

Assisting Marginalized People Who Fall Outside Traditional Social Programs

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Assisting Marginalized Individuals Who Fall Outside Traditional Social Programs

Peterborough Community-Based Research Project

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Abstract

This research aims to comprehend constraints within Peterborough, Ontario's social services, particularly in food banks and housing shelters, hindering marginalized individuals from accessing necessary assistance. These individuals facing poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, addiction, and mental health challenges, encounter barriers in obtaining support, compelling them to resort to improvised lodgings like tent encampments rather than available shelter beds. These issues are prevalent not only in downtown Peterborough but across the whole community, leaving individuals without access to the available housing and food support. In collaboration with Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce, the project seeks to improve the living standards of vulnerable individuals falling through social service gaps. The objective is to identify common barriers and constraints that result in marginalized individuals not accessing existing social services. Social service workers from local shelters and food bank organizations participated in an online survey, providing insights and suggestions on better supporting marginalized individuals. Analytical research examined data from other municipalities on experiences of housing instability and food insecurity, revealing a sharp increase in poverty rates since the COVID-19 pandemic's onset, with a major concern in Ontario. By gathering communal data, the research aims to address Peterborough's homeless and hunger crisis by identifying effective solutions that can lead to long-term benefits. The research findings indicate systemic barriers including capacity limits, documentation requirements, discrimination, and stigma as significant obstacles to accessing shelter and food bank services. To address these challenges, Peterborough must enhance its social service programs by increasing outreach efforts, improving collaboration and coordination among service providers, and advocating for increased funding and support from policymakers. By implementing these recommendations, Peterborough can work towards dismantling systemic barriers and improving access to essential resources for marginalized individuals. Ultimately, this project seeks to foster a more inclusive and equitable community where all members have easy access to necessary support services for their health and well-being.

Assisting Marginalized People Who Fall Outside Traditional Social Programs

Introduction

Housing and food are basic human needs. In supporting these needs, shelter and food bank services are funded by the Government to aid disadvantaged, distressed, or vulnerable individuals who struggle to access essential resources. As stated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25, Section 1, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control” (United Nations, 1948). Through social services, also referred to as social work or welfare services, the purpose is to ensure all individuals have the right and access to these basic health and safety needs. In recent years, the social service budgets and funding in the Peterborough region have experienced a noticeable increase. The budgetary allocation for homeless initiatives was raised by \$2,493,300 for the years 2023–2024, totalling \$7,657,600 (City of Ptbo, 2024). A common expectation is a result in more facilities and resources available to limit food insecurity and homelessness rates. However, despite these financial investments, the rates of chronic health conditions, homelessness, and unemployment among marginalized individuals in the area have been on the rise (United Way, 2022). Subsistence strategies such as panhandling, which refers to begging for money, food or other items are commonly observed on the streets as a way to meet their daily needs (Homeless Hub, 2021). However many people who are panhandling are routinely ignored, sworn at, harassed, robbed and assaulted (Homeless Hub, 2021). Downtown Peterborough still witnesses several individuals residing and sleeping in unfit outdoor conditions. Especially during extreme warming or cooling temperatures, these conditions can be life-threatening. Deaths of individuals lacking housing in Peterborough are not systematically recorded, making it challenging to determine the precise number (Ptbo Currents, 2023). Regardless, citizens have urged that several people without housing have died in Peterborough (Ptbo Currents, 2023). In January of 2023, a candlelit vigil was held outside Peterborough City Hall for those who have died or faced stigma due to homelessness, substance use, and mental health challenges (Ptbo Currents, 2023). A minimum of 7 lives were honoured by a photograph placed along the walkway leading up to City Hall while a large number of deaths have still gone unreported. These tragic deaths are not inevitable but are

rather preventable and avoidable through sustained community efforts to strengthen housing and food services.

Marginalization, in the context of this project, refers to individuals who are at a societal disadvantage socially, economically, or politically. Such individuals often deal with challenges related to hunger, unemployment, housing instability, mental health, and addiction, among others, making their day-to-day lives more challenging (Baah, 2019). The purpose of this community research is to identify and remove the barriers and challenges associated with marginalized individuals' access to crucial social services in Peterborough. Understanding the underlying factors contributing to homelessness and food insecurity empowers effective solutions. The significance is in hopes of increasing access rates which will ultimately improve vulnerable individuals' well-being and economic opportunities. This community-based research project aims to identify efficient methods and required resources for addressing limitations and barriers hindering access to shelter and food support in Peterborough, Ontario. By gathering data on communal desires, needs, and affordability within the community, the initiative seeks to discern patterns and gain insights that will inform targeted strategies for future improvement. The overarching goal is to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable community by developing interventions that precisely address the identified challenges, fostering improved access to vital social support systems for all community members regardless of economic status.

Peterborough's Homeless Crisis

A large percentage of Peterborough's population faces the harsh reality of not having a place to call home. In 2012, a new Canadian definition of homelessness was released by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network. It has since been described as "the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability to acquire it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural, or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing" (Gaetz et al, 2013). As marginalized survey participants agreed in the United Way Peterborough and District report, the pathways into and out of homelessness are neither linear nor uniform. Homelessness has been a result of insufficient income, unsafe housing, conflicts, abuse, mental health issues, substance abuse, or past incarceration (United Way, 2022). Economic downturns, unforeseen health crises, sudden job loss, or family breakdowns are just a few examples of how any individual can find themselves experiencing financial hardship (United

Way, 2022). Even those who have enjoyed stability and privilege can face circumstances beyond their control, such as mounting debt, inadequate savings, or unforeseen expenses (United Way, 2022). Systemic inequalities and societal barriers can perpetuate cycles of poverty, affecting individuals regardless of their background or initial economic status. It's crucial to recognize that poverty is not solely a product of personal choices or failures but is often a result of complex and intersecting factors that can impact anyone. Homelessness is a collective issue, not a personal crisis. It is the result of the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even those in crisis, have access to housing (Gaetz et al., 2013).

Homelessness is a global issue with 150,000 to 300,000 individuals a year experiencing homelessness in Canada alone (Blair, 2024). As many as 1.3 million Canadians have experienced homelessness or extremely insecure housing within the past five years (Gaetz, 2013). Between 25,000 to 35,000 Canadians are homeless and struggle to find shelter per night (Gaetz, 2013). Toronto, Ontario has the largest homeless population in Canada (Blair, 2024). Within close range, this crisis has largely impacted Peterborough, Ontario becoming alarmingly worse in 2023 than in 2022 (Ptbo Public Health, 2023). This societal issue is not new to the community but rather has been on a sharp increase for 4 years following the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 (United Way, 2022). This has resulted in Ontario experiencing crushing inflation, an increased poisoned drug supply, and unaffordable housing and rental markets (United Way, 2022). In 2018, before the pandemic, Peterborough's population was estimated to include 131, 283 individuals (Statistics Canada, 2020). 6% of individuals were reported to have been living in rough conditions, specifically living outside or in spaces unfit for human habitation (United Way, 2022). It was reported that 49% of this marginalized population had been experiencing chronic homelessness, where one experiences long-term or repeated periods of homelessness for 6 months or longer (United Way, 2022). In 2021, following the pandemic, Peterborough's general population slightly increased (Statistics Canada, 2021). Unmatched to this population increase, the biannual Point-in-Time Count of individuals living rough and sleeping outdoors jumped up 27%, with 71% of this marginalized group reaching chronic homelessness (United Way, 2022). In total, 604 individuals accessed the shelter system at least once during 2021 (United Way, 2022). According to the February 2022 Built for Zero Report Card, at least 300 people were experiencing homelessness in Peterborough City and County, with 156 of those people having been chronically homeless. The number of people on the homeless by-name list (BNL) in Peterborough in 2022 is up 30% compared to the same time in 2021 (Davis, 2022). As a major contributing factor to the housing crisis, the reported vacancy rate, which represents the

proportion of available rental units that are unoccupied, dropped to 1.0 percent in 2023 (Pearson, 2024). With a healthy vacancy rate of around 4%, this has led the homeless rates to currently surpass 300 individuals (City of Peterborough 2017, Homeless Hub 2021). Hidden homelessness refers to people who typically do not access homeless support and services even though they are improperly and inadequately housed, such as those who temporarily live with others, often referred to as “couch-surfing” (Homeless Hub, 2021). As a result, this particular population of the homeless is not included in standard statistics on housing and food insecurity despite experiencing similar challenges. A 2013 estimate was that for every 1 person who accessed an emergency shelter, an additional 3.5 people were experiencing hidden homelessness (Homeless Hub, 2021). If this rate remains consistent, the number of people in Peterborough facing housing instability would exceed 1,000 individuals.

