



# CALLING HOME

Exploring Homelessness in our City

Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Study

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Employment and Social Development Canada program.

Canada 

**DIXON** 



This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Innovative Solutions to Homelessness program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

Toronto's homelessness crisis has been worsening for decades. The city has witnessed a rise in rental prices, decline in availability of decent jobs and cuts to social spending. Life is especially challenging for Toronto's homeless population during winter. It is during this season that homeless deaths skyrocket. The City of Toronto (2018, [Deaths of People]) reported 145 homeless deaths between January 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018. The Out of the Cold (OOTC) program aims to support the homeless population during the coldest months of the year by providing food, shelter, clothing and donated items. Their client intervention workers also help provide housing solutions. The OOTC program in Toronto is offered by sixteen faith-based organizations, and is funded by the City of Toronto, with management support provided by Dixon Hall. Although the program has been in operation for three decades, no formal research has been conducted to understand who the program's users – or guests – are. The *Innovative Solutions to Homelessness* study was conducted to better understand:

- OOTC guests' personal histories of housing, homelessness and service access;
- the difference in experience in OOTC sites and shelters;
- the reasons for OOTC guests' attachment to the OOTC program and other options outside the shelter system;
- the benefits of smartphone technology for the homeless population and in research involving homeless participants.

This study used a community-based research approach. It aimed to empower participants to share their stories and to offer their suggestions around service improvement based on their lived experiences. The research team developed a mixed methods study design; they gathered quantitative data through closed-ended personal interview survey questions and qualitative data through open-ended focus group and survey questions. In March and April, 2018, five preliminary focus groups were conducted with shelter residents as well as with OOTC guests and staff. This was followed by two stages of personal interview surveys in June and October 2018; 89 interviews were conducted. Fifty-one smartphones donated by Freedom Mobile were distributed to OOTC guest research participants to facilitate communication with researchers and housing workers. Transcription as well as data entry and analysis began in June. Findings will be conveyed to stakeholders with the goal of improving access to necessary resources and housing opportunities.

This study found that OOTC guests have on average been homeless longer than shelter residents. Two measures were used for length of homelessness: 1) when last housed and 2) longest period of homelessness. On average, OOTC guests were housed seven years ago, while shelter residents were housed 3.6 years ago. On average, the longest period of homelessness was 7.2 years for OOTC guests and 3.4 years for shelter residents. While loss of job or income, stressful life events, health issues and family breakdown were cited as the causes of homelessness for both groups, OOTC guests cited loss of job or income more often than did shelter residents and shelter residents cited stressful life events, health issues and family breakdown more often than did OOTC guests. With respect to the barriers that made it challenging to maintain housing, OOTC guests emphasized finances, building safety and unfair landlords, while shelter residents emphasized unclean or mouldy accommodations.

This study explored the relationship between homelessness and health issues, with a focus on mental health, addictions and mobility issues. Both OOTC guests and shelter residents discussed the importance of increasing access to addictions support, harm reduction support and mental health services. The underfunding of these services has grave consequences such as poverty, lower life expectancy and homelessness. This study found that OOTC guests living with addictions have been homeless on average twice as long as those living without addictions. OOTC guest respondents self-reported living with addictions more often than did shelter residents, although a higher percentage of shelter residents living with addictions sought supports. Meanwhile, a higher percentage of shelter residents self-identified living with mental health challenges. More than half the survey respondents who self-reported living with mental health challenges were accessing mental health supports. This study also found correlations between mobility constraints and socioeconomic status. OOTC guests with mobility issues had lower income and have been without housing for longer than guests without mobility issues.

OOTC guests reported using many services. Survey responses indicate that they tend to seek out services more often than do shelter residents. They also identified more support needs. The slashing of social services and shortage of affordable housing have left some respondents feeling defeated and disinterested in being housed. However, a large percentage – 83.3% – of both groups are still interested in being housed.

OOTC guests described various factors that drew them to the program. For instance, staff and volunteers make key contributions to program success. Respondents used descriptors such as *non-judgemental*, *compassionate*, and *respectful* to characterize them. The strong relationship between staff, volunteers and clients has led to high success rates around housing; 173 Dixon Hall clients have been housed since 2016. This relationship, as well as interpersonal relationships between guests have contributed to a sense of belonging to the program. Guests also felt a sense of security because Dixon Hall staff were present in the sleeping areas overnight. They valued the physical provisions (e.g. nutritious meals, tokens, clothing, etc.). They felt the sites were clean and they appreciated the low barrier intake process that afforded them anonymity and privacy.

Study participants also identified various benefits of having smartphones. They cited practical advantages, such as the ability to search the weather and use the phone alarm, as well as deeply psychological, emotional and social benefits such as decrease in social isolation and increase in social interaction. However, some did also feel the technology was difficult to operate.

Various actors, including different levels of government, places of worship, and non-profit organizations are working toward solutions to the homelessness crisis. In 2017, the federal government introduced Canada's first ever National Housing Strategy, and in 2018, the municipal government introduced the Housing Now initiative. While these efforts may help to address the crisis, more research and actions are needed to eliminate homelessness. Conversations with research participants highlighted critical needs of the homeless population. These include the need to:

- Improve the income security system;
- Increase deeply affordable housing stock;
- Increase the number of supportive housing units, diversify populations served by supportive housing units, and integrate supportive housing units into all communities across our city;
- Design effective workforce strategies for individuals who work in the shelters and respites and social housing field;
- Assure a continuity of services to individuals who access the range of Shelter, Respite and Out of the Cold Programs in the City of Toronto;
- Increase opportunities for decent employment, peer programming and community engagement. Survey respondents asked for peer workshops, skills development and professional employment supports;
- Build Strategic Community relationships to assure collaborative community-based shelter and Housing initiatives;
- Make evidence-based research and program decisions in collaboration with People with Lived Experience;
- Invest in research that assures continued commitment to the implementation of best practices in serving homeless men and women, assuring that we as a city can foresee and mitigate trends that affect our city to the best of our capacity;
- Enshrine Housing as a Human Right in legislation as per the National Housing Strategy (NHS).

## 2.0 Introduction

The *Innovative Solutions to Homelessness* study is both Dixon Hall's first formal research project and the first formal study exploring the Out of the Cold (OOTC) program user or "guest" population. It was funded by Employment and Social Development Canada. The objectives of this study were to:

- Define demographic characteristics of this population;
- Understand the reasons for guests' preferences for the OOTC program and for other options outside the shelter system (e.g. 24-hour respite sites);
- Explore the difference in individual histories of housing, homelessness, and service access between OOTC guests and shelter residents;
- Compare the complex needs of OOTC guests and shelter residents;
- Test the use of cell phones in research involving homeless participants;
- Understand the benefits of cellphone technology for the homeless population;
- Inform stakeholders of research findings with the goal of improving access to necessary resources and housing opportunities.

## 2.1 OOTC Program

According to the City's Medical Officer of Health, cold weather is unsafe for people living on the streets, whether it is -1°C or -15°C (Draaisma, 2017). In 1987, Sister Susan Moran, Canon John Erb, Father John Murphy and students at St. Micheal's College co-founded the Out of the Cold program in



response to the death of a homeless man whom they had befriended that year. It later evolved into an interfaith program with the goal of responding “to the basic physical needs of shelter, food and warm clothing for the less fortunate members of our society – as well as...the deeply human needs of compassion, dignity and feelings of self-worth” (Home, n.d.). Since 2013, Dixon Hall has been providing support services to sixteen OOTC sites across the city in the form of management, security, safety, and cleaning supports as well as data coordination and analysis. These sites include:

<b>All Saints Kingsway Anglican</b>
<b>Beth Emeth</b>
<b>Beth Sholom / Beth Tzedec</b>
<b>Blythwood Road Baptist</b>
<b>Chinese Gospel</b>
<b>Eastminster United</b>
<b>Evangel Hall</b>
<b>First Interfaith at St. Matthew’s</b>
<b>Holy Blossom Temple</b>
<b>Knox United</b>
<b>Lakeshore at St Margaret’s Church</b>
<b>Out of the Cold in the Beach</b>
<b>St. Brigid’s Annex</b>
<b>St. Patrick’s</b>
<b>St. Mathew Our Lady Peace</b>
<b>Yorkminster Park Baptist</b>

Dixon Hall also provides Client Intervention Workers who provide case management services and aim to connect guests with housing opportunities. The program is delivered by volunteers and coordinated by faith group staff. The sixteen faith-based organizations provide sleeping mats to overnight guests, and at select sites offer clothing, legal clinics, foot care, and laundry facilities. Every night of program operation, an evening meal is cooked and served by volunteers for overnight guests. The evening meal is also open for community members.

## 3.0 Background and Context

### 3.1 Canada’s Homelessness Crisis

Income inequality has been on the rise in Canada for over two decades (“Income Inequality,” n.d.). The Conference Board of Canada ranked Canada 12<sup>th</sup> out of the 17 wealthiest countries in the world with respect to income inequality (Farha et al, 2018). Among the most extreme forms of this poverty and marginalization is homelessness; twenty-five thousand Canadians are chronically homeless and 1.7 million Canadian families do not have a home that meets their basic needs (“What is the,” n.d.; Walks, 2013). In their report, *The Opportunity Equation in the Greater Toronto Area: An Update on neighbourhood income inequality and polarization*, Dinca-Panaitescu et al (2017) state that Toronto is the Canadian capital of income disparity. In an earlier report, *The Three Cities within Toronto: Income Polarization Among Toronto’s Neighbourhoods, 1970 – 2005*, Hulchanski (2010) noted that low-

middle-, and high-income groups in Toronto moved apart between 1970 and 2005; 29 percent of Toronto neighbourhoods were defined as middle income in 2005, as compared to two-thirds in 1970. During that same period, the proportion of high-income neighbourhoods grew from 15 percent to 19 percent, and the proportion of low-income areas grew from 19 percent to 53 percent (“2014-2019 Housing Stability,” n.d.). There has been a simultaneous growth in the homeless population during this time. According to the 2018 Street Needs Assessment (SNA), over 8,700 people are currently homeless in Toronto (Toronto Alliance to, n.d.).

