3: Coordinated housing and homelessness service system



In 2020, Lambton received Federal Reaching Home funding from the Ministry of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). Lambton County was chosen as one of Canada’s **6** new Designated Communities under Reaching Home, participating in a two-round application process throughout 2019.

The Reaching Home strategy supports the goals of the National Housing Strategy, moving **58** Canadian communities towards outcomes-based approaches, and reducing chronic homelessness in urban communities.



Lambton was successfully selected as one of **6** new Built for Zero Communities in 2020, joining a national change effort to end chronic and veteran homelessness - and eventually all homelessness in Canada.

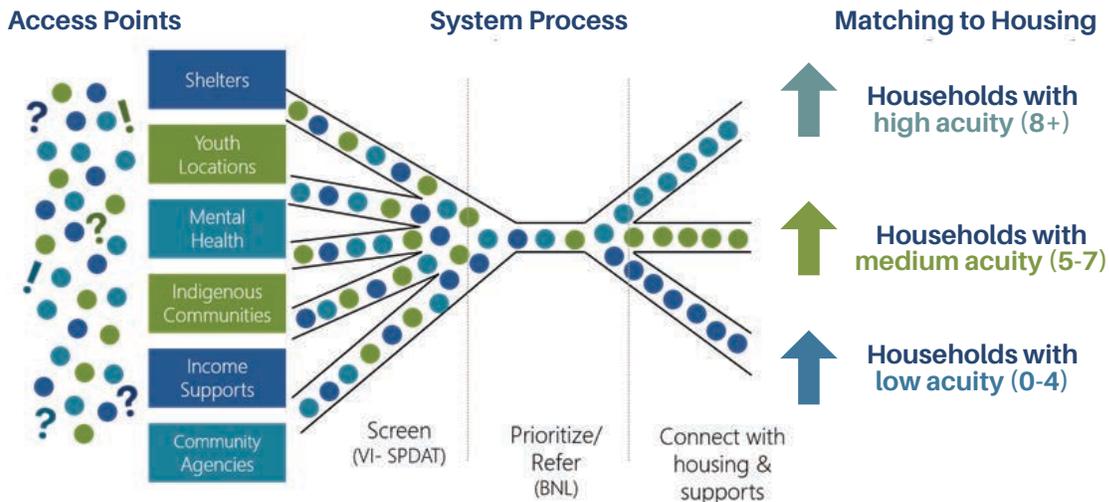
Current Focus:

- » Improve system capacity and coordination among homelessness service providers;
- » Measure improvement towards a comprehensive quality Coordinated Access System; and
- » Use system level data to measure reductions and improvements through a Homeless Management Information System.

Coordinated Access System

Under Reaching Home and Built for Zero directives, Lambton has begun implementation of a Coordinated Access System. A Coordinated Access System is a community-wide system that streamlines the process for people experiencing homelessness to access housing and supports.

A primary goal of Coordinated Access is to help communities ensure fairness, prioritize people most in need of assistance, and match individuals to appropriate housing and services in a more coordinated way. These efforts will translate to better outcomes for individuals and for the community as a whole.



Acuity scores measure the depth or severity of need among households experiencing homelessness, informing the level of supports they require.

Coordinated Access Agencies

All Coordinated Access Agencies act as access points where individuals may be connected to the homelessness system through a common intake and consent form, and complete a triage assessment to determine the most appropriate referral for their housing crisis (e.g., shelter, prevention, diversion) and are entered into a homelessness management information system.

Coordinated Access Agencies or "access points" are identified agency locations within Lambton County that:

- » Have regular contact with individuals and families experiencing homelessness;
- » Can conduct a fulsome intake for a client to enter Lambton County's Coordinated Access System; and
- » Have been trained to assess individuals' and families' needs.



2020 Coordinated Access Efforts in Lambton County:

- ✔ Identified the Community Advisory Board to exercise leadership for the planning, implementation and ongoing management of our Coordinated Access System.
- ✔ Increased Homelessness specific service provision among partner organizations. Agreement signed with ESDC.
- ✔ Data provision practices developed.
- ✔ Implemented an Aggregated List of Homelessness.
- ✔ Progressed homelessness system data towards a quality By-Name List.
- ✔ Developed a common intake form for access points.
- ✔ Shared data collection among key partner organizations.
- ✔ Real time inflow and outflow of homelessness system monitored.
- ✔ Introduced system-wide diversion efforts across service providers.

Homeless Individuals and Families Information System



- Hosted by the County of Lambton
- Developed by ESDC
- Accessible to service providers

In line with Coordinated Access and Reaching Home requirements, Lambton County is implementing a centralized, electronic database referred to as HIFIS (Homeless Individuals and Families Information System). This web-based application is a comprehensive data collection, reporting and case management system that supports the day-to-day operations of housing and homelessness response service providers. HIFIS supports communities by allowing service providers to access data in real-time and refer clients to services at the right time.