Homeless shelters, sometimes known as emergency shelters, are facilities designed to provide temporary shelter with overnight sleeping accommodations for homeless persons without required signed leases or occupancy agreements (Law Insider). The primary purpose of shelters is to offer a safe and secure environment where individuals and families in crisis can access necessities such as shelter, food, and hygiene facilities. Additionally, shelters may assist in accessing healthcare, social services, and employment resources to help residents transition out of homelessness and into stable housing situations (Homeless Hub, 2021). In Peterborough, Ontario, several shelters serve the community, including emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and specialized shelters for specific demographics such as women, youth, and individuals experiencing substance abuse or mental health issues. These services include Brock Mission for men, the Cameron House for women, the Yes Shelter for Youth and Families, and the Trinity Community Centre for a winter overnight drop-in centre (City of Ptbo, 2024). In addition to these homeless shelters, the City of Peterborough has implemented 50 modular housing units on Wolfe Street, and 85 Hunt Terraces housing units on Bonnacord St (City of Ptbo, 2024). Each unit is furnished with bed frames, mattresses, bedding, a mini fridge, shelving, storage space, dressers, chairs, laundry baskets, cutlery, nightstands and lamps, along with a heating and cooling appliance (Connect Ptbo, 2024).

These shelters and housing units play a significant role in addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable populations. However, there is still a large population of residents sleeping in unfit conditions as opposed to a homeless shelter. While commendable efforts by organizations like the Yes Shelter for Youth and Families, Brock Mission, and Cameron House contribute to providing shelter, the current offerings fall short, evidenced by 32 individuals resorting to sleeping in public places, 3 in their vehicles, and 12 camping outdoors as reported by

Built-for-Zero Peterborough's monthly local statistic from February of 2022 (Homeless Hub, 2023). In addressing the concerns of those who are sleeping in unfit conditions as opposed to a homeless shelter, it is crucial to delve into why housing shelters are falling short in attending to these pervasive issues. This understanding is essential for developing targeted interventions and fostering a community where housing stability and shelter support are easily and efficiently accessible to all.

Peterborough's Hunger Crisis

Housing and food insecurity are deeply interconnected. The inability to afford adequate housing can result in compromised access to nutritious food, while inadequate access to nutritious food can worsen housing instability due to financial strain and health issues (Seo and Park, 2021). As a result, the increase in Peterborough's homeless crisis is adjacent to an increase in Peterborough's hunger crisis. Unaffordable housing is linked to negative health impacts, food insecurity, and inadequate nutrition (Ptbo Public Health, 2023). Food insecurity is a health equity issue, which means that certain groups are more impacted than others and may be prevented from reaching their full health potential due to uncontrollable circumstances (Ptbo Public Health, 2022). One who struggles with food insecurity may worry about running out of food before there is money to buy more. They may not be able to afford balanced or nutritious meals or buy food that meets individual and cultural needs. They may miss meals, eat less food than needed, or even go days without food. In addition to the impact of hunger, individuals who face food insecurity have a higher risk of infectious diseases, poor oral health, and injuries (Ptbo Public Health, 2022). Chronic food insecurity can lead to heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, back problems, and joint pain (Ptbo Public Health, 2022). With challenges in accessing medical assistance and supplies, these chronic conditions can result in premature death, shortening the average lifespan by 9 years (Ptbo Public Health, 2022).

Despite the existence of numerous resources including food banks and assistance programs, food bank use remains at an all-time high with 2023 marking the seventh consecutive year of food bank use increases (Feed Ontario, 2023). Canada has experienced the fastest increase in the cost of food since the early 1980s at roughly 11% from September 2022 to September 2023 (Davis, 2023). The years 2019-2023 have had an alarming development with statistics determining it as the period with "the highest year-over-year increase in usage of food banks ever reported in 40 years" (Davis, 2023). In Ontario, household food insecurity has gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic with a significant increase between 2021-2022 (Ptbo Public Health, 2023). Peterborough has experienced the highest rate of food insecurity ever

recorded, with roughly 19% or 1 in 5 households facing food insecurity between 2020 and 2022 (Ptbo Public Health, 2023). This rate excludes unhoused individuals or Indigenous Peoples living on-reserve, in which the rate is likely higher. Within a year, September 2022-September 2023, the cost of food has increased an additional 6% (Ptbo Public Health, 2023). This increase was not accompanied by an increase in income to match the inflation. In 2023, “there were almost 2 million visits (1,935,911) to approximately 2,388 food banks across Canada” (Food Banks Canada, 2023). Ontario food banks are experiencing the 6th consecutive year of increased rates of visits, and the expectations and increased needs in our province are beginning to surpass the capacity of the food bank network (Bueckert, 2022). 71% of Ontario food bank survey respondents acknowledge their circumstances worsened since the pandemic, attributing to the cost of living, including housing, food, transportation, and other essentials (Feed Ontario, 2023). This trend indicates ongoing and possibly worsening food insecurity among residents of Ontario, with a growing number of people relying on food banks to meet their basic nutritional needs. These statistics offer valuable insights into the urgent and growing need for assistance with food insecurity issues at the national level. Food insecurity presents a multifaceted income challenge impacting our community, where discrepancies between incomes and the expenses of essential items, such as food, resulting in significant life repercussions (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Food banks are essential community organizations dedicated to providing food assistance to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. Their primary purpose is to offer temporary relief by distributing food supplies, including perishable and non-perishable items, to those in need. Food banks play a crucial role in addressing hunger and poverty by ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to nutritious meals, thereby promoting health and well-being. In Peterborough, Ontario, several food banks serve the community, including the Salvation Army Food Bank, One Roof Peterborough, Good Neighbours Care Centre and St. Vincent de Paul Peterborough. In addition to these food banks, there are several church food donations at Murray Street Baptist Church and St. Luke’s Anglican Church. These organizations rely on donations from individuals, businesses, government funding and community groups to sustain their operations and meet the growing demand for food assistance. By providing essential food support to those in need, food banks contribute significantly to alleviating hunger and improving the overall quality of life for individuals and families facing economic hardship in Peterborough.

Food banks and non-profits are experiencing unprecedented demand while confronting resource constraints, leading to a ratio of one-third of visitors being turned away or placed on waitlists (Walker, 2024). Despite the availability of food banks and assistance programs, a

significant portion of the population suffering from food insecurity resort to scavenging through garbage or asking for money to obtain food. Food insecurity remains one of the most critical challenges for the world to face. By addressing these concerns and exploring why food assistance programs may fall short in reaching vulnerable populations, we can develop targeted interventions to ensure that all community members have access to an adequate and nutritious diet. This understanding is crucial for fostering a community where hunger is effectively addressed, and support is readily accessible to those in need. Urgent action is needed to address the root cause of this crisis and ensure that all residents have access to an adequate and nutritious diet.

Purpose and Significance

Addressing the root causes of marginalization requires a multi-faceted approach that is broader than the scope of this research. In general, marginalization can be attributed to a variety of circumstances, such as personal difficulties, systemic failures, and societal and economic issues. A large percentage of the Peterborough community deals with marginalization, with a significant portion of these individuals lacking the ability to meet their basic needs, including food, shelter, hygiene products, and clothing. As a result, United Way Peterborough and District reveal the need for community-based initiatives with local stakeholders to assist marginalized individuals with social support. The literature review explores the current state of social services in Peterborough and assesses the extent to which they cater to the needs of marginalized individuals. Gathering and observing data on the unique needs and perspectives of marginalized individuals within Peterborough is fundamental to designing targeted and contextually relevant solutions. This research also delves into successful strategies employed in other regions that improve access to social services that can be applied locally. Importantly, tangible assessments of government financing and allocation are conducted to determine where the majority of budgets are spent, to ultimately shift funds to the most effective costs.

Given the number of vulnerable individuals observed living in poor conditions such as sleeping outdoors, begging for money on the streets, or looking for food or cans in garbage, there appears to be limits to shelter and food bank services and their purpose of providing community safety and health care. There appear to be systemic issues that prompt people to live in these conditions rather than accessing social support. The continuous rising issue of homelessness in Peterborough underscores the urgency of addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalized individuals, particularly concerning access to essential services such as food banks and shelters. The commitment to social equity and inclusivity is the driving force behind this initiative,

grounded in the belief that every community member should have access to the necessary support for a healthy life.