There are many consequences to not having adequate housing. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, it can affect one’s ability to obtain and maintain employment, to recover from mental health challenges and other disabilities, to integrate into the community, to escape physical or emotional violence, or to maintain custody of children (“Housing as a,” n.d.). Homelessness can also significantly reduce life expectancy, by as much as 40% according to a 2017 article by Paul Webster called *Bringing homeless deaths to light* (Webster, 2017). At least 792 homeless deaths have been reported in Toronto since 1985, 145 of which were reported between January 2017 and June 2018 (Staff, 2019; Draaisma, 2017). Some of the most complex challenges are faced by Aboriginal people and African-Canadians as well as those members of our communities living with mental health challenges (“Housing as a,” n.d.; Webster, 2017).

Toronto’s shelters are experiencing overcrowding due to this homelessness crisis; they are operating at well beyond the 90 per cent capacity mark set by Toronto city council. Respite sites are responding to the growing homeless population by extending services to operate year-round. According to veteran street nurse, Cathy Crowe, the system is “crowded. It’s not healthy. There’s a lot of violence and tension” (Janus, 2018). In fact, some homeless people feel the streets offer a safer environment than does the shelter system. According to Lauren Gostick, a frontline social worker:

The shelter systems in general are broken and they’re old.  
You’re thrown in with a large group of people who are all in an immediate,  
acute crisis situation. One person may have extreme mental health issues,  
another is dealing with substance abuse and somebody else is  
smoking crack in the bed across from you. It’s survival of the fittest (Woolley, 2015).

Approximately 1,000 people are also using respite sites and overnight drop-in centres, which often do not have adequate bathrooms, shower facilities or other amenities (Janus, 2018).

### 3.2 Pathway to Canada’s Homelessness Crisis

The circumstances that give rise to homelessness are diverse. They include structural factors as well as personal and relational issues (“Causes of Homelessness,” n.d.). This section will focus on structural factors. In Canada, the federal withdrawal from housing investment, increase in rents, and decrease in vacancy rates have led to a rise in homelessness (Gaetz et al, n.d.; “2014-2019 Housing Stability,” n.d.). Between 1970 and 2005, the annual federal spending on low-income affordable housing dropped from over \$115 to just over \$60 per capita (adjusted to 2013 dollars) (Gaetz et al, n.d.). Housing affordability is particularly a problem in Toronto. Housing is considered unaffordable when 30% or more of a household’s pre-tax income goes toward shelter costs, which include rent, mortgage payments,

taxes or repairs. In Toronto, 19.8% of total households and 43.5% of renter households spend more than this percentage of their income on shelter (“2014-2019 Housing Stability,” n.d.). Toronto is the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) with the highest incidence of core housing need in Canada, with nearly one-fifth of its households living in dwellings which are unaffordable, inadequate in condition, or unsuitable in size (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2017). That there are currently 90,000 households in Toronto waiting for a subsidized unit to become available is testament to this insufficient housing investment (“2014-2019 Housing Stability,” n.d.). Structural factors also include a decrease in investments in social and health supports, eviction prevention services and housing follow-up programs (Gaetz et al, n.d.; 34). Research shows that housing insecure populations need access to supports such as programs that connect them to services, assistance in finding affordable housing (e.g. through a Housing Help Centre), rent subsidies (e.g. Rent Bank loans), emergency shelter beds, subsidized units in social housing, as well as on-site assistance and supports in daily living (“2014-2019 Housing Stability,” n.d.).

Another factor that gives rise to housing instability is the replacement of well-paying, full-time, permanent jobs with part-time, temporary contract positions (Gaetz et al, n.d.; 34). These changes to Toronto’s labour market pose a barrier to finding and maintaining employment. At just over 8.5 percent, Toronto’s unemployment rate is higher than the provincial and national rates (5.9% and 5.6%, respectively) (“Labour market report,” n.d.; “2014-2019 Housing Stability,” n.d.; Staff, 2018). In the last two decades, employment precarity has risen nearly 50 percent, with at least 20 percent of southern Ontario’s employed population facing employment precarity in 2013 (“2014-2019 Housing Stability,” n.d.).

While Canada has signed or ratified many international covenants (e.g. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) signifying support for the notion that housing is a human right, this right is not enshrined in any Canadian legislation – not even the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Farha et al, 2018; “Housing Should be,” n.d.). During a press conference where an open letter written by Amnesty International Canada, Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty in Canada, Canada Without Poverty, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Emily Paradis (housing and homelessness researcher), and the Social Rights Advocacy Centre was released, Tim Richter (President of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness) stated “Canada’s housing and homelessness crisis is the result of a failure to protect human rights” (Farha et al, 2018). The letter demanded that legislation “explicitly recognize the right to housing as defined in international human rights law”. According to Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, doing so would prevent federal and provincial governments from backing out of affordable housing commitments (Pedwell, 2018). On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, the federal Liberal government committed to “progressively [implementing] the right of every Canadian to access adequate housing” (Farha et al, 2018).

### 3.3 Solutions in the Works

#### 3.3.1 National Housing Strategy

The National Housing Strategy will invest \$40 billion toward cutting chronic homelessness in half, removing 530,000 families from housing need and building as many as 100,000 new affordable homes (“What is the”, n.d.; “Who does the”, n.d.). The federal government has proposed to provide Ontario with \$7.4 billion in new contributions through this strategy (“An Affordable Housing”, 2018). The strategy’s six priority areas for action include:

- **Housing for those in greatest need.** The strategy commits to supporting women and children fleeing domestic violence, seniors, young adults, indigenous peoples, people living with disabilities, people living with mental health and addictions challenges, veterans, the LGBTQ2+ population, racialized groups, newcomers (especially refugees), people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations (“About the initiatives”, 2018).
- **Community housing sustainability.** The federal government proposes to improve the sustainability of community housing and to build the capacity of providers (“About the initiatives”, 2018).
- **Indigenous housing.** Underfunded, overcrowded and in dire need of repair, indigenous households experience some of the most difficult challenges around housing in Canada. The NHS will heed Indigenous leaders’ calls to afford indigenous peoples, organizations and communities more autonomy around housing, as well as to “co-develop federally supported distinctions-based First Nations, Inuit and Metis Nation housing strategies founded in principles of self-determination, reconciliation, respect and co-operation” (“About the initiatives”, 2018).
- **Northern housing.** Northern communities are sparsely populated and face low employment rates, cyclical resource-based economics, limited capacity for sustainable growth, uncertain economic futures, extreme climate conditions, and high living costs. The NHS has allocated \$300 million to improving housing conditions in these communities (“About the initiatives”, 2018).
- **Sustainable housing and communities.** This strategy is focused on ensuring housing is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable (“About the initiatives”, 2018).
- **Balanced supply of housing.** The NHS proposes to create new affordable rental supply, addressing diverse housing needs of Canadians and working toward creating affordable homeownership options (“About the initiatives”, 2018).

#### 3.3.2 Housing Now

In January, Toronto city councillors voted 21-4 in favor of the Housing Now initiative. This initiative will create 10,187 residential units. It aims to build mixed-income communities near transit, as well as commercial and employment areas. City Council has approved the initial allocation of \$20 million for affordable housing, of which \$1 million will support the participation of non-profit organizations in the initiative (“Implementing the ‘Housing,’” 2019). The *Implementing the “Housing Now” Initiative* report for action proposes a minimum two-thirds of the 10,187 residential units will be rental units, half of which (approximately 3,700) will be affordable rental housing units with rents set not to exceed 80% of Toronto’s average market rent (“Implementing the ‘Housing,’” 2019; Rider, 2019). The monthly rent for these units will range between \$549 and \$1,372 (Rider, 2019). Approximately 363 of these units

would be “deeply affordable” (i.e. two-thirds of average market rent) (Rider, 2019). The remainder will include 3,700 market rental units and roughly 2,600 market ownership units (“Implementing the ‘Housing,’ 2019).

## 4.0 Research Methodology

This study used a community-based research (CBR) approach. CBR “involves active participation of stakeholders, those whose lives are affected by the issue being studied, in all phases of research for the purpose of producing useful results to make positive changes” (Nelson, 1998). It strives to be action-oriented and to encourage community self-determination (Ochocka & Janzen, 2014). Through this study, research participants were empowered to share their stories.

This study used mixed methods; it integrated quantitative data obtained through closed-ended survey questions and qualitative data obtained through open-ended focus group and survey questions (Fig. 1). Freedom Mobile donated 75 smartphones with 7-month paid plans, 51 of which were distributed to research participants during the study to allow researchers to remain in contact with study participants as well as to explore the benefits of this technology beyond participation in the project.



Figure 1: The Innovative Solutions to Homelessness study research methodology.

