

Homelessness and

By PJ Hobbs

Housing, Support, and Community

As I write and as you read, someone, somewhere will have to scramble to find a place to sleep tonight. It might be a woman fleeing abuse, or a young person couch surfing in the suburbs, or a man trying to find space in a shelter or at least a warmer doorway or under a bridge. Somewhere, someone will wake up tomorrow morning without enough money for food, most of their income going to pay rent and bills. Somewhere, someone sits alone, isolated and afraid, yearning for a place to belong, wondering when their next contact with a loving, caring human being will be.

Be it in our parishes, our Community Ministries, or in partnership with others, throughout our history our Diocese has engaged in ministries that seek to be of service to those most vulnerable in our midst – some-

one, somewhere who needs help. Such ministries are essential to our identity as Christians, following Jesus on the way of compassion, healing, and justice. On one hand, we strive to bring immediate comfort to people we encounter each day with ministries that address issues such as homelessness, poverty, addiction, mental illness, trauma, and abuse. On the other hand, we strive to bring about systemic change that seeks to transform unjust structures in our communities, our society.

Recently there has been an increased emphasis on affordable housing. Our National Church and our Diocese have formally adopted affordable housing as a priority. Indeed, our Diocese has set the goal that we will together create 125 new units of affordable housing by 2021, our 125th anniversary as a diocese.

Cornerstone Housing for Women's 42 new units of affordable, supportive housing in Westboro gets us well on the way to achieving this goal. The federal government has recently announced a National Housing Strategy. Many of us are keenly waiting for the details.

I am a strong supporter of the need for more affordable housing in our communities. Housing alone; however, does not address fully the many issues surrounding poverty. There are three key elements that create an integrated model (See Venn diagram) to help us understand and address these complex issues: housing, support, and community. Three things we all need.

Housing: Safe, Secure, and Affordable

The statistics* can be staggering: 35,000 Canadians are homeless on any given night; 27% are women; 18.7% are youth, and approximately 30% of those in shelters are Indigenous folks. In our own Diocese, consider some of the numbers of people on waiting lists for social housing: 10, 479 in Ottawa, 1,206 in the Outaouais; 958 in Renfrew County; 766 in Cornwall; and 394 in Lanark County. The average wait time for social housing in Ontario is longer than three years. These numbers do not tell the whole story by any means.

Once in a home it should be safe, secure and affordable. Many people, especially in urban settings, live in rooming houses that are far from affordable. The acceptable standard for affordable housing is no more than 30% of household income (one in five

Canadians pay more than 50% of their income on housing). The average monthly market rent in Ottawa is over \$900. A single person on Ontario Works (OW) receives \$656 a month for all their needs; and the housing allowance (intended to cover rent, utilities, etc) for a single person on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is \$479. It doesn't take much to appreciate that housing for these folks is not affordable.

To the many unseen couch surfing youth; to the seniors isolated in rural housing trying to balance utilities, food, maintenance and repairs; to the men and women sleeping in the unsafe, perilous conditions of many rooming houses - a roof over your head does not necessarily mean you are in safe, secure, and affordable housing.

Support Services: Health, Social, Practical, Emotional, and Spiritual

Imagine you have finally found a place to live that is safe and secure and that, if you are very careful, is affordable. While housing is essential, it is not enough. People need support, especially folks who have struggled with homelessness and poverty. Support services are essential.

In the rural context, transportation is often named as a much needed support service for people who live away from town, isolated in their homes. With the reality of financial assistance and the cost of housing, even when in safe and secure housing there is not enough for food and other necessities. Support services that provide, for example, meals, clothing, and hygiene products are critical.

Being able to leave your dwelling and have a place to go can make a big

difference in ensuring someone can stay healthy and housed. People do better when they can gather with others for meaningful activities, to learn new skills, enjoy a recreational activity, work in a team and accomplish a task, attend a chapel service, see a nurse or doctor, speak with a counselor or a chaplain, make a friend.

Along with many other agencies, the day programs of our Diocesan Community Ministries – Centre 454, The Well, St Luke's Table - are great examples of integrated support services. As we focus on housing, both within the church and greater community, it is important to remember and provide resources for support services that will enhance an individual's chance for wholeness.

*Statistic drawn from a number of sources and provided by the Homeless and Affordable Housing Working Group.

Deadlines and Submission Guidelines for Crosstalk

Deadlines:

March - January 25
April - February 26
May - March 26

Submission:

News - 500 words or less
Articles - 700 words or less
Letters to the Editor - 300 words or less
Reviews - 400 words or less
Original Cartoon or Artwork - contact the Editor

Photographs

Very large, high resolution
(at least 300 dpi)
JPEG or TIFF format
Include name of photographer.

Question or Information: Contact the Editor at: ott-crosstalk@ottawa.anglican.ca

(613) 232-7124, ext. 245

Online Submission Form: <http://bit.ly/CommReq>

Affordable Housing

Community: Diverse, Engaged, and Generous

People need community. Yet, in this model it may seem the most intangible compared to the more practical housing and support services. It is though just as important. Once housed in a safe and affordable context with professional support services, people need to be in a community that is diverse, engaged and generous. I am often reminded that even with all the staffing, housing, and support services provided by our Community Ministries, we are really about building communities. On any given day you can walk into a place like the Trinity Cornwall Drop-In, or one of the day programs in Ottawa, and you will see community in action as participants, staff, partners, volunteers come together and create a supportive and meaningful environment.

A community that is diverse calls on all of us regardless of background to contribute to addressing the concrete social needs of our society. We, as Christians, are called to be a community that is light, salt and leaven, illuminating, enriching and growing community. The Executive Directors of our Community Ministries often tell me of the remarkable and

transformative support provided by the parishes of the Diocese of Ottawa. We are a critical ingredient to making those ministries authentic communities. And that is just the tip of the iceberg. There are countless ministries throughout our diocese in which our parishes and individual members are engaged and generously giving of themselves to address the critical needs in the community. In the church we are in the business of community, and community begets community. It is the stuff of mutual transformation.

In terms of housing and support services, we need a community that is engaged, aware of the challenges people face, providing resources, and putting the needs of the most vulnerable first when considering community programs and public policy. A community is called to be generous and offer immediate service to those in need. It is also called to work toward and advocate for systemic change.

As a Church, we are a community that has a place in providing housing and support services. Yet, the diverse, engaged and generous community envisioned

here reaches out far beyond the community of the church. It includes all of our friends and neighbors, our elected officials, public servants, multifaith, ecumenical and charitable partners. It is staff, volunteers, participants, and donors. It is new, settled, and Indigenous Canadians. It is all of us. The more a whole community is committed to addressing the issues of homelessness and poverty, the more likely we can create transformative change.

Obviously matters such as these are complex and intricate. There are seldom simple solutions to great challenges. This model of Housing, Support Services, and Community presented as a Venn diagram illustrates the dynamic and necessary interplay between three central elements when addressing a critical social issue in our time. It provides a framework to think, converse, organize, and act. By considering this model, we can all find ways, big and small, to engage in ministries in which we can all share. Because today, someone, somewhere needs housing, support, and community.