“Not only is a housing and homelessness evaluation strategy necessary but so is a research strategy” (Kovacs-Burns and Gordon). This community-based research project is purposefully designed to tackle a critical issue within our local community: the well-being of marginalized individuals who currently do not access food banks or shelter services when hungry and/or homeless. The focus of this project is to shed light on the specific challenges faced by these individuals, recognizing the barriers hindering their access to essential services, and developing effective strategies to bridge this gap. Through a collaborative effort with the Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce (PKCC), the aim is to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of the issue and generate practical solutions that will not only benefit marginalized individuals but also contribute to the overall well-being of the community. Once the identified strategies have undergone thorough research and considerations, they can be presented to broader stakeholders through local networking channels. These local stakeholders have the power and financial resources necessary to enact changes that can enhance the safety and well-being of all residents in Peterborough. In essence, this research seeks to identify, comprehend, and transform food bank and shelter services, creating a more safe and supportive community. The central focus of this project revolves around addressing three pivotal questions:

- 1. Why are shelter and/or food bank services not being used when homeless and/or hungry?*
- 2. What are the solutions for marginalized people who are not accessing food banks and/or shelters when homeless and/or hungry?*
- 3. What methods and resources are needed to improve the current social support services in Peterborough?*

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Trent University Research Ethics Board. Privacy is the top priority as any disclosed information is ensured to be handled with the utmost sensitivity and confidentiality. It is imperative to acknowledge that the perspectives of marginalized individuals were not directly incorporated in this study due to inherent limitations. Despite this constraint, concerted efforts were undertaken to integrate their narratives and experiences into the research framework. The mission to include the voice of marginalized individuals was pursued through various means, including direct conversations, previously published interviews, and surveys conducted with marginalized communities. By striving to incorporate these voices, the study aims to honour the diverse range of experiences and

viewpoints within society, recognizing the significance of amplifying voices that are often marginalized or overlooked with the highest standards of integrity, empathy, and respect.

Methods

1. Why are shelter and/or food bank services not being used when homeless and/or hungry?

A significant focus of this project is to unravel the multifaceted reasons and complexities surrounding the underutilization of shelter and food bank services by vulnerable individuals facing homelessness and hunger. A global count revealed approximately 2,880 individuals were sleeping unsheltered, whether outside in cars, parks or on the streets as opposed to shelters or provisional accommodations (Gaetz, 2013). The general public may wonder why a vulnerable individual would sleep outdoors in a tent during the winter when they could be in a bed in a shelter with heating. Why would a vulnerable individual sleep in the park with radiating heat from the sun during the summer, if they could be in a shelter with air conditioning? In terms of hunger, questions may arise such as why would a vulnerable individual search through bins for scraps when they could receive nutritious meals from a food bank? Why would people beg for money and food on the streets when they could access food bank organizations? Though these questions are valid, it is important to understand that not utilizing shelter and/or food bank services may not be of choice. Many challenges can lead to one resorting to desperate measures to acquire shelter and food. This research has the intent to highlight and understand the underlying reasons why individuals experiencing housing and food insecurity may not utilize the available resources. This research delved into whether this is by choice or not, and if the reasoning stems from personal preference or whether external factors, such as limited access or unfamiliarity with available services, play a role. It also sought to understand the extent to which individuals have attempted to access these services and their comfort level. Exploring their past experiences and perceptions of these services is crucial in gaining insight into potential barriers that may deter utilization. Despite the limitations of contact with marginalized individuals directly, data was collected on their behalf through previously conducted surveys, interviews, and statistics of those with first-hand experiences, both present and past. By comprehensively examining all aspects of accessing social services, the research seeks to inform targeted strategies aimed at bridging these gaps in service utilization.

2. What are the solutions for marginalized people who are not accessing food banks and/or shelters when homeless and/or hungry?

Understanding the obstacles preventing individuals from accessing vital services like food banks and shelters, allows the development of effective strategies that encourage greater utilization of these facilities during times of need. Barriers may exist that hinder access to these essential services, potentially worsening the already vulnerable situations of these individuals. This inquiry seeks to explore potential solutions or alternative support mechanisms for reaching and aiding marginalized populations who are slipping through the cracks of existing support systems. The lack of clarity surrounding homelessness complicates the implementation of efficient solutions. By listening to the voices of those with firsthand and secondhand experiences of poverty, we can work towards creating a more supportive and accessible environment for marginalized individuals, addressing their pressing needs and recommendations. By comparing annual and global statistics, we strive to identify methods and resources that can alleviate the common limitations and challenges in accessing services. Overall, this question prompts a consideration of how to effectively reach and support marginalized individuals who do not utilize traditional food banks or shelters but still require assistance. This inquiry explores potential services or methods that may be absent but could significantly enhance shelter and food bank services. It encourages an examination of the current state of social support infrastructure in the area and identifies areas where improvements are necessary. Focused on understanding the gaps in current services for marginalized individuals accessing food banks and shelters, the research aims to pinpoint unmet needs and potential avenues for improvement.

3. What methods and resources are needed to improve the current social support services in Peterborough?

This question prompts an examination of the current state of the social support industry, infrastructure, and innovations in the area to identify where improvements are necessary. In concentrating on understanding the gaps in current services for marginalized individuals accessing food banks and shelters, the research aims to pinpoint unmet needs and potential avenues for improvement which will guide action to implement change beyond just words. The question suggests a focus on both the strategies, and approaches, as well as the assets and provisions needed to advance these services effectively. Consideration of various aspects such as funding, staffing, accessibility, outreach programs, community engagement, technology, and collaboration with other stakeholders is required to put interventions into action. Engaging with the community, conducting thorough needs assessments, and collaborating with stakeholders are key components of our efforts to emphasize how our community requires innovative solutions to the poverty crisis. If the community works together to highlight the common recommendations

for addressing homelessness and hunger, these ideas may be taken to higher-level stakeholders who have the capacity and funds to put into effect the desired changes to marginalized individuals' access to food and shelter services.

Results

1. Why are shelter and/or food bank services not being used when homeless and/or hungry?

As per the accounts provided by social service workers in Peterborough, the underutilization of shelters and food bank services by homeless and hungry individuals stems from a multitude of challenges and limitations within the system as indicated in Figure 1. According to Peterborough's social service workers' interactions and experiences, one significant challenge relates to capacity limits, which 66.7% of survey participants have commonly experienced, resulting in individuals being turned away and deprived of the vital support they seek. Of the participants, 66.7% also stated the documentation requirements present barriers, which necessitate individuals to provide specific paperwork that not all can complete. Failure to meet these requirements can lead to exclusion from receiving assistance, exacerbating the challenges faced when in critical need. Discrimination and stigmatization also pose significant obstacles as 61.1% of participants agreed, as individuals often encounter unfair treatment or negative attitudes from the public. Such discrimination can lead to social exclusion and further worsen the already precarious situation of those seeking help. The risk of victimization and overdose are serious issues that can lead people experiencing homelessness to feel unsafe in shelters and avoid them altogether (Kerman and Voronov, 2023). Limited operating hours of shelters or food banks present further challenges, making it difficult for individuals to access services outside of regular business hours, especially during emergencies. Alongside these primary obstacles, individuals may encounter a host of other barriers, including limited resources such as funding, supplies, and personnel, which undermine the effectiveness of support services. Limited awareness about available services and how to access them can also hinder individuals from seeking assistance. Transportation challenges are also prominent, particularly in rural or underserved areas, where individuals may lack reliable transportation options to reach support services. The final finding emphasizes the physical or mental health challenges that create difficulties in seeking and accessing assistance, forming additional hurdles on their path to stability.

Question 9: Based on your interactions and experience, what barriers do clients commonly face in accessing social services? (Select all that apply)

18 responses

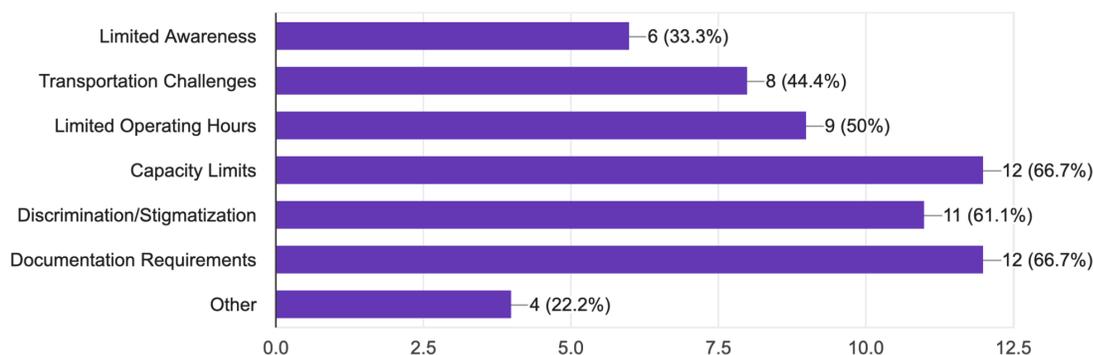


Figure 1. Common barriers to accessing social services.