## 4.1 Phase 1

During the first phase of the study, a formal ethics review was conducted by a neutral, third party. This was followed by the first of a two-part “Community Based Research” training led by Dr. Winnie Ng, the former Social Justice Chair at Ryerson University. Next, five preliminary focus groups involving 20 OOTC guests, 10 shelter residents and 9 OOTC staff were conducted. The findings from these focus groups informed the survey questions. The details of these focus groups are given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Preliminary focus group participants and locations.**

Focus Group Participants	Location
<b>OOTC guests</b>	Beach United Church
<b>OOTC guests</b>	First Interfaith
<b>OOTC guests</b>	Dixon Hall
<b>OOTC site staff</b>	Regent Park Community Centre
<b>Shelter residents</b>	Heyworth House

## 4.2 Phase 2

The second portion of the CBR training was conducted during the second phase of the project. This phase also involved two stages of one-on-one intensive personal interview surveys. The first stage of interviews was conducted by seven researchers throughout June 2018. Thirty-seven OOTC guests and 36 shelter residents participated in these interviews. The second stage of interviews was conducted by four researchers throughout October 2018. Eleven OOTC guests and six shelter residents who had participated in June surveys were engaged during this stage of interviews.

Data entry and analysis began in June. Qualitative data was transcribed using NCH Express Scribe Transcription Software and quantitative data was entered into Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. A nine-member operational team collaboratively analyzed and coded qualitative findings manually, following which the Principal Investigator and OOTC Research Project Data Analyst created a coding framework. Quantitative findings were analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel software.

## 5.0 Results

### 5.1 OOTC Staff Focus Group

The focus group conducted with OOTC staff highlighted many difficulties this population faces around finding and maintaining housing. These include complex issues (e.g. mental health, addictions, etc.), the lack of life skills (e.g. cooking, cleaning, budgeting, etc.), and disinterest in housing due to tax debts, bad credit, criminal history, citizenship status and the lack of decent, affordable housing. OOTC staff also noted opportunities for improvement to the OOTC program. They emphasized the need for additional work to be done with site volunteers and coordinators around mental health awareness and recommended more mental health supports and resources be made available to guests on site. They suggested OOTC sites provide more programs and services catering to the needs of guests and that referrals be made when their needs are not met on site. They also noted the frustration felt by guests around policy inconsistencies across sites.



## 5.2 June Surveys: OOTC Guest Respondents

### 5.2.1 Who are the OOTC Guests?

Responses to the personal profile portion of the surveys provide a snapshot of the demographic attributes of the OOTC guest population. However, it should be noted that while 1,260 people used the OOTC Program during the 2017/2018 season, only 37 OOTC guests participated in this study. This sample may be unrepresentative of the larger OOTC guest population.

The mean age of the OOTC guests who participated in this study was 49.5. This is higher than the mean age of the homeless population who participated in the City of Toronto's 2018 SNA – 41 years of age. There was also a notable difference in age distribution. While the largest age group of OOTC guest survey respondents (Fig. 2) was 55 to 59 years old, the largest age group of SNA respondents (Fig. 3) was 35 to 39 years old, and while the proportion of seniors (60 years and older) was comparable between the two populations, the proportion of youth (ages 16 – 24) was not. There were no youth OOTC guest survey respondents, but 10% of the SNA respondents were youth.

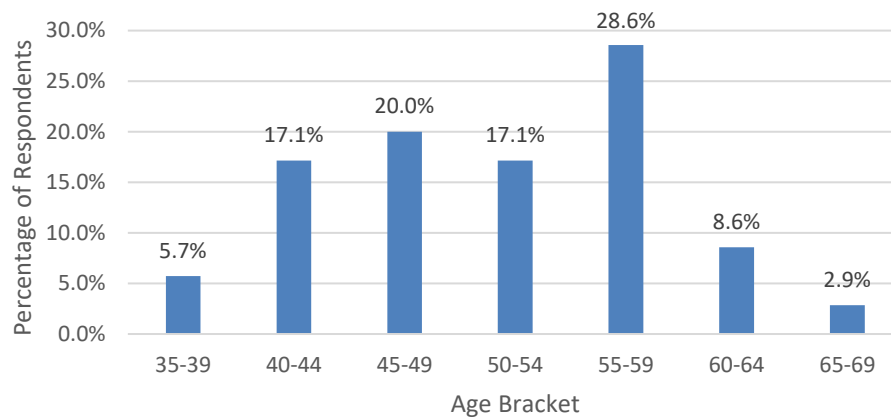


Figure 2: Age distribution of OOTC guest survey respondents.

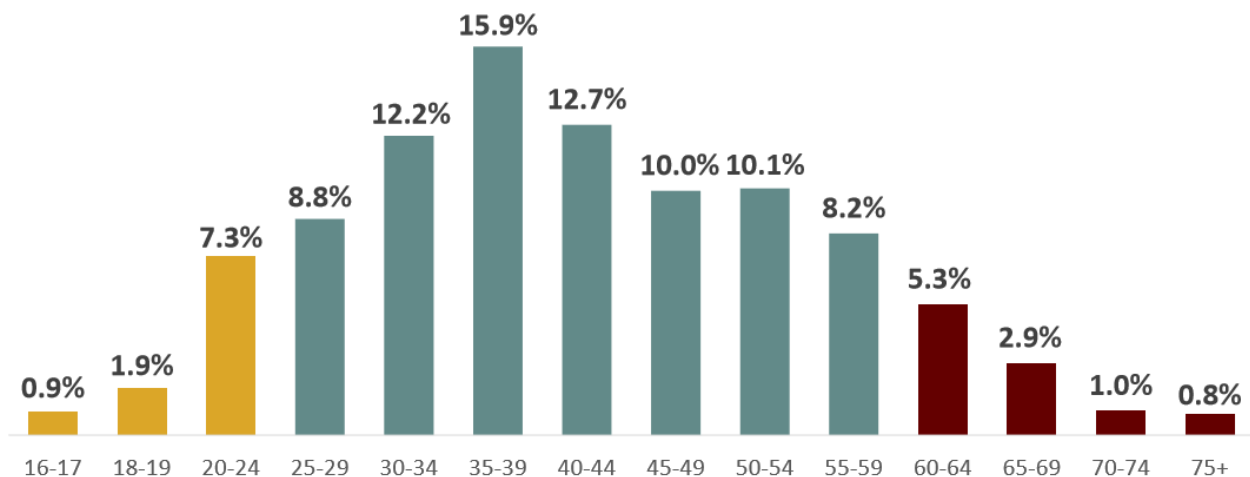


Figure 3: Age distribution of Toronto's homeless population according to the 2018 SNA.

This study found that men represented the overwhelming majority of OOTC guests; 78.4% (n = 29) of respondents identified as men and 21.6% (n = 8) as women (Fig. 4). These findings are not consistent with those of the SNA findings. While the majority of SNA respondents (54%) were also male, the female population represented twice that of the OOTC guest female population (42%) (“2018 Street Needs,” 2018).

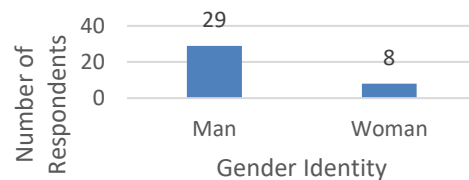


Figure 4: Gender identity of OOTC guest survey respondents.

Figure 5 presents the sexual orientation of OOTC guest survey respondents. Heterosexual guests represented 86.5% (n = 32) of this population, bisexual respondents represented 2.7%, while 5.4% (n = 2) selected the “prefer not to answer” option. One methodological limitation to this study was that “transgender, transsexual, or gender non-conforming” was listed as both gender and sexual orientation categories. While no respondents selected the “transgender” gender identity category, 5.4% (n = 2) selected “transgender, transsexual, or gender non-conforming” sexual orientation category. In future studies, this option should only be listed as a gender identity category.

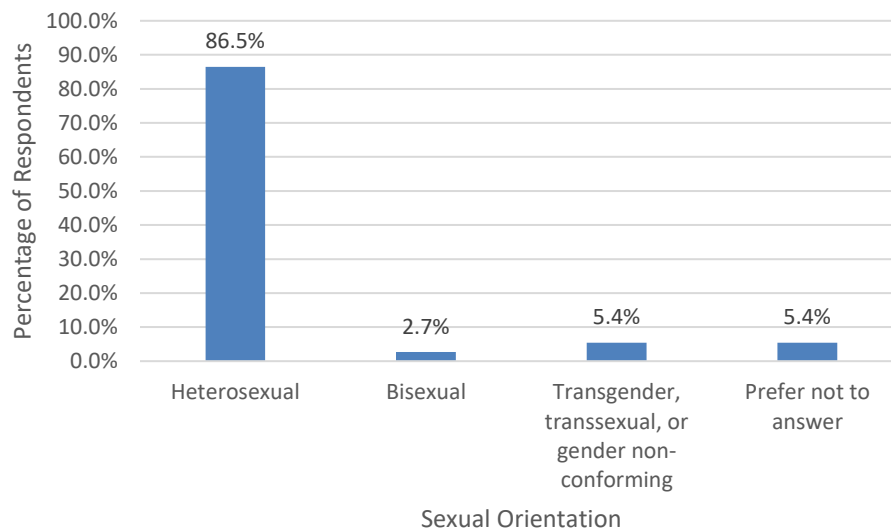
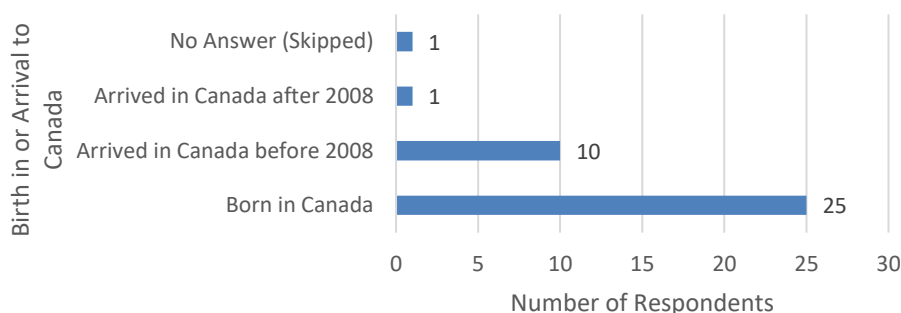


Figure 5: Sexual orientation of OOTC guest survey respondents.