2020 HIFIS Milestones in Lambton County:

- ✓ Hired a HIFIS Coordinator to lead implementation and training initiatives ahead of launching HIFIS in the Fall of 2021.
- ✓ Installed HIFIS on a dedicated County server in November.
- ✓ Engaged with key partner agencies around data-sharing and system mapping.
- ✓ Developed intake tools to facilitate collection of HIFIS data through Coordinated Access System providers.

Community Advisory Board

The Community Advisory Board is a local committee of **six** service providers and the County, responsible for setting direction for addressing homelessness in Lambton. The Community Advisory Board is responsible for the following key areas:

1. Guide the development of the community plan and provide official approval;
2. Support in the planning and implementation of Coordinated Access; and
3. Assess and recommend projects for funding.

COVID-19 Spotlight: Lambton's Overflow Shelter

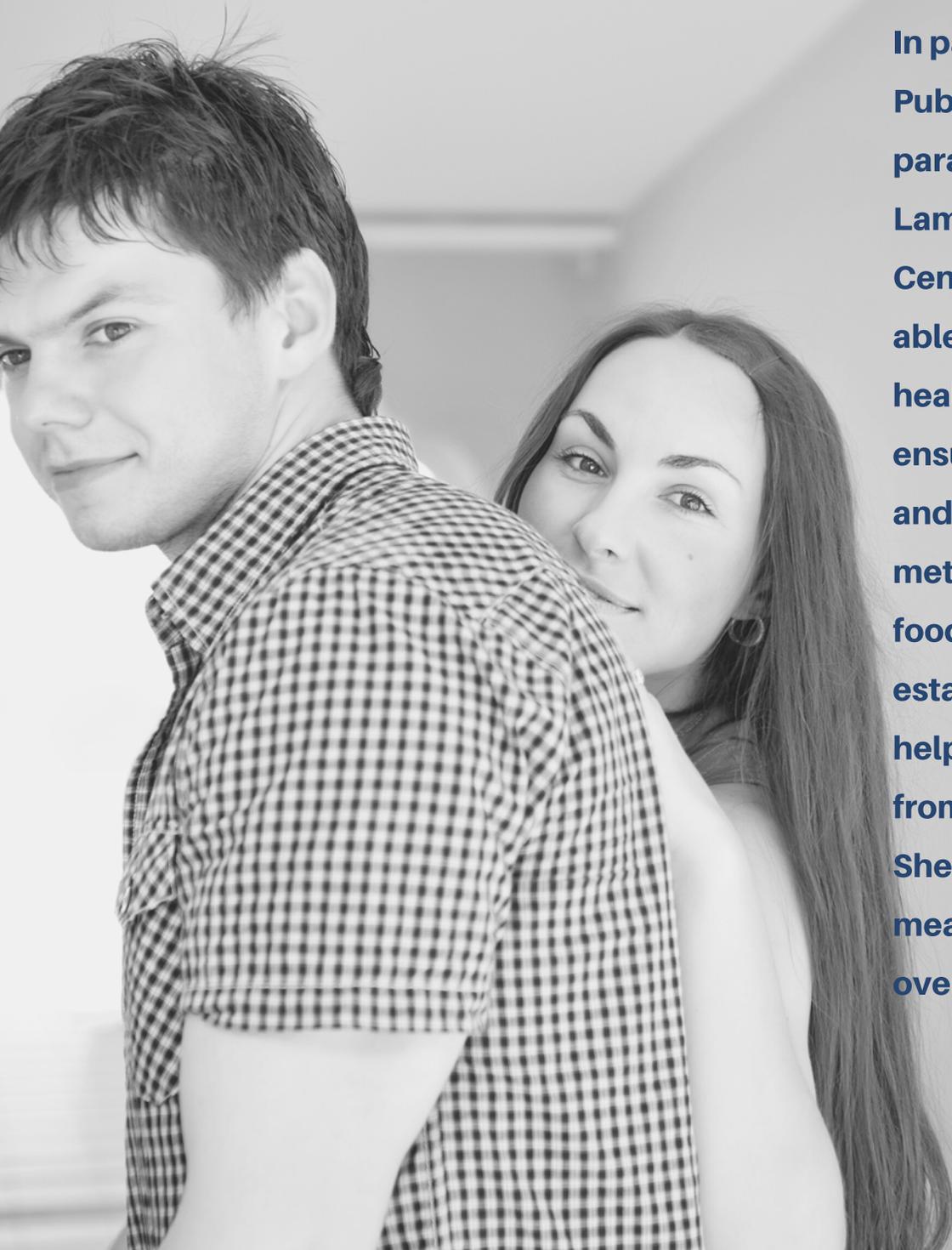
At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Lambton County's emergency shelter system had capacity for a maximum of 60 individuals experiencing homelessness, with the occasional use of motel rooms when all shelters were at full capacity. The pandemic and resulting province-wide lockdowns led to a spike in the demand for emergency assistance, and the abrupt loss of informal accommodations for those experiencing homelessness, such as couch-surfing. In response to these needs Lambton County developed a high capacity, cross-sectoral overflow shelter system, which houses upwards of 200 individuals and families experiencing homelessness every day. Utilizing local motel and hotel sites, and established shelters such as the Inn of the Good Shepherd's Lodge, residents have had access to low-barrier, COVID-19 safe accommodations when they had no other place to go.