Collectively, these barriers create undesirable obstacles for individuals in need, exacerbating their struggles with hunger and often precipitating homelessness. Homeless individuals may turn to unconventional methods of finding shelter, such as sleeping in abandoned buildings, seeking refuge in public parks, or relying on temporary shelters, because of their challenges in accessing housing and shelter solutions. Those struggling with food insecurity may resort to alternative means of acquiring food, such as dumpster diving, foraging, or seeking out free meals from soup kitchens, due to the practical difficulties associated with accessing food bank services. Additionally, when monetary assistance is present, it is often prioritized for addressing other critical needs, such as transportation, medical expenses, hygiene items, and clothing.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach aimed at dismantling the current systemic barriers to accessing shelter and food support systems. As a community, addressing the common constraints and barriers requires comprehensive solutions that encompass broader support services tailored to the needs of homeless populations. By addressing these barriers, we can enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of food bank services, ensuring that the organizations effectively focus on the solutions most suitable to conquer Peterborough's current poverty crisis.

2. What are the solutions for marginalized people who are not accessing food banks and/or shelters when homeless and/or hungry?

To address the challenges faced by marginalized individuals who are not accessing food banks and shelters when homeless and hungry, it is essential to consider practical solutions

derived from personal perspectives and experiences, as demonstrated in Figure 2. One key solution is enhancing existing social service programs, as advocated by a significant majority of respondents (94.4%). This entails increasing funding to increase the capacity and reach of these programs, ensuring they can adequately meet the rates of vulnerable populations. Simplifying the intake process and providing enhanced mental health support are also crucial improvements identified by 72.2% of respondents, aiming to streamline access to services and address underlying mental health challenges. Increasing the number of outreach workers, as suggested by half of the respondents, can play a vital role in better engaging with marginalized individuals and connecting them to necessary resources and support systems. Collaboration networks and flexible operating hours, supported by 38.9% of respondents, offer opportunities to enhance accessibility and coordination of services, ensuring individuals can access assistance when they need it most. Other proposed solutions include implementing employment training programs and establishing client feedback mechanisms, identified by 33.3% of respondents, to empower individuals with skills and provide avenues for constructive feedback on service provision. Additionally, increasing advertising efforts and exploring innovative measures, as suggested by smaller percentages of respondents, can help raise awareness and improve outreach to marginalized populations.

Question 18: From your perspective, what improvements could be made to existing social service programs to better serve marginalized individuals? (Select all that apply)

18 responses

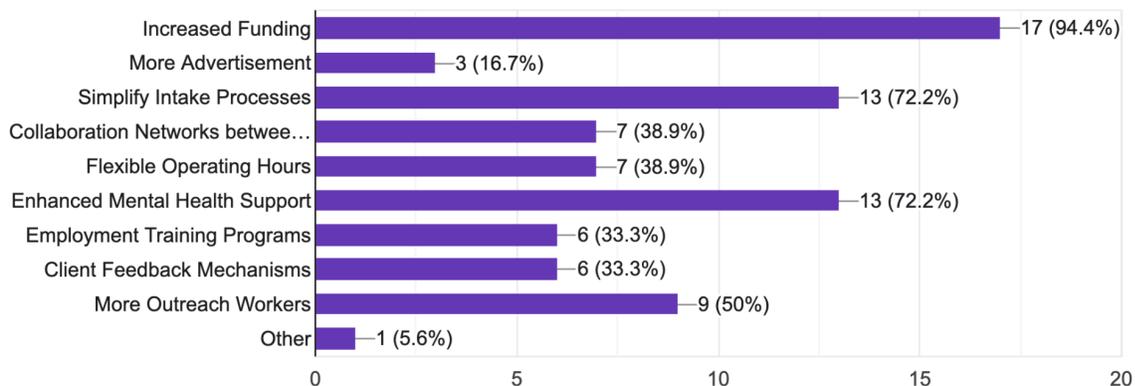


Figure 2. Suggested improvements for existing social services.

By integrating these proposed enhancements, social service programs can effectively address the pressing immediate needs of marginalized individuals while concurrently laying the groundwork for long-term stability and support. This multifaceted approach seeks to enhance the existing gaps in service utilization, ensuring that every individual in need has equitable access to

essential resources and assistance on their journey toward stability and well-being. Through the implementation of these improvements, social service providers can establish comprehensive frameworks that not only address immediate crises but also empower individuals to navigate toward long-term well-being.

3. What methods and resources are needed to improve the current social support services in Peterborough?

To enhance the current social support services in Peterborough and address the needs of marginalized individuals effectively, it's crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach integrating various methods and resources. Community organizations need to assess existing barriers and constraints to determine optimal solutions for implementation. As discussed further in the following section, there are several avenues for improvement. These include providing training to staff members to enhance their capacity in addressing clients' complex needs, particularly in mental health intervention. Collaborating with addiction recovery programs can provide additional support for individuals struggling with substance abuse issues. Simplifying the application process and offering assistance with paperwork can make accessing services more accessible and less daunting for applicants. Recruiting and training additional outreach workers, particularly those with culturally sensitive training, can expand service reach to marginalized communities. Establishing collaborative partnerships with other organizations and hosting community engagement events can foster supportive networks and raise awareness about available resources. Regular feedback mechanisms ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness to community needs. Additionally, advocating for increased government funding, engaging with local businesses for sponsorship, encouraging community donations, and collaborating with policymakers for effective resource allocation are vital strategies to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of social support services in Peterborough. By implementing these measures, social support services can better cater to marginalized individuals and contribute to the overall well-being of the community. For this research project, five key findings will be highlighted, discussing the common factors affecting access to shelters and food banks. Following are recommendations of where our community can start to improve services to conquer the Peterborough poverty crisis.

Discussion

Finding #1 - Limited Resources and Capacity Limits

Homelessness costs the Canadian economy \$7 billion annually which includes the cost of emergency shelters, social services, health care, and corrections (Gaetz, 2013). Despite extensive funding, resources and capacity continue to pose significant hurdles in addressing the complex issues of poverty, homelessness, and food insecurity in Peterborough, Ontario. With a growing demand for these housing and food resources, shelters often operate at or near full capacity, leaving many individuals without a safe place for aid (Government of Canada, 2021). Similarly, food banks struggle to meet the increasing needs of the community, often facing shortages of essential items due to limited donations and resources (Bueckert, 2022). The lack of available space in shelters and limited food supplies can deter individuals from seeking assistance, fearing rejection or inadequate support. As seen in Figure 3, data collected from local social service workers reveals that the average user or occupancy rate of the service organizations is from 80-100% based on over half of the survey participants' experiences. The Peterborough housing shelters had an average occupancy of 92% with an average of 84 people sheltered per night and 172 per month. Often, the shelters reach capacity limits, leading to circumstances in which social service workers have to deny service and marginalized individuals are forced to find another location to stay. People are asked to move along regularly, forcing them to haul their camping gear long distances. Camping gear and belongings are thrown out regularly, forcing people to start over at least once a week, sometimes more (PATH, 2022). This prevents people from establishing any kind of stability that would allow regular connections to support and services.

The modular housing units were recently implemented in 2024 to assist the growing need for homeless shelter cots. According to Global News, within the first 10 weeks of the Peterborough modular housing units on Wolfe Street, 49 of 50 of the units were occupied. As of March 4th, 2024, 47 out of 50 of the cabins were occupied, while the other three were unavailable due to construction. This reflects a 100% occupancy rate for this local housing service signifying both its necessity and effectiveness. Reaching 100% capacity leads to a decline in assisting new clients who are trying to access shelter in times of vulnerability. The declined access due to capacity constraints not only impedes access to necessities but also perpetuates cycles of homelessness and food insecurity. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including increased funding for shelters and food banks, mental health and substance use professionals, and community-wide efforts to implement preventative measures for the underutilization of shelters and food banks. Strategic collaborations between government agencies, non-profit organizations, and local businesses can help optimize resource allocation and enhance service delivery, ensuring that all individuals experiencing homelessness have access to the support and assistance they urgently need.