Immigrants represented a lower proportion of the OOTC guest population than they did the homeless population in Toronto. When asked whether they were Canadian-born, 67.6% (n = 25) of OOTC guest survey respondents answered that they were born in Canada, 27% (n = 10) answered that they arrived in Canada before 2008, 2.7% (n = 1) answered that they arrived after 2008, and 2.7% (n = 1)

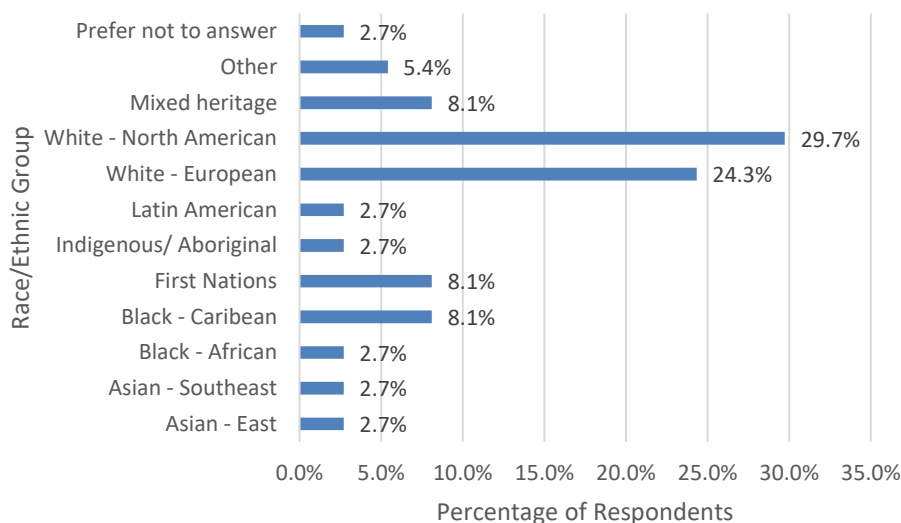


skipped the question (Fig. 6). Hence, immigrants accounted for 29.7%, ( $n = 11$ ) of the OOTC population, while they accounted for 52% of the SNA respondents (“2018 Street Needs,” 2018).



**Figure 6: OOTC guest survey respondents' birth in or arrival to Canada.**

The OOTC guest survey respondents were less racially and ethnically diverse than the larger homeless population. More than half – 54.1% ( $n = 20$ ) – of the OOTC guest respondents identified as white; 29.7% ( $n = 11$ ) identified as “White – North American” and 24.3% ( $n = 9$ ) identified as “White – European” (Fig. 7). Meanwhile, 37% of SNA respondents identified as white. While the 2018 SNA found that nearly two-thirds of the homeless population in Toronto self-identified as members of racialized groups, only 37.8% of OOTC guest survey respondents self-identified as racialized. The second largest racial/ethnic identity group in the SNA was the Black – African population, who made up 31% of respondents. This identity group only accounted for 2.7% of OOTC guest survey respondents.



**Figure 7: Racial/ethnic identity of OOTC guest survey respondents.**

The causal relationship between living with physical disabilities and homelessness is well-established (Boisvert, 2018). Individuals with disabilities face unique challenges around finding long-term employment and receiving disability benefits and are thus at particular risk of living below the

poverty line (Boisvert, 2018). The recent proposed changes to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) eligibility requirements may make it more difficult for Ontarians to qualify for ODSP assistance, which could possibly have serious consequences for people living with disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2017). Figure 8 shows that 24.3% (n = 9) of OOTC guest survey respondents reported living with mobility issues. Similar findings were reported by the SNA regarding homeless people living with physical disabilities; 23% of respondents reported living with a physical disability. However, since physical disabilities include challenges around flexibility, dexterity and pain, in addition to mobility, it is not clear whether these numbers are comparable (Education & Homelessness, n.d.).

This study also found a correlation between mobility impairment and income. Figure 9 demonstrates that the majority of OOTC guest survey respondents with mobility issues – 62.5% (n = 5) – survive on a monthly income of \$401 - \$800. While half (n = 7) of the OOTC guests without mobility issues reported a monthly income of more than \$800 (Fig. 10), only three (37.5%) OOTC guests with mobility issues reported this monthly income (Fig. 9). Moreover, the study found a link between mobility impairment and length of homelessness. OOTC guests were asked when they were last housed; the mean value for OOTC guests with mobility issues was 8.4 years, while this value for OOTC guests without mobility issues was 4.1 years. OOTC guests were also asked their longest period of homelessness; the mean value for those with mobility issues was 7.4 years, while this value was 3.5 years for those without mobility issues.

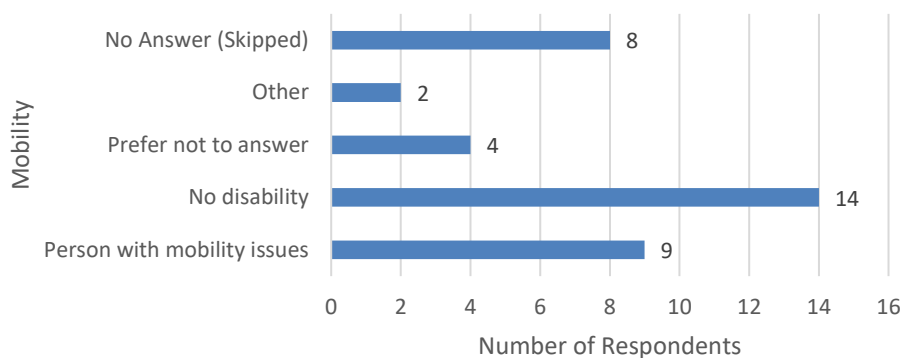


Figure 8: OOTC guest survey respondents living with mobility issues.

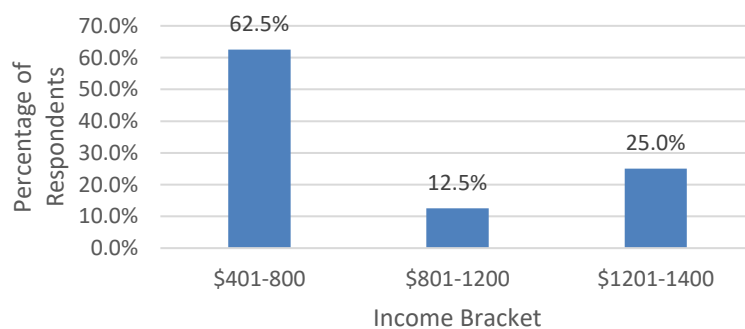


Figure 9: Income distribution of OOTC guest survey respondents living with mobility issues.

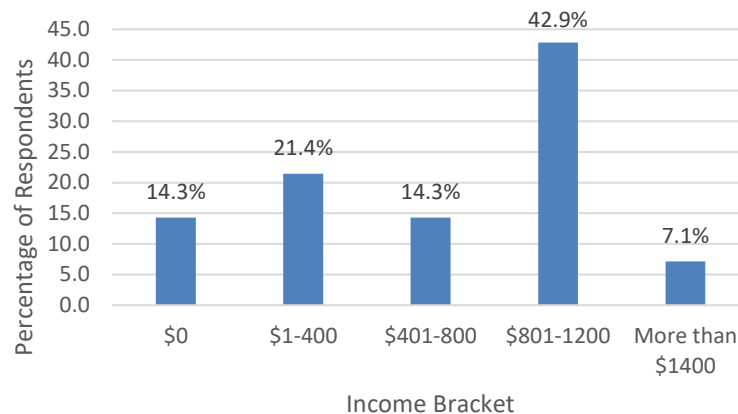


Figure 10: Income distribution of OOTC guest survey respondents living without mobility issues.

Mental health challenges were not as prevalent among OOTC guest respondents as they were among 2018 SNA respondents. While 16.2% (n=6) of the former self-reported living with mental health challenges, 32% of the latter self-reported living with them. It should be noted, however, that this might not be an accurate reflection of the proportion of OOTC guests living with mental health challenges. Compared with physical illness, these challenges are underreported as a result of the associated stigma and the fluctuating course of mental health challenges (“Prevalence of Mental,” 2014). Research shows that approximately two-thirds of Canadians suffering from mental health challenges avoid seeking treatment for fear of negative perception as well as concerns around how their lives would be affected (“Prevalence of Mental,” 2014 [Psychiatry & Behavioural]). Meanwhile, addictions were more prevalent among OOTC guest respondents than 2018 SNA respondents; 37.8% (n = 14) of the former reported living with an addiction, while 27% of the latter reported living with one. Moreover, this study found a correlation between addictions and length of homelessness. Survey respondents were asked when they were last housed; the mean value for the OOTC guests living with addictions was 10.3 years, while the mean value for those living without addictions was 4.1 years. They were also asked to share the longest period of time that they had been homeless. The mean value for respondents living with addictions was 10.3 years, while it was 5 years for those living without addictions. Many individuals living with alcohol abuse or dependence also suffer from psychiatric conditions; this dual diagnosis is referred to as comorbidity (“Comorbidity of Alcoholism,” n.d.). It is difficult to track the rates of these concurrent disorders (Khan, 2017). There are unique challenges associated with treating comorbid patients and these individuals often experience long hospital stays, high risk of relapse when illnesses are not treated simultaneously, and subsequently high readmission rates (“Comorbidity of Alcoholism,” n.d.; Khan, 2017). These individuals also often have poorer physical health outcomes than do people with a single disorder (Khan, 2017).