Lambton's Overflow Shelter Continued

Lambton Social Services staff have been assigned to roles at the overflow shelter sites, in order to connect residents with supports that aid their transition from homelessness to permanent housing. Residents are assigned a Community Support Worker (CSW) to help them not only find housing, but secure and maintain it with appropriate supports. The CSWs and onsite staff work together to help clients navigate the system, from apartment and job hunting, to applying for social assistance.

In partnership with Lambton Public Health, community paramedics, and North Lambton Community Health Centre, residents have been able to receive weekly health and wellness checks, ensuring that their physical and mental health needs are met. Basic needs such as food security have been established through the help of weekly meal boxes from the Inn of the Good Shepherd, as well as hot meals provided at staffed overflow sites.





Goal # 4: Ending Homelessness

Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF)

The Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) was announced in March of 2020 by the Ontario government, in an effort to provide relief to the province’s most vulnerable individuals and the agencies that assist them.



+ Increased supports for physical distancing and personal protective equipment in shelters



+ Increased outreach supports for those experiencing homelessness, including home visits and harm reduction



+ \$78, 000 issued to address food security in the community

Integrated Homelessness Prevention Team

In order to continue Lambton’s work towards appropriate housing supports and sustainable housing solutions, the Social Services Division hired six Community Support Workers across both the Ontario Works and Homelessness Prevention Departments, in addition to a Landlord Engagement Support Worker in 2020. This interdepartmental integrated team assists individuals experiencing homelessness in their search for housing, and helps those who access emergency shelter progress through the housing continuum. This work advances the community towards lowering chronic and Indigenous homelessness , and greatly contributes to the level of community ongoing tenancy support for recently housed individuals and families.





Community Support Workers (CSWs)

Community Support Workers are able to provide diversion supports (see page 22 for diversion efforts), rapid re-housing supports and on-going supports required to ensure individuals and families remain housed. The Community Support Workers work very closely with the Ontario Works Caseworkers, developing a coordinated case management plan for each client.

In order to respond to the overrepresentation and heightened vulnerability of Indigenous individuals and families in Lambton's homeless population, one of the new Community Support Workers is an Indigenous Support Lead. This position works closely with the Sarnia Lambton Native Friendship Centre to offer more culturally appropriate services, prioritizing Indigenous clients and building relationships with the Indigenous Communities within Lambton County.

Landlord Engagement Support



- Screening clients for suitable, supportive housing options
- Uncovering unlisted rental units in Lambton
- Removing barriers such as first and last rent down-payments

The Landlord Engagement Support Worker engages with case managers, agencies, property managers and landlords on behalf of clients to find and create sustainable housing solutions within Lambton County. This includes relationship-building, ongoing tenancy supports, and proactive intervention aimed to resolve conflict between tenants and landlords. This position works closely with clients of the Community Support Workers, matching those experiencing homelessness to available units and supports.

Jacob's Story

Jacob is a sole support parent who entered the homeless shelter with his 2 year old daughter after losing housing.

Jacob was able to stay with his mother for a few days and had secured an apartment with his girlfriend. However, before the lease was signed their relationship fell apart.

The apartment was no longer affordable without his spouse, and Jacob was unable to stay with family or friends due to COVID-19. Jacob entered the shelter with his daughter in November 2020.

Due to intensive and collaborative supports offered through the integrated team, Jacob and his daughter are now stably housed and he continues his progression towards his goals of maintaining his tenancy, furthering his education and extending his employment.

Jacob was able to apply for Ontario Works assistance and secure part-time employment.

A Community Support Worker (CSW) from the integrated team connected with Jacob to assist him with securing permanent housing.

Ontario Works was able to cover Jacob's last month's rent deposit and purchase beds using the local Municipal Residency Benefit.