When addressing food insecurity, gaining access to such services is not always straightforward. Food bank's ability to meet demand has plummeted due to difficulties in sourcing and distributing food (Wakefield, 2024). Even if food banks are used, there are usually monthly restrictions, so recipients are left without a source of basic sustenance for around three weeks. The restrictions are a result of the increase in demand, forcing food banks to limit the number of daily visitors and reduce the size of their food baskets by almost 30% (Canadian Press, 2023). It has been observed that in these situations homeless people will resort to asking for money and food on the streets instead. Thirty years ago, Feed Ontario's network of 1,200 hunger relief organizations was created with the intent to provide temporary emergency assistance (Feed Ontario, 2022). The purpose of food banks was to offer short-term support while individuals navigated unforeseen circumstances. It was not anticipated that this assistance would serve as a permanent solution to address persistent food insecurity needs. Essentially, food banks can't solve the struggle with poverty (Feed Ontario, 2022). Despite tremendous efforts, food charities are never able to meet the demand, which is getting worse due to the rapidly rising cost of food. With the increase in poverty rates, food banks have increased by 42% with more than 4,353,000 visits in the last three years (Feed Ontario, 2022). This has resulted in food bank networks struggling to be able to accommodate the increasing demand and dependence on food banks.

Similarly, when it comes to homelessness, accessing housing and shelter services can pose challenges for numerous individuals. Even if shelters are utilized, there are typically limitations on the length of stay, leaving individuals without a stable place to sleep for significant periods. Moreover, some homeless shelters require documentation or adherence to certain rules that may be inaccessible or challenging for those experiencing homelessness. In such circumstances, homeless individuals may resort to sleeping rough on the streets, seeking makeshift shelters in alleyways or under bridges, or relying on the goodwill of strangers for a place to rest. Over the past few decades, various organizations and initiatives have been established to provide temporary relief to homeless individuals and to address immediate housing crises. However, the escalating rates of homelessness have overwhelmed these resources, leading to a gap between demand and availability of shelter services. Just as food banks cannot single-handedly eradicate food insecurity, homeless shelters alone cannot solve the complex issue of homelessness. With poverty rates on the rise, the strain on homeless shelters has increased exponentially, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive and sustainable solutions to address homelessness at its root causes.

Question 7: What is the average user or occupancy rate at the social service organization that you work for?

16 responses

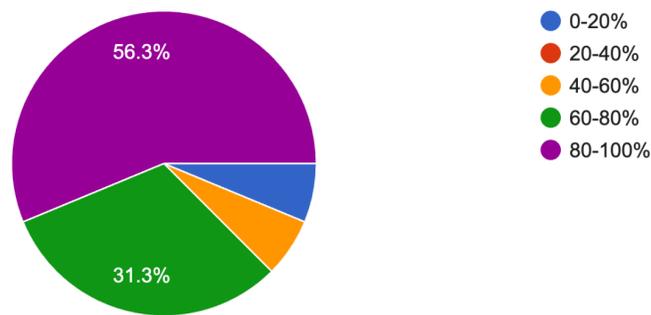


Figure 3. Average social service organization occupancy rate according to social work participants.

Finding #2 - Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Enhanced mental health and addiction support services are critical for addressing the complex needs of homeless individuals and improving accessibility to food banks and housing shelters in Peterborough. According to Peterborough Public Health, individuals suffering from food insecurity have a higher risk of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety disorders. Statistics reveal that Peterborough has the highest primary care need, the highest mental health disorder diagnostics, and a high number of substance-use disorders per 1,000 populations (Laidman, 2022). Among the general population, 39% have a mental disability and reported going hungry because of a lack of money (Food Banks Canada, 2023). The coexistence of food insufficiency with mental health concerns highlights the relationship between socioeconomic factors related to mental well-being. This indicates a pressing need for accessible addiction treatment and mental health services to support those affected. Many homeless individuals grapple with untreated mental health conditions or substance abuse disorders, which can significantly impact their ability to seek and receive assistance. The stigma surrounding mental illness and substance abuse often leads to self-isolation and reluctance to seek help, exacerbating the cycle of homelessness. Moreover, limited access to mental health services and addiction treatment programs further impedes their ability to address underlying issues and stabilize their living situations. Without adequate support for mental health and substance abuse issues, homeless individuals may struggle to navigate the complexities of accessing food banks and shelters, exacerbating their vulnerability and increasing their risk of experiencing

homelessness for prolonged periods. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that integrates mental health and addiction services into existing support systems. This includes increasing funding for mental health services, expanding access to substance abuse treatment programs, and providing training for staff at food banks and shelters to effectively support individuals with mental health and addiction concerns. By addressing mental health and substance abuse issues, we can better support homeless individuals in accessing the assistance they need to regain stability and improve their overall well-being.

Finding #3 - Lack of Outreach Workers

Outreach workers play a vital role in connecting with marginalized individuals, identifying their needs, and guiding them to available resources and support services. The outreach team is committed to building a workforce that promotes a diverse, anti-racist, inclusive, accessible, merit-based, respectful and equitable community (Ontario Public Services, 2023). Through outreach work, connections are made with homeless individuals to find out their stories, discuss their situation, and offer resources based on individualized needs (City of Peterborough, 2024). Referrals can then be made to health care, shelters, addiction services, mental health services, housing services, and food programs (City of Peterborough, 2024). Household food insecurity can lead to detrimental and enduring effects on the health and welfare of all ages, with significant impacts on children. Food insecurity is associated with adverse childhood experiences and has the potential to generate toxic stress (Ptbo Public Health, 2023). Without proper assistance, toxic stress can result in children who struggle to regulate stress response, leading to potential harm to both the body and brain and resulting in long-term health issues (ACEs Aware, 2018). The results of toxic stress extend to learning, behaviour, and both physical and mental health, thereby perpetuating cycles of health inequity (Franke, 2014). Based on the Peterborough Public Health report of 2023, 1 in 4 children face food insecurity. That means that one-quarter of our child population is likely to experience health inequity as they become older. In Peterborough, 64% of the homeless experienced homelessness before the age of 26 (City of Peterborough, 2017). There are strong links between homelessness and a history of involvement with the Child Welfare System and/or changes in family structure during childhood. In comparison, in Canada, only 0.3% of the general population has had involvement with the child welfare system, while there are at least 6,500 young Canadians who experience homelessness and approximately 50,000 over a year (Nichols et al., 2017). Young people, ages 13-24 who are homeless make up approximately 20% of the homeless population in Canada. (Gaetz, 2013). By facilitating access to housing, food support, healthcare, education, and other

vital services, outreach workers play a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of homelessness and addressing the underlying factors contributing to youth homelessness. Their efforts not only alleviate immediate suffering but also have the potential to transform the trajectory of young lives, offering hope for a healthier and more stable future.

The aim of outreach is to ignite the path toward a vital and dignified life within the community. However research raises concerns about the lack of access to necessary programs and services, long waiting times, and the lack of specialized care for a variety of different conditions and target groups (Homeless Hub, 2021). The lack of outreach workers presents a significant barrier for homeless individuals seeking access to food banks and shelter services. People are often strong supporters of the support programs but express concerns about the difficulty in accessing the care when it is needed (Homeless Hub, 2021). Limited staffing in outreach programs often results in insufficient coverage and outreach efforts, leaving many homeless individuals without vital support. Without dedicated outreach workers to engage with them, homeless individuals may remain unaware of available services or face challenges in navigating the complex systems to access assistance. Additionally, the absence of outreach workers can contribute to feelings of isolation and disconnection from support networks, further exacerbating the challenges faced by homeless individuals. There is a need for better transitions, coordination, and planning when discharged from facilities for individuals encountering homelessness and food insecurity. Addressing this issue requires increased investment in outreach programs and the recruitment and training of additional outreach workers. By expanding outreach efforts, we can effectively reach and support homeless individuals, ensuring they have access to the essential services and resources they need to transition out of homelessness and rebuild their lives.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1 - Redistributing Fund Allocation

It is widely acknowledged that increased funding is crucial for enhancing social services. With additional funding, shelters and food banks can expand their capacity to meet the growing demand for services, mitigating the limitations imposed by limited resources and capacity constraints. The majority of homeless shelters in Canada are in the most populous provinces, with 90% located in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta (Blair, 2024). Ontario hosts approximately half of Canada's homeless shelters (44%) (Blair, 2024). The Canadian Government is currently investing \$2.2 billion over ten years to expand funding for the homeless (Blair, 2024). Even if increased funding is recommended, the current system of funding social

assistance is divided between the federal and provincial governments, leading to lengthy delays in implementation that could take years to apply (CUIAS, 2024). While advocating for increased funding may seem impractical, a more feasible approach would involve redistributing existing fund allocations to address immediate needs with more instant impacts. Peterborough could address housing and food insecurity more effectively by redirecting funding away from advertising and statistical counts, and instead allocating it towards expanding the availability of specialized mental health and substance abuse professionals. By redirecting our efforts towards sustainable solutions, we can potentially decrease the enduring expenses of homelessness and optimize the use of public resources, fostering greater efficiency and effectiveness.