In 2017, Statistics Canada (n.d.) defined the low-income cut-off (LICO) before tax for an unattached individual living in an urban area with a population larger than 500,000 to be \$25,338. By this definition, every OOTC guest respondent was low income; 5.4% (n = 2) self-reported no income, 16.2% (n = 6) earned between \$1 – 400, 29.7% (n = 11) earned between \$401-800, 24.3% (n = 9) earned between \$801 and 1200, 8.1% (n = 3) earned between \$1201 and \$1400, 2.7% (n = 1) earned more than

\$1400, 10.8% (n = 4) skipped the question and 2.7% (n = 1) selected “no response” (Fig. 11). With respect to source of income, Ontario Works (OW) and ODSP represent the main sources; 37.8% (n = 14) received ODSP, 27% (n = 10) received OW (Fig. 12). These findings are consistent with the SNA findings; 33% of SNA respondents received ODSP and 21% received OW. Among the remaining respondents, 13.5% (n = 5) selected “other”, 2.7% (n = 1) were supported by family and/or friends, 2.7% (n = 1) had a part-time job, and 2.7% (n = 1) received old age security (OAS) (Fig. 12). Two (5.4%) selected “prefer not to answer”, while three (8.1%) skipped the question. Other sources of income included employment insurance benefits (EI), odd jobs and redeeming recyclables.

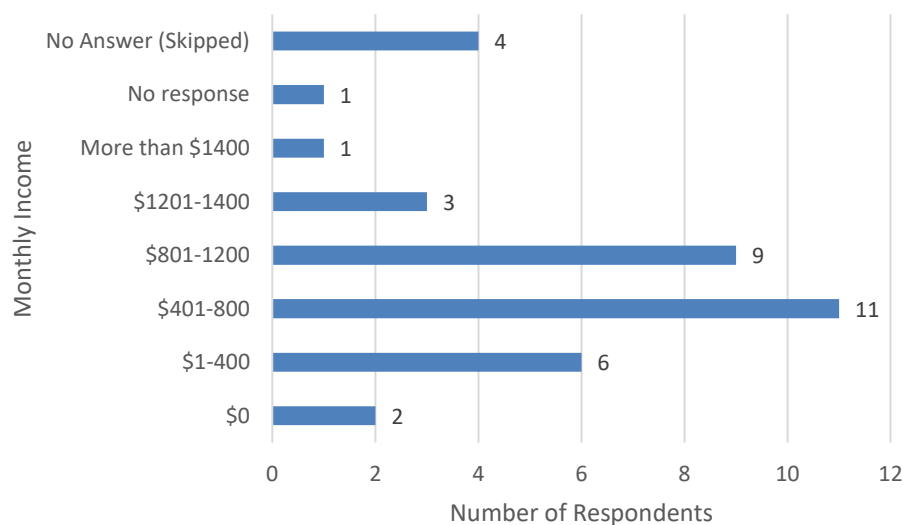


Figure 11: OOTC guest survey respondents' monthly income.

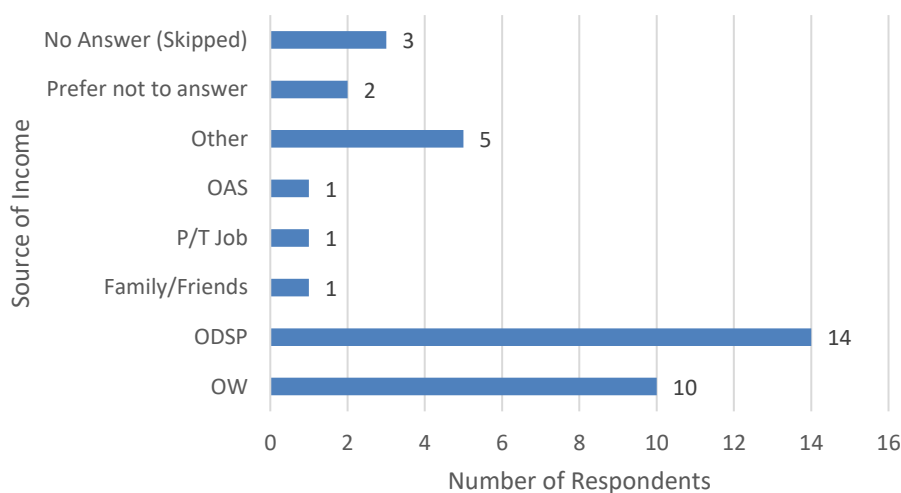


Figure 12: OOTC guest survey respondents' sources of income.

The Homeless Hub describes the consequences of lower educational attainment with respect to employment, finances and housing. It points to studies that demonstrate that 63% to 90% of homeless youth and 64% of shelter users do not complete high school (Education & Homelessness, n.d.). However, rates of high school incompleteness were much lower among OOTC guest survey respondents than the national rates (34%); only 10.8% of respondents had less than a high school diploma, while 29.7% (n = 11) reported high school as their highest level of education, 35.1% (n = 13) had completed some college, 2.7% (n = 1) had completed a bachelor's degree, 2.7% (n = 1) had completed a Master's degree, 5.4% (n = 2) skipped the question and 10.8% (n = 4) selected "other" (Fig. 13). These other responses included college diploma, some university, an unspecified university degree, and on-the-job training. More accurate statistics could have been produced had more adequate response options been provided on the survey; while there was an option for "some college", there was no option for "college diploma".

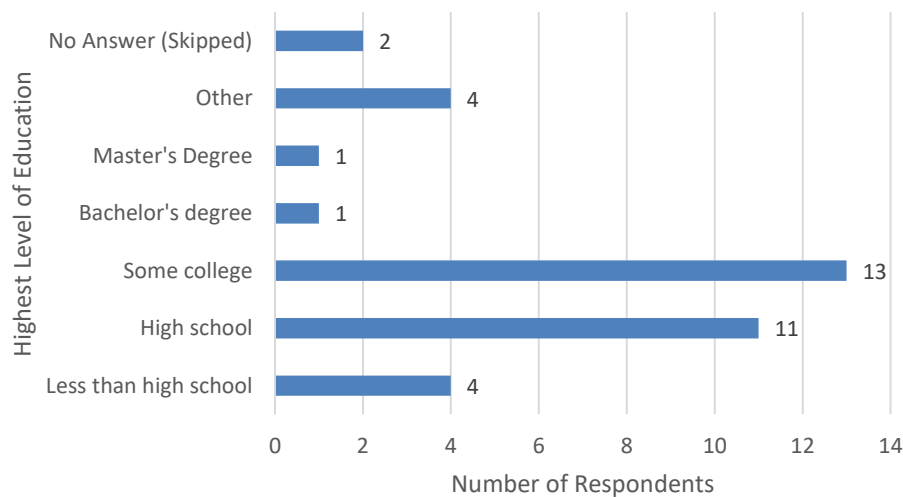


Figure 13: OOTC guest survey respondents' educational attainment.

## 5.2.2 Experiences of OOTC Guests Within the Program

### *What Guests Like About the OOTC Program*

OOTC guest survey respondents were asked to identify two things they liked about the OOTC program. Some found the current site locations to be convenient and accessible. Respondents also cited staff and volunteer characteristics, physical provisions, community, program environment and program design.

### *Staff/Volunteer Characteristics*

OOTC guest research respondents identified many positive personality traits of OOTC staff and volunteers. One respondent described staff as "phenomenal". Some felt it was evident the volunteers genuinely wanted to be present at the site and felt the staff treated guests well. Other positive traits identified are shown in Fig. 14.



Figure 14: Positive personality traits of OOTC staff and volunteers as described by OOTC guest survey respondents.

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*“Warmth and hospitality of the people that run the programs”*  
*– OOTC guest survey comment*

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### Physical Provisions

The majority of OOTC guest survey respondents were satisfied with the serving size and nutritional value of the meals with which they were provided in the OOTC program; 67.6% (n = 25) of the respondents made mention of the meals. They expressed appreciation for the provision of sleeping mats to use during their overnight stays as well as tokens, clothing, hygiene products and Tim Cards. They also enjoyed the entertainment options made available on site (e.g. board games, movies, video games, etc.).

### Community

Some OOTC guest survey respondents felt a sense of belonging to a community in the OOTC program. They valued the opportunity to communicate with and develop interpersonal relationships with other guests, staff and volunteers.

### OOTC Program Environment

OOTC guest survey respondents described various aspects of the OOTC environment as program strengths. Five respondents (13.5%) mentioned that they felt both their person and property were secure at OOTC sites. One respondent attributed this sense of safety to the sites being under constant observation by OOTC staff. Some respondents also felt the staff created a welcoming, warm and comfortable environment. Some emphasized the value in the program offering homeless people an opportunity to stay indoors during cold weather. The OOTC program was also described as clean more often than were 24-hour respites and shelters.