The Landlord Engagement Support Worker assisted Jacob to apply for a 2 bedroom townhouse. He accessed funding through the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) which would cover the balance of his rent.

Community Connector Program



**North Lambton
Community Health Centre**

142 individuals were assisted by the Community Connector Program.

The Community Connector Program is delivered through the North Lambton Community Health Centre. Individuals accessing emergency shelter or experiencing homelessness in 2020 received support to progress through the housing continuum into either transitional or long-term housing.

In addition, households experiencing homelessness received supports and services navigating the social services system as a means to secure stable housing.

Local Diversion Efforts



136
successful diversions away
from emergency shelter



511
instances of diversion
services offered

Lambton shifted Community Support Workers, Ontario Works Caseworkers and The Inn of the Good Shepherd's Lodge's staff to a "**diversion**" approach of homelessness prevention in 2020, in order to decrease use of emergency shelters. **Diversion** is a tool used to prevent stays in emergency shelter by providing individualized supports before families and individuals enter the shelter system.

Diversion begins at the first point of contact with an individual or family. Regardless of the access site, trained staff have knowledge of all available community resources and are able to direct people appropriately.

Cathy and Phil's Story

Cathy and Phil attended the Inn of the Good Shepherd's Lodge seeking assistance with a place to stay, as they had been paying out of pocket to live in a local motel. After finding themselves homeless, they placed their five children into a family member's care. The couple felt they had no other options, and were seeking emergency shelter in a funded motel so they didn't end up on the streets. With diversion assistance from staff at the Lodge, they were able to reconnect with Cathy's mother.

Cathy's mother was willing to take the couple in for a couple of nights, supporting them until they were able to get their feet on the ground and secure something more permanent.

*Names have been changed for confidentiality of clients.

Emily's Story

Emily contacted County staff while in the process of fleeing an abusive relationship, leaving her husband and youngest daughter behind. After exhausting her network options with family and friends, she had nowhere to stay and could not return home. Emily did not feel she would be eligible for assistance through the Women's Interval Home due to the length of separation from her partner exceeding one month. Staff encouraged her to reach out and seek assistance from the Women's Interval Home despite this condition, and she contacted them shortly after.

Staff at the Women's Interval Home were able to support Emily and provide her with a safe place to stay, diverting her from having to access the emergency shelter system.

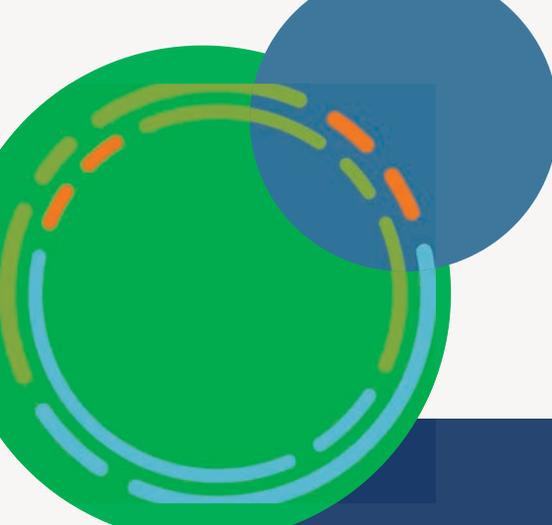
Collaborative Community Outreach



Due to the drastic increase in households experiencing homelessness and resultant need for emergency shelter overflow, the County of Lambton Social Services Division partnered with both the North Lambton Community Health Center in addition to Lambton Public Health in order to offer more targeted community-level outreach to these households. In addition, these efforts were expanded to include the local youth Transitional housing at Ohana Landing in partnership with Sarnia-Lambton Rebound.

Teams that included varying combinations of social workers, Community Support Workers, nurses, peer support workers and community paramedics were deployed to overflow locations to offer supports that included housing-centric services, COVID-19 testing, harm-reduction services, sexual health services, hepatitis C services and fulsome wellness checks. This novel collaborative approach to outreach relied heavily upon in-kind services and staff hours from Lambton Public Health and the North Lambton Community Health Center. Through these efforts, client-level connections to primary care services and housing supports were greatly strengthened and the many households struggling with addictions were connected to vital harm reduction services and supplies.





Conclusion: Looking Ahead

Throughout 2020, the County of Lambton shifted service priorities to provide emergency shelter and supports to those experiencing homelessness, as this vulnerable population has been disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of the pandemic. Moving forward into 2021, the County of Lambton will continue to collaborate with community partners, Indigenous communities, internal staff and the community at large to progress those experiencing homelessness through the housing continuum, recover from the hardships of the pandemic, and further the goals of the Housing and Homelessness Plan in order to meet our 2024 goals.