While advertising campaigns serve the purpose of raising awareness about homelessness and related issues, it's crucial to evaluate their effectiveness critically. Redirecting a substantial portion of the financial resources allocated to these campaigns toward recruiting and training more outreach workers could yield significantly positive outcomes. Outreach workers possess unique skills and training that enable them to engage with individuals experiencing homelessness at an earlier stage of their struggles. Through direct interactions and personalized support, these professionals could provide vital assistance and guidance to prevent individuals from further descending into destitution. One other significant advantage of investing in outreach workers over advertising campaigns is their ability to reach individuals who may not have access to cellular devices or the Internet. A considerable portion of the homeless population faces barriers to technology access, making social media advertising ineffective in reaching those who are most in need. This is seen in Figure 4, 58.8% of social work staff actively use social media as part of the outreach strategy. By focusing on outreach efforts, resources are directed towards proactive engagement with marginalized communities, ensuring that support reaches those who may otherwise be overlooked. Moreover, investing in outreach workers enables the provision of tangible assistance and pathways toward sustainable solutions for individuals and communities in need. These professionals can connect homeless individuals with essential services such as emergency shelters, food assistance, healthcare, and employment resources. By addressing immediate needs and offering ongoing support, outreach workers play a crucial role in empowering individuals to transition out of homelessness and toward long-term stability. In essence, while advertising campaigns have their place in raising awareness, the real impact in addressing homelessness comes from investing in outreach efforts. By prioritizing direct engagement, personalized support, and proactive assistance, resources can be allocated more effectively to provide tangible solutions and pathways toward stability for individuals and communities experiencing homelessness.

Question 17: The organization that you work for actively uses social media as part of the outreach strategy to inform the community of the available resources.

17 responses

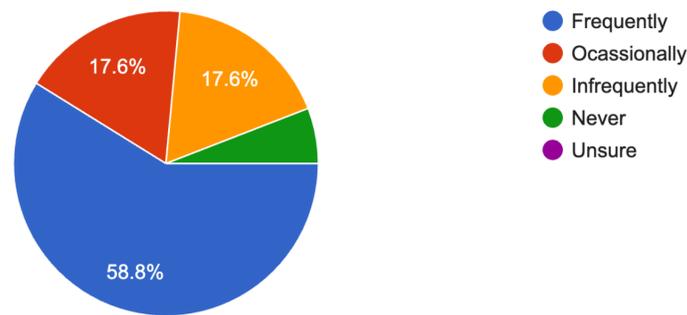


Figure 4. Social media use as an outreach strategy.

Redirecting a significant portion of financial resources towards professional mental health and substance abuse services can have a direct impact on improving access rates to shelters and food banks. Many individuals facing homelessness or food insecurity may grapple with mental health issues or substance abuse disorders, which can act as significant barriers to seeking assistance. Based on survey responses, 40% of social worker respondents stated that mental health services are not integrated into the social service program that they work for. By increasing funding for specialized services, individuals can receive targeted interventions and treatment, thereby addressing these underlying challenges and enabling them to access the support provided by shelters and food banks more readily. Prioritizing funding towards professional mental health and substance abuse services aligns with a holistic approach to addressing homelessness and food insecurity. Rather than solely focusing on immediate needs, such as providing shelter and food assistance, investing in mental health and substance abuse services addresses the root causes of homelessness and food insecurity.

It's essential to consider the current allocation of resources, including significant expenditures on advertising. The average cost to reach 1,000 people with online advertising ranges from \$3-\$10, while the average cost to reach 1,000 people with traditional/offline advertising is \$22 and up (Topdraw, 2020). By reallocating funds from advertising budgets towards critical services such as mental health and substance abuse support, communities can better invest in initiatives that directly address the complex needs of vulnerable individuals. The average hourly pay for a Community Outreach Worker in Ontario is \$19.67 an hour (ZipRecruiter, 2024). Peterborough is the 9th highest paying city for community outreach work jobs in Ontario with an annual salary of \$38,673 (ZipRecruiter, 2024). Peterborough United

Way's Point-in-Time count pays over 50 trained staff and volunteers from social services and other local outreach agencies to administer bi-annual surveys (PATH, 2022). Redirecting funding away from paying workers to conduct homeless counts and instead investing in proactive solutions could also significantly benefit communities grappling with homelessness. While homeless counts provide valuable data, they often represent a snapshot rather than a comprehensive understanding of the issue. By reallocating resources towards initiatives like affordable housing programs, mental health services and substance abuse treatment, communities can address the root causes of homelessness more effectively. These proactive measures not only offer immediate support to those experiencing homelessness but also create pathways to stability and independence, ultimately reducing the need for future homeless counts. By adopting a more proactive and preventative approach, communities can allocate resources in a manner that produces lasting and meaningful impact in addressing homelessness. This realignment not only maximizes the effectiveness of financial resources but also underscores a commitment to sustainable solutions for combating homelessness and food insecurity. By addressing these underlying issues, individuals can experience long-term improvements in their well-being, reducing their reliance on shelters and food banks over time.

Recommendation #2 - Enhanced Mental Health and Addiction Support

Access to shelters and food banks is crucial for individuals facing homelessness or food insecurity. However, mental health issues and substance abuse disorders often present significant barriers to accessing these essential services. This essay explores how investing in enhanced mental health and addiction support can aid more people in accessing shelters and food banks when in need. Mental health issues and substance abuse disorders are prevalent among individuals experiencing homelessness or food insecurity, exacerbating feelings of hopelessness and isolation (Saldua, 2023). Untreated mental health and addiction issues can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and homelessness, making it essential to address these underlying challenges. Investing in enhanced mental health and addiction support offers numerous benefits in improving access to shelters and food banks. By deploying specialized professionals such as counsellors, therapists, and addiction specialists, tailored interventions can be provided to address the unique needs of individuals grappling with mental health and addiction challenges. These professionals can offer evidence-based therapies, harm reduction strategies, and rehabilitation programs to empower individuals in their recovery journey. By equipping individuals with the tools and support they need, they can overcome barriers to seeking assistance and accessing essential services. Enhanced mental health and addiction support services can facilitate early intervention

and prevention efforts. Outreach and support to individuals at risk of homelessness or food insecurity can help stabilize their situations before crises occur, connecting them with necessary resources, including shelters and food banks. Investing in mental health and addiction support aligns with a holistic approach to addressing homelessness and food insecurity. By addressing underlying challenges, individuals can achieve long-term stability and self-sufficiency, reducing their reliance on shelters and food banks over time.

Numerous case studies and success stories illustrate the positive impact of enhanced mental health and addiction support on access to shelters and food banks (Kovacs-Burns and Gordon). Adopting integrated care models, such as the Housing First approach, can significantly enhance outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness and concurrent mental health or substance use disorders. Housing First prioritizes providing stable housing as a first step, coupled with support services including mental health and addiction treatment. This model has proven successful in multiple municipalities, including initiatives in Medicine Hat, Alberta, which have notably decreased homelessness rates (Alberta Secretariat, 2008). Under this housing first philosophy, investments are focused on three key areas: rapid re-housing of the homeless, providing client-centred support to re-housed clients, preventing homelessness through emergency assistance and providing adequate and accessible government programs and services (Alberta Secretariat, 2008). If more municipalities implement such integrated programs offering mental health and addiction services alongside housing assistance, significant improvements in maintaining stable housing and accessing essential resources can be achieved.