### OOTC Program Design

Some OOTC guest survey respondents appreciated that the OOTC was a low barrier program; one person mentioned having never been turned away. They found that the intake process was uncomplicated and allowed for privacy and anonymity. Some also felt that compared with other

programs, the rules were less stringent in the OOTC program. Some OOTC guests also felt that the program was well-organized.

“STRAIGHT WALK-IN, NO COMPLICATIONS.”  
- OOTC GUEST SURVEY COMMENT

### *What Guests Would Like to see Improved in the OOTC Program*

OOTC guest survey respondents were asked to identify two aspects of the program they wished to see improved. Respondents described opportunities for improvements around staff and volunteer characteristics, program design, program environment, and physical provisions.

#### *Staff/Volunteer Characteristics*

While some respondents described staff and volunteers to be an asset to the OOTC program, others felt they sometimes exhibited demeaning, condescending, judgemental, dishonest behaviour. At times, they felt the staff and volunteers created an antagonistic environment, described by one respondent as an “us and them” atmosphere. Some described being made to feel like a number in the OOTC program. Respondents also reported witnessing staff practice favouritism and inconsistent enforcement of rules at times. Several potential solutions were suggested. These included additional staff and volunteer training and increased practice of positive interaction with guests.

#### *OOTC Program Design*

Several aspects of program design were identified as opportunities for program improvement. For instance, some pointed out inconsistencies around rules across sites. While, as mentioned in the previous section, some considered low barriers for entry a strength of the program, others felt the intake process was too lenient and preferred some guests not be granted program access. While Dixon Hall does not feel that introducing more stringent barring practices are a best practice, these comments are testament to the challenges posed when, as mentioned in page 8, a large group of people in “immediate, acute crisis situations” are given shelter in close proximity of one another. Program scheduling was also identified as an area of improvement; the current program schedule had some guests waiting long periods for sites to open and leaving so early in the morning that they felt they got inadequate sleep.

#### *OOTC Program Environment*

While regular monitoring of the site by OOTC staff and volunteers did alleviate some concerns around security, some guests still felt unsafe due to the occurrence of fighting and excessive shouting, as well as the presence of weapons at the sites. Despite the sense of community this program fostered, not everyone got along. Some OOTC guests described other guests as “troublemakers” and “disruptive people” and associated these behaviours as well as lack of hygiene with challenges around substance dependence and mental health. Concerns were also raised around women’s safety as well as privacy and crowding in the women’s washroom. Overcrowding, inaccessibility and unclean washrooms and floors were also identified as negative aspects of the program atmosphere.

### Physical Provisions

OOTC guests made suggestions around increases to physical provisions. They proposed additional food, tokens, blankets, pillows, bathrooms, showers, and laundry services be made available on site. Some guests also requested more comfortable mats and blankets.

### *Dynamics between Dinner and Overnight Guests*

Some OOTC sites serve free meals to both members of the public and overnight guests. These meals are provided by volunteer groups. Members of the public are also invited to take clothing and other items donated to the OOTC program. Some OOTC guest survey respondents reported this led to overcrowding. There were also some challenges around perception between the dinner and overnight guests. All OOTC guests who participated in this survey were overnight guests. When they were asked whether there were any differences between the overnight and dinner guests, 48.6% (n = 18) responded that there were and another 48.6% responded there were not. Among those who felt there were differences, many reported not recognizing the dinner guests' need for this program's services. They felt that homeless individuals should be prioritized during the intake process and in the distribution of donated items for being at a greater disadvantage. Some also reported dinner guests did not treat overnight guests well and worried that the former might perceive the latter as needy.

Others' perceptions of dinner guests were more charitable. For instance, some felt they were only different insofar as they faced different circumstances. Others speculated that dinner guests might not all be housed and that some might sleep rough. Meanwhile, one respondent described their behaviour as more "civilized" and stable as a result of having housing, and not facing the challenges around having to search for a place to stay each night. Some even reported dinner guests were "older and nice", consequently safer and more comfortable to be around, and that overnight guests would become rowdy after dinner guests departed.

### *Reasons for Being Turned Away from the OOTC Program*

OOTC guest survey respondents were asked whether they had ever been turned away from an OOTC site and if so, what reason they were given for having been turned away. As mentioned above, many OOTC guests described the program as low-barrier. Out of 18 responses, the majority – 83.3% (n = 15) – reported they had been turned away because the site was at capacity. Guests whose work or volunteer shifts ended late faced challenges arriving to the site on time. Three guests cited fighting, intoxication, "volatile" behaviour and conflicts with staff as reasons for being turned away from OOTC sites.

### *Reasons for Being Service Restricted*

OOTC guests were also asked whether they had ever been service-restricted; 13.5% (n = 5) reported they had been barred from sites in the past. Self-reported reasons for service restriction include fighting, voicing an opinion, being assaulted by staff, theft, breaking property, using alcohol or drugs, discrimination, and health reasons.



### 5.2.3 Experiences of OOTC Guests within the Shelter System

#### *Positive Experiences in Shelters*

Fourteen OOTC guest survey respondents had experience using the shelter system. They were asked to identify two to three things they enjoyed during their stay in shelters. Many appreciated that the shelter system offered refuge from the elements and from the streets, as well as a place to rest or get a good night's sleep. Some valued the strict curfew for preventing people from being able to enter the site during late-night hours. One person mentioned being able to go to bed early in shelters. Physical provisions including the two or three daily meals, clothing and hot showers were noted as assets as was access to cable TV, beds and lockers. Staff were described as caring, empathetic, and willing to ensure a comfortable stay for the residents. Some respondents also noted that employers would sometimes recruit from shelters, giving them ad hoc work opportunities. One person described the environment to be clean.

#### *Opportunities for Improvement in the Shelter System*

OOTC guest survey respondents with experience using the shelter system were also asked to make two or three suggestions for improvements. There was widespread consensus that improvements could be made around creating a clean and hygienic shelter environment. Many suggested that rooms and washrooms should be cleaned to prevent odors, that bed bug infestations should be addressed, and that shelter residents should be required to maintain good personal hygiene habits. The overall environment was described as depressing, overcrowded and noisy and many felt that noise, arguments and other disruptions should be managed through the creation of separate designated spaces for quiet and loud residents.

Some respondents recommended shelters provide residents two tokens instead of one, additional food and bedsheets, and access to computers. Some also felt additional staff training was necessary to best address resident needs, especially those of residents who are particularly marginalized or who have unique needs. Safety concerns were often raised; additional supervision and more stringent barring practices were deemed necessary by some to prevent fighting and on-site alcohol and drug use. Conversely, some suggested more flexible rules. Some also saw an urgent need for shelters to be better funded and to provide more programs for the homeless population.

#### *Reasons for Being Turned Away from a Shelter*

Nearly three-quarters – 71.4%, (n = 10) – of the 14 OOTC guest survey respondents who have experience using shelters as housing report having been turned away from shelters. While the majority stated they were turned away because shelters were at capacity, some also said they were turned away for being drunk and for arriving after the 11pm curfew.

#### *Where OOTC Guest Survey Respondents Went When Turned Away from a Shelter*

OOTC guests with experience in the shelter system were asked how they coped when they were turned away from a shelter. While some were able to stay with friends, others reported trying to access other shelters or going to Central Intake to be referred elsewhere. Unfortunately, referred sites were sometimes at capacity by the time guests arrived. Respondents also resorted to OOTC sites, coffee shops (e.g. Tim Hortons), restaurants (e.g. McDonalds), airports, building lobbies or stairwells, or staying

outdoors (e.g. wandering, sleeping in parks, sleeping on hot air vents, etc.). Some respondents reported coping with alcohol or by taking drugs that enabled them to stay awake and panhandle.

### *Reasons for Service Restriction*

Five (35.7%) of these 14 OOTC guests had experienced service restriction in the shelter system. They cited fighting, drug and alcohol use, possession of drug paraphernalia (e.g. pipe), unpunctuality, theft, breaking property, discrimination, health reasons, and unfair enforcement of rules by shelter employees as reasons for service restriction.

### *Reasons OOTC Guests Do Stay at Shelters Overnight*

When OOTC guest survey respondents with experience in shelters were asked why they had chosen to use the shelter system in past, they mentioned a lack of alternative options, particularly during cold weather. Some chose shelters because they were the most convenient option at the time. Others resorted to shelters out of desperation or vulnerability because they had just gotten out of jail, or were cold, ill, tired, in need of a change of clothes, or experiencing soreness in their feet and back from excessive standing and walking. Many felt the outdoors were noisy and unsafe. One respondent said “you can get raped, peed on – anything can happen” outside.

Some respondents chose a shelter because others had recommended it or because it offered beds, meals, and an opportunity to socialize with other residents. One respondent was drawn to the shelter system because they found the staff to be kind. Another said the drug-free shelter where they were staying offered them the safety and stability they needed for successful workforce re-entry after coming off morphine.

### *Reasons OOC Guests Do Not Stay at Shelters Overnight*

Some OOTC guests stated they avoid shelters if it is warm enough to stay outdoors, or if they are enjoying themselves. Some mentioned they opt to ride the bus all night. Those OOTC guest survey respondents who chose not to stay in shelters were asked why they avoided the shelter system. Beyond the reasons given above regarding opportunities for improvement at shelters, respondents noted a lack of personal space and freedom, limited resources (e.g. clothing donations), ineffective housing support, and a preference for OOTC and 24-hour respite sites. They also mentioned that they had no opportunity to rest during the day at shelters.