Recommendation #3 - More Outreach Work

Access to shelters and food banks is crucial for individuals grappling with homelessness or food insecurity. However, reaching marginalized populations poses unique challenges. This is when outreach workers play a pivotal role in connecting with individuals facing homelessness or food insecurity by extending support and guiding them toward available resources. The presence of outreach support within the community enables proactive engagement with marginalized populations, reaching those who may be more severely impaired and less motivated to seek out services. Although some may argue that treatment efforts should be solely targeted at persons who are already making use of shelters, drop-in-centres, soup kitchens, and other social and health services (Lam and Rosenheck, 1998), communal research shows that outreach is an important part of the case-management engagement process for people who are homeless. By fostering relationships and trust, outreach workers effectively assess needs, provide assistance, and link individuals with essential services, including shelters and food banks. Investing in more

outreach work yields various benefits for improving access to shelters and food banks. Outreach workers possess the skills and expertise to engage with individuals early on, offering vital assistance and guidance to prevent further deterioration of their situations. By identifying and addressing barriers to accessing services, outreach workers help individuals overcome challenges and connect them with necessary resources. Expanding outreach efforts ensures communities reach marginalized populations that may otherwise be overlooked. Outreach workers act as bridges between service providers and those in need, ensuring support reaches the most vulnerable. Through targeted initiatives, communities can effectively address the root causes of homelessness and food insecurity, providing tangible assistance and pathways toward stability. Numerous case studies and success stories underscore the positive impact of expanded outreach efforts on access to shelters and food banks. Programs prioritizing trust-building within communities have witnessed significant improvements in engagement and service access. Peterborough's homeless population reveals certain populations at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness, with a reported count of 42 youth aged 16 to 24 experiencing homelessness per month, 58 individuals identifying as Indigenous and 17 senior individuals (Giunta, 2022). Initiatives offering outreach services targeting specific demographics, such as youth or seniors can successfully link individuals with essential resources and support based on individualized needs. In terms of youth homelessness, developmentally, there is a substantial difference between the needs, circumstances, and physical and emotional development of a 14-year-old compared to an 18-year-old or a 23-year-old (Homeless Hub, 2021). Youth require a variety of resources to overcome homelessness, including health cards and identification, emotional support, counselling and referral services, life skills training, education and job search skills (Youths Without Shelter, 2024). As for seniors, focused services concentrate on physical disabilities, mental health, mobility support, transportation, finances and elder abuse (Homeless Hub, 2021). Not all individuals or socio-demographic groups experience homelessness in the same way or at the same rate. Similarly, not all individuals or socio-demographic groups have the same needs for assistance. Independent of demographics, the longer people are homeless the more that their health and mental health declines and their risk of being a victim of a crime increases (Gaetz, 2013).

Currently, social services provide outreach services throughout the week to various city parks to respond to community concerns as soon as possible (City of Peterborough, 2024). Outreach workers engage with individuals experiencing homelessness by offering resources and support while also taking the time to understand their personal stories and discuss their circumstances. Through a collaborative approach with community partners, these workers may

facilitate consents and assessments, as well as make referrals to various essential services including healthcare, shelters, addiction support, mental health care, housing assistance, and food programs (City of Peterborough, 2024). Additionally, in certain instances, outreach workers engage in conversations with individuals to develop a housing plan and ensure their inclusion in the Coordinated Access and the By-Name Priority List systems (City of Peterborough, 2024). As we strive to provide a collaborative approach for better utilization of shelter and food bank services, more funding should be allocated to hire more outreach workers. This will enable Peterborough to employ more members of the outreach team, enhance specialized training modules, be more equipped for any scenario, and be able to provide immediate assistance before the circumstances of instability worsen.

Conclusion

As of now, there is no evidence that our efforts to address homelessness in Canada have resulted in an overall reduction of the problem. In our ongoing efforts to address the critical issues of homelessness and food instability in Peterborough, our community remains committed to implementing tangible solutions. As we refine our approach through continuous poverty interventions, it becomes increasingly apparent that targeted investments are essential for meaningful progress. By closely examining data and identifying actionable insights, we can strategically allocate resources where they are most needed, ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness and food insecurity receive the support and assistance they require. Enhanced mental health and addiction support services are paramount in addressing the underlying challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness and food insecurity. Research has consistently shown that a significant proportion of this population grapples with untreated mental health conditions or substance abuse disorders. By investing in specialized professionals and expanding access to mental health and addiction treatment programs, we can provide comprehensive support to individuals, addressing both immediate needs and underlying issues. Furthermore, increasing outreach worker initiatives is essential for reaching marginalized populations and connecting them with vital resources and support services. Outreach workers play a crucial role in building trust, addressing barriers to accessing assistance, and guiding individuals toward pathways to stability. By investing in additional outreach workers and providing specialized training, we can improve engagement with marginalized communities and ensure that no one experiences barriers in accessing housing and food support. By providing comprehensive support and opportunities for stability and dignity, we can truly make a difference in the lives of those most vulnerable in our community. “Moving the conversation away from

homelessness as an individual problem to the conceptualization of homelessness as a result of structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances is key to being able to address the issue head-on” (Gaetz, 2013). Through strategic funding allocation and commitment to social service improvements, we can work towards a future where every individual in Peterborough has access to the support and resources they need to live a healthy lifestyle.

Appendix



Project Information Document

Research Project Title: Assisting Marginalized Individuals with Accessing the Available Social Services

Research Investigator: Macey Hodgson

Email: maceyhodgson@trentu.ca

About the Project:

The project assists marginalized individuals with accessing the available social services is focused on identifying the most effective and best-suited methods to better assist community members dealing with poverty, homelessness, and hunger. Research will be conducted on behalf of marginalized individuals to gain valuable insight into the current barriers to social services. Along with the support from experienced social service workers from local food banks and housing shelters. Your survey will be useful to the research investigator by gaining information about the needs and limitations of current social services in Peterborough, Ontario. Your information and data will be used to make informed decisions on what methods and techniques should be used in the future.

Rights as a Participant:

At any point before the collection/submission of the survey form, participants can withdraw the professional and personal information provided during their survey. Participants have the right to refuse to answer any question asked during the survey process.

Risk:

As a participant, you will not be exposed to any risk during the survey process. The survey will be conducted in person or online. Once the survey is collected/submitted, it will be analyzed anonymously (no name requirement). There will be no professional or personal risk accompanying this research project. This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Trent University Research Ethics Board.

Compensation:

As a participant, you will not be receiving any compensation. There is no monetary benefit attached to this research project.

Contact Information:

Please feel free to contact the research investigator at any time during or after the survey process. You can reach them at their institutional email, maceyhodgson@trentu.ca



Project #6031: Social Service Workers

Consent Agreement

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate, please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have to be sure that you understand what your participation will involve.

Assisting Marginalized People Who Fall Outside Traditional Social Programs:

Group 2: Social Service Workers

INVESTIGATORS: This research study is being conducted by Macey Hodgson, Joel Wiebe, Joel Cahn, Carolyn Mount, and Brittany Finigan from the Trent Community Research Centre at Trent University.

This study is funded by Peterborough and the Kawartha Chamber of Commerce.

Due to the research focusing on issues that directly impact lives, it's important to be honest about any possible conflicts of interest among the researchers, institutions, or sponsors involved. This openness is crucial to make sure our study remains unbiased and stays dedicated to helping you and others facing similar challenges. This honesty is part of our commitment to ethical research, aiming to build trust and accountability within our community.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: We're conducting this study to understand more about the challenges faced by individuals in Peterborough who are dealing with poverty, homelessness, and food insecurity. The goal is to learn how these marginalized individuals use the social services available. We want to know what works well and what could be improved to better support them and others facing similar difficulties.

The information we gather will be for a thesis, presentations at conferences, and research papers. These are ways we can share what we've learned with other researchers and the community. We will make sure that your identity is removed when sharing data to protect your privacy.

WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS: Survey forms will be made available at several food banks and shelter services in Peterborough, Ontario.

Please note that due to the digital nature of the survey, the location of participation is different for all participants. Some individuals may complete the survey at a social organization, while others may complete the form elsewhere.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Read and sign the Project Information document.
2. Read and sign the Consent Agreement form.
3. Read and sign the Informed Consent Waiver form.
4. Complete the digital survey form consisting of 21 questions (True or False, Yes or No, Select all that apply, Fill in the blank). This will take approximately **5-10 minutes**.
5. Once the form has been completed, please click the submit button.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study. There are no direct benefits to your involvement in the project, however, your participation will help collect a wider sample of data to support findings on the efficient/nonefficient methods of social service so that our community can determine what improvements should be made.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT: The level of risk for participating is minimal. Participants may be exposed to psychological risks including feeling demeaned, embarrassed, worried, or upset. The risks are no greater than what you would experience in your everyday life.