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*“Facility too small for number of people”  
- OOTC guest survey comment*

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## **5.2.4 Experience of OOTC Guests in 24 Respite Sites**

### *Positive Experiences at Respite Sites*

More than half – 59.5% (n = 22) – of OOTC guest survey respondents reported having used 24-hour respite sites. When they were asked to reflect on their experiences in respite sites, some expressed appreciation that respites allowed them to keep dry and warm. They also cited positive program traits

relating to staff or volunteer characteristics and physical provisions. OOTC guests who had used respite sites described staff and volunteers to be helpful, friendly and attentive. They were also grateful for the provision of food, coffee and snacks and access to showers. They also identified the respite environment to be a strength of the program.

OOTC guests described OOTC and respite sites as safe havens far more often than they did shelters. Six (27.2%) of the 22 respondents felt that the restrictions around drug use created a safe environment for both their person and their possessions. They also described the sites as clean, comfortable, and spacious. They reported experiencing better quality of sleep in respite sites because of the quiet environment after lights out as well as the opportunity to wake up later than in OOTC sites and shelters. Lastly, they appreciated that some sites were located close to methadone pharmacies.

### *Opportunities for Improvement at Respite Sites*

Respondents with experience in the respite program were also asked to identify areas for improvement. Some offered feedback regarding staffing and staff characteristics; they felt there was a need for additional investment in human resources, as well as for training of staff to ensure they do not behave like “jail guards” and that they are more attentive to respite users’ unique challenges and needs. Some also preferred a wake-up call in the mornings.

The respite environment was characterized as noisy, crowded, unsafe, and unclean and in need of better management of fighting, drug-use, and guests facing mental health challenges. Respondents felt lights should not be left on all night. They suggested that bed bug treatments should be done regularly. Some respondents suggested the amount of food (e.g. hot water and snacks) and cots available should be increased as should access to showers, laundry and detox programs. Cots were also described to be unhygienic, uncomfortable and too short.

### *Reasons for Being Turned Away from Respite Sites*

Four (18.2%) of the 22 respite users report having been turned away from a respite site, while one person who reported never using respites also said they had been turned away from respites. Reasons for being turned away included the site being at capacity, and the respondent being intoxicated and loud.

### *Reasons OOTC Guests Do Stay at Respite Sites Overnight*

OOTC guests survey respondents were asked why they chose to use respite sites. Some said they used these sites out of necessity at the end of the month when they had run out of money for food and were unable to find beds elsewhere; they felt the alternative – “staying awake all night and trespassing” – was challenging. Some respondents felt there was more freedom of movement in respite sites than in shelters. One stated they used a respite site out of convenience – it was situated in the area they frequented. Some mentioned appreciating the opportunity to watch television.

### *Reasons OOTC Guests Do Not Stay at Respite Sites Overnight*

OOTC guest survey respondents also shared the reasons they did not use respite sites. In addition to the reasons given in the section outlining opportunities for improvement, some stated they were simply unaware of the respite program. This may be an indication of a need for additional

outreach to the homeless population and the larger community around emergency shelter options. Others described feeling unsafe due to police presence at respite sites. One respondent stayed away from respite sites to avoid their abuser. Respondents also reported they preferred shelter beds to cots.

### 5.2.5 Housing History of OOTC Guests

Study participants shared their experiences around housing and homelessness. Their accounts offer insight into length of homelessness, previous housing experiences, barriers to housing and housing search methods.

#### *When OOTC Guests Were Last Housed*

While some OOTC guest survey respondents were housed as recently as 11 months prior to June 2018, others had not been housed in over 23 years. The mean length of time since their last experience being housed was seven years. It should be noted, however, that values were not entirely accurate; many respondents offered estimates because they had difficulty recalling dates and responses were often given as ranges (e.g. 10 to 11 years ago).

#### *Previous Housing Experience: Accommodation Type*

More than one-quarter (25.7%,  $n = 9$ ) of the respondents stated their most recent housing experiences were in rooming houses, seven (20%) stayed in private apartments, four (11.4%) stayed in shared apartments, two (5.7%) in rent-geared-to-income (TCHC) units and thirteen (37.1%) in other accommodations (e.g. house, RGI Mainstay unit, basement apartment, makeshift apartment on top floor of house, with friends, etc.) (Fig. 15).

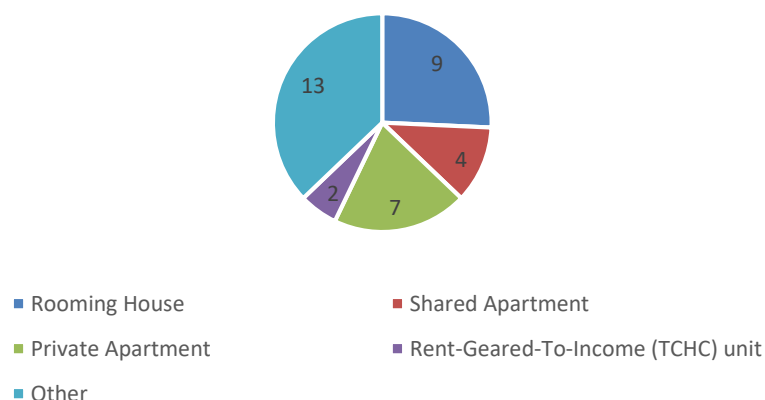


Figure 15: OOTC guest survey respondents' most recent housing accommodations.

#### *Housing Search Methods*

OOTC guest survey respondents demonstrated independence and resourcefulness in their search for housing. When asked how they found their last housing, twelve (34.3%) said they found their housing by themselves, six (17.1%) through a housing worker, one (2.9%) through The Housing Help Centre, two (5.7%) through family, six (17.1%) through friends, and eight (22.9%) responded "other" (e.g. through business connections, word of mouth, etc.) (Fig. 16). Some of the agencies through which

they received housing help include St. Stephen's Community House, Woodgreen Community Services and John Howard Society of Toronto.

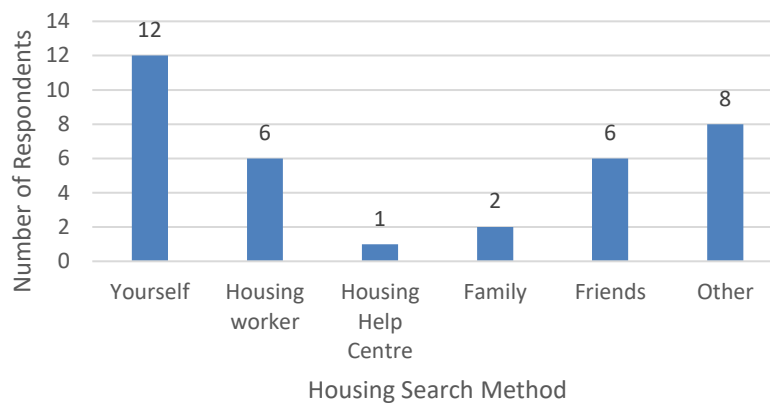


Figure 16: Avenues through which OOTC guest survey respondents found most recent housing accommodations.

### *Housing Quality*

Twenty-three (65.7%) respondents reported their last housing was good, while ten (28.6%) said it was not and two (5.7%) offered other responses.

### *Previous Housing Situation: Positive Experiences*

OOTC guest survey respondents offered insight into the positive aspects of their previous housing situations. One of these advantages was location; some found it convenient to be situated downtown and others appreciated living close to amenities. Respondents described their most recent accommodation as safe, clean, bug-free, and spacious. They also enjoyed living in newer buildings and having privacy (e.g. their own bathroom), good roommates and backyards.

### *Previous Housing Situation: Negative Experiences*

OOTC guest survey respondents also shared drawbacks of their most recent housing situations. Unsafe environments were often cited as disadvantages; respondents described fire, theft, suicide, substance abuse, and conflicts with police and other security personnel. Their accommodations were often neglected; respondents described structural issues, low ceilings, doors that would not close properly, damp and mouldy apartments and pest infestations. Others cited a lack of privacy in their home. There were many concerns around landlords and superintendents raising their rent, stealing their mail, and failing to address plumbing and other maintenance issues. One respondent described them as “slumlord millionaires”. Some also reported conflicts with housemates (e.g. disagreements over pets). One reported experiencing restricted access to water.

### *Barriers to Keeping Housing*

OOTC guest survey respondents identified finances as the primary barrier to maintaining housing; out of 22 responses, 16.2% (n = 6) cited financial challenges such as dependency on OW, unemployment, and cuts to worker's compensation. Five (13.5%) identified conflict with roommates, four (10.8%) pointed to concerns around building safety, two (5.4%) mentioned location, two (5.4%)

identified unclean and mouldy environment, two (5.4%) mentioned unfair landlords, and one (2.7%) pointed to family breakdown as challenges around keeping housing (Fig. 17). Other responses included loss of accommodations due to the property being sold, the building being torn down, the environment, and challenges around drug and alcohol addictions. In fact, one person mentioned that respite sites were preferable to the apartment they had.