I am dedicated to minimizing any potential risks to participants' well-being and will take steps to ensure your safety and comfort throughout the study. Due to the personal nature of the questions asked, if any questions lead to discomfort, they may be skipped without giving reasoning.

CONFIDENTIALITY: We understand the importance of keeping your information private. To maintain the confidentiality of your records, the surveys will be anonymous (not requiring a name). Please note that if you withdraw consent after the form has been collected, you will not be able to exclude your data from the research.

Participants' surveys will be retained for a specific duration, in accordance with institutional deadlines. This period is set to April 1st, 2024. After this period, all participatory information will be securely and permanently destroyed to safeguard your privacy.

All records identifying participants will be securely stored with restricted access. Only authorized members of the research team, Macey Hodgson and Joel Cahn will have permission to access this information.

Your privacy is our top priority. Rest assured that any disclosed information will be handled with the utmost sensitivity and confidentiality. We encourage you to openly discuss any concerns or questions regarding the security and handling of your information.

Our commitment is to conduct this research ethically, protecting your rights and privacy throughout the process. If you have any questions or require further clarification, please reach out to one of the contacts listed below.

INCENTIVES AND/OR COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION: Please note that in this study, participants will not be paid or receive any incentives for taking part.

COSTS TO PARTICIPATION: There will be no compensation involved in this study. Your decision to participate is voluntary and we appreciate your willingness to contribute to this important research.

COMPENSATION FOR INJURY: If you experience physical and/or psychological harm related to this study, we will do our best to provide appropriate assistance. However, since this research involves minimal risk, compensation for injury is not applicable in this case. By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not waiving any legal right in the event that you are harmed during the research.

We want to assure you that your safety and comfort are a top priority, and every measure will be taken to minimize any potential risks associated with your participation. If you have any concerns about your well-being during the study, please don't hesitate to discuss them with the research team.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to participate or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip or partially complete that question. You may stop participating at any time. However please note that due to the anonymous nature, if your form has already been collected, you will not be able to receive the survey back. Your choice of whether to participate will not influence your future relations with Trent University and/or other institutions/partners/programs of the research and/or the investigators, Macey Hodgson, Joel Cahn, and Joel Wiebe involved in the research.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions or concerns about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Macey Hodgson
Research Investigator
Trent University
1600 West Bank Dr. Peterborough ON K9L 0G2
maceyhodgson@trentu.ca

Joel Cahn
Research Supervisor
Trent University
1600 West Bank Dr. Peterborough ON K9L 0G2
705-748-1011 ext. 7779
joelcahn@trentu.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Trent University Research Ethics Board, the study number is 28842. If you have questions or concerns that you don't wish to share with the researchers, please contact:

Anna Kisiala
Coordinator, Research Conduct and Reporting
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation Trent University
1600 West Bank Dr
Peterborough, ON K9L 0G2

705-748-1011 ext. 7866

annakisiala@trentu.ca

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

- I have read, or have had read to me, the information in this agreement;
- I have asked any questions I have about the study;
- By signing, I agree to participate in the study;
- I am aware I can change my mind and withdraw consent to participate at any time; I have been given a copy of this agreement; and
- I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this consent agreement.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Informed Consent Waiver

Research Project Title: Assisting Marginalized Individuals with Accessing the Available Social Services
Research Investigator: Macey Hodgson
Research Participant Name (Optional):

The survey will take approximately 5-15 minutes. We do not anticipate any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the survey or withdraw from the research at any time before the collection process. Please review the information sheet provided.

Thank you for agreeing to be surveyed as part of Project #6031: Assisting Marginalized Individuals with Accessing the Available Social Services. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken by Trent University require that participants explicitly agree to be surveyed and how the information contained in their survey will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying Information Document and sign this form to certify that you approve of the following:

- The surveys will be anonymous.
- You may leave any question blank.
- You may stop and/or withdraw from the survey at any time before the collection process.
- You may request that the survey be redone before the collection process.
- Your words may be quoted anonymously in the final report of this research.
- The survey will be analyzed by Macey Hodgson as the research investigator.
- Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your explicit approval.

The anonymous information you provide in your interview may be used in:

- Academic papers
- Presentations by the research investigator, Macey Hodgson

By signing this document, I agree that:

1. My participation in this project is voluntary.
2. I can stop taking part in the research and withdraw my information at any point before the survey has been collected.
3. I will not be receiving any compensation for my involvement in this research.
4. I may contact the researcher through email at any time if there are questions or concerns.
5. I have read and agree to the Informed Consent Waiver and the Information Document.

Printed Name

Participant's Signature

Date (YYYY-MM-DD)

Researcher's Signature

Date (YYYY-MM-DD)

Contact Information

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Trent University Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Research Investigator: Macey Hodgson
E-mail: maceyhodgson@trentu.ca

Project #6031 - Survey
Assisting Marginalized Individuals with Accessing the Available Social Services

Research Investigator: Macey Hodgson

Category B: Participant __

Question 1: What is your primary role in providing social services?

Question 2: Select the category of social service organization that you work for:

- Shelter
- Food Bank
- Both
- Other _____ (optional)

Question 3: How long have you been working/volunteering for this position?

- Less than one year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- Longer than 5 years

Question 4: What are the operating hours for the organization that you work for?

- Open 24/7
- Daytime hours only (8 am-6 pm)
- Evening and nighttime hours only (6 pm-2 am)
- Weekends
- Seasonal variation (please specify: _____)
- Varied hours throughout the year
- Unsure
- Other: _____

Question 5: What is the primary goal of the organization that you work for?

- Immediate crisis intervention
- Long-term solutions
- Both a and b
- Other: _____ (optional)

Question 6: Which specific populations are the primary focus of the social service organization? (Select all that apply)

- Women
- Men
- Children
- Families
- Veterans
- LGBTQ+
- Elderly
- Other: _____ (optional)
- All of the above

Question 7: What is the average user or occupancy rate at the social service organization that you work for?

- 0-20%
- 20-40%
- 40-60%
- 60-80%
- 80-100%

Question 8: What do you feel are the most pressing immediate needs of marginalized individuals in the community. (Select 1-3 answers)

- ___ Shelter
- ___ Food/Water
- ___ Clothing
- ___ Hygiene products
- ___ Healthcare
- ___ Education
- ___ Employment
- ___ Heat (ex: during winter)
- ___ Cooling (ex: during summer)

Question 9: Based on your interactions and experience, what barriers do clients commonly face in accessing social services? (select all that apply)

- Limited Awareness
- Transportation Challenges
- Limited Operating Hours
- Capacity Limits
- Discrimination/Stigmatization
- Documentation Requirements
- Other: _____ (optional)

Question 10: What are the primary challenges you face in providing social service assistance to marginalized individuals in Peterborough? (select all that apply)

- Limited resources
- High demand
- Limited staff training
- Stigmatization
- Lack of affordable housing
- Barriers to employment
- Other: _____ (optional)

Question 11: Mental health services are integrated into the social service program that you work for. If yes, please elaborate or identify which population.

- No
- Yes: _____

Question 12: Are there specific populations that you have observed face greater challenges in accessing social services?

- No
- Yes: _____ (optional)

Question 13: How is the social service program that you work for customized to meet the unique needs of individuals?

- Personal assistance plans
- Cultural sensitivity training
- Language interpretation services
- Flexible service hours
- Mental health support
- Resource availability
- Collaboration with other services
- It is not customized
- Other: _____ (optional)

Question 14: How would you describe the coordination efforts with other social service organizations in Peterborough?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Question 15: Is there a local organization that you have partnered with/worked closely with?

- No
- Yes: _____ (optional)

Question 16: How are marginalized community members involved in the social service program that you work for?

- Community feedback sessions
- Community advisory boards
- Collaborative community projects
- Regular surveys and assessments
- Unsure
- Other: _____ (optional)

Question 17: The organization that you work for actively uses social media as part of the outreach strategy to inform the community of the available resources.

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Infrequently
- Never
- Unsure

Question 18: From your perspective, what improvements could be made to existing social service programs to better serve marginalized individuals? (select all that apply)

- Increased funding
- More advertisement
- Simplify Intake Processes
- Collaboration networks between agencies and organizations
- Flexible operating hours
- Enhanced mental health support
- Employment training programs
- Client feedback mechanisms
- More outreach workers
- Other: _____ (optional)

Question 19: Other thoughts or suggestions for improving Peterborough's shelter and/or food bank services. (optional)

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