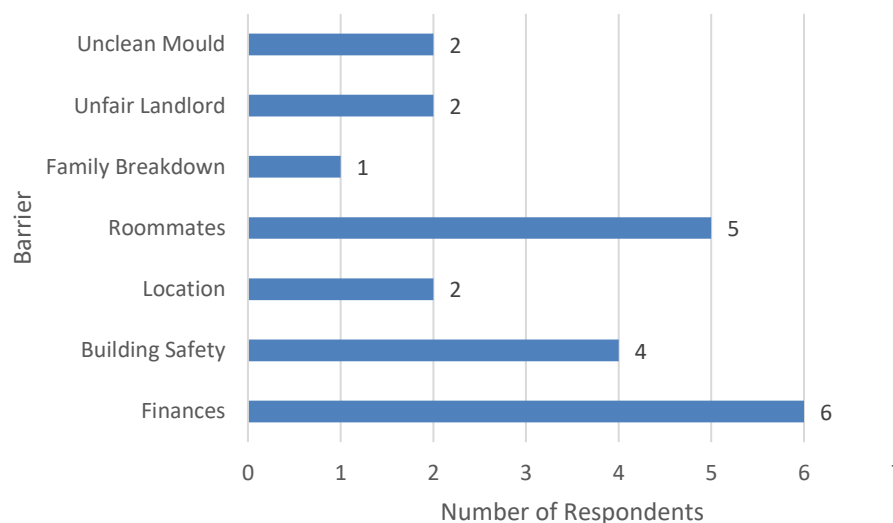


Figure 17: Challenges faced by OOTC guest survey respondents around maintaining housing.

### ***Landlord Discrimination: Toronto Transitional Housing Allowance Program (TTHAP)***

Toronto Transitional Housing Allowance Program (TTHAP) is a subsidy funded by the provincial-federal Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) Program aimed at making housing more affordable. It provides support of \$250/month to 3,600 households (“Overview of Housing,” 2013; Toronto Drop-In Network, n.d.). Sixteen (44.4%) OOTC guest survey respondents had knowledge of this program. One (2.8%) said that they had encountered a landlord who avoided renting to them because they received TTHAP.

### ***Landlord Discrimination: OW/ODSP Recipients***

More than one-quarter – 27% (n = 10) – of the OOTC guest survey respondents (27%) were OW recipients and 37.8% (n = 14) were ODSP recipients. When they were asked whether they had ever come across a landlord who discriminated against them for being OW or ODSP recipients, 38.9% (n = 14) reported having experienced this.

### ***Characteristics of Good Housing***

OOTC guests were asked to identify the three most important features that characterize good housing (Fig. 18). Many selected more than three traits. The top three characteristics selected were cleanliness (n = 26), building safety (n = 22) and affordability (n = 22). With respect to clean environments, five people mentioned the accommodations should be bug-free. Twenty respondents identified location as an important factor of consideration; they preferred homes that were near amenities like stores, markets, hospitals, and public payphones. Three respondents needed access to

supports such as cleaning support services, supportive housing, and laundry services (e.g. free access to washing machine and dryer). Other important considerations included access to storage and gardens, a “good, caring landlord”, the opportunity to split rent, the opportunity to avoid disclosing ODSP status, and state of repair.

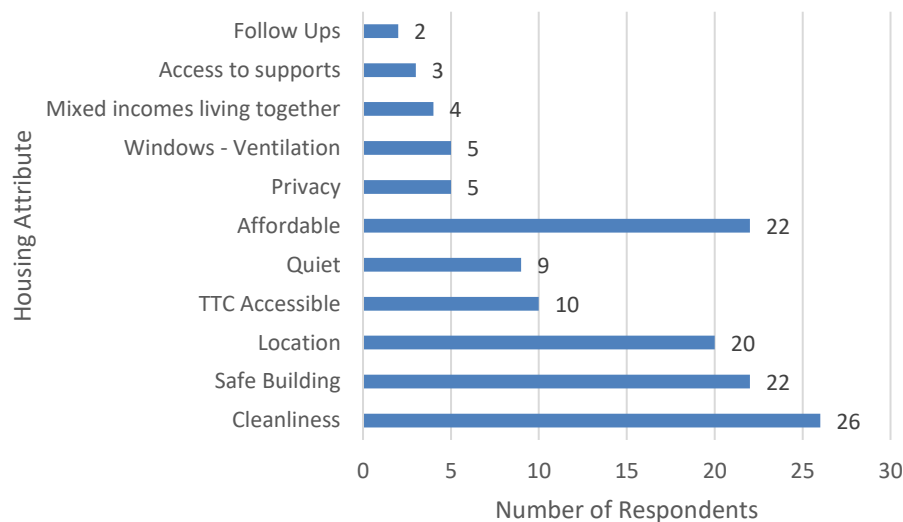


Figure 18: Factors OOTC guest survey respondents consider when looking for housing.

### *Interest in Being Housed*

When asked whether they were currently interested in being housed, 83.3% (n = 30) of the 36 OOTC guest survey respondents indicated they were interested, 8.3% (n = 3) indicated they were not, 2.8% (n = 1) selected the “skip” option, and 5.6% (n = 2) provided no answer.

### *Reasons for Disinterest in Housing*

Research elucidates various reasons for a lack of desire to be housed. Many homeless people describe bad experiences in housing or facing seemingly insurmountable barriers to finding adequate housing. Some do not feel safe being housed due to previous experiences of violence at home (Woolley, 2015). Others do not want to part with pets or property that are not allowed in housing units they are offered (Woolley, 2016). These and other challenges lead some to experience a sense of disappointment, a lack of strong desire to be housed. Many of the reasons given for their lack of interest in housing stem from a deficit of other more ideal alternatives (Woolley, 2015). The eight OOTC respondents who indicated they were not currently interested in being housed were asked to offer reasons for their lack of interest. One said they were content with their current situation tenting outdoors with their partner, one said they were finding it challenging to find housing since they have two dogs, and one was disappointed by the long wait list for subsidized housing.

### *Relationship with Housing Workers*

Out of 36 responses, half (n = 18) said they currently had a housing worker, while 44.4% (n = 16) said they did not. One person (2.8%) selected the “skip” option and another (2.8%) left the question blank.

### *Reasons for Not Having a Housing Worker*

When asked why they did not have a housing worker, some responded they did not have legal status in Canada. Others mentioned that they distrusted housing workers. Previous negative experiences around missed appointments, and a lack of continuity of services contributed to this lack of trust. Others felt disappointed because of how unaffordable housing is. Many found it easier and more effective to look for housing on their own. This is corroborated by the findings in the “Housing Search Methods” section; 34.3% found housing on their own, while 17.1% found housing through housing workers.

### *Social Housing Wait Lists*

Some OOTC guest survey respondents are on a social housing wait list for “rent geared to income” (RGI) units. Rent for RGI units are set at an “affordable” percentage of household income. In Ontario, this is 30% of a household’s total monthly income before taxes and adjustments according to provincial law (City of Toronto, 2018 [Rent-Geared-to]). Out of 36 respondents, the majority – 58.3% (n = 21) – were on a waitlist for housing, among whom 95.2% (n = 20) were on the TCHC wait list and 14.3% (n = 3) were on the Coordinated Access to Supportive Housing (C.A.S.H.) wait list (Fig. 19).

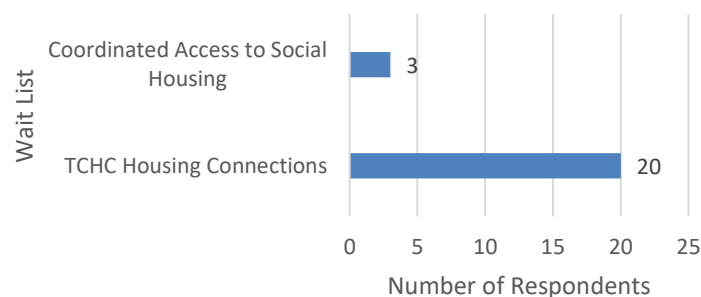


Figure 19: OOTC guest survey respondents were on various wait lists for social housing.

## **5.2.6 Pathway to Homelessness**

### *First Experience of Homelessness: OOTC Guests*

#### *Circumstances Around First Experience of Homelessness*

Loss of job or income was the main cause of OOTC guest survey respondents’ homelessness; 40.5% (n = 15) cited this as a causal factor. Nearly one-fifth – 18.9% (n = 7) – cited family breakdown, 16.2% (n = 6) cited health issues, and 13.5% (n = 5) cited a stressful life event (Fig. 20).



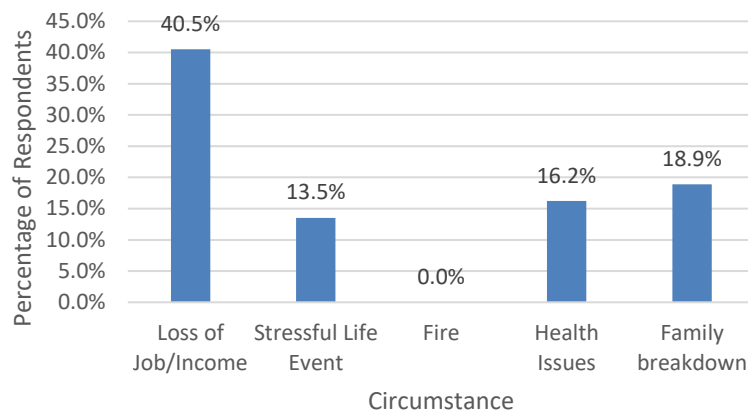


Figure 20: Circumstances under which OOTC guest survey respondents first became homeless.

The data shows differences in the pathways to homelessness between OOTC guests and shelter residents. While nearly one-quarter – 24.3% (n = 9) – of shelter residents identified loss of job or income as a factor leading to them becoming homeless, this was not as much of a factor for this group as it was for OOTC guests (Fig. 21). Family breakdown was cited by shelter residents as the leading circumstance rendering them homeless; 29.7% (n = 11) identified this reason. Stressful life events and health issues were also cited as leading causes by this group more often than they were by OOTC guest survey respondents; 21.6% (n = 6) identified the first cause and another 21.6% (n = 6) identified the second.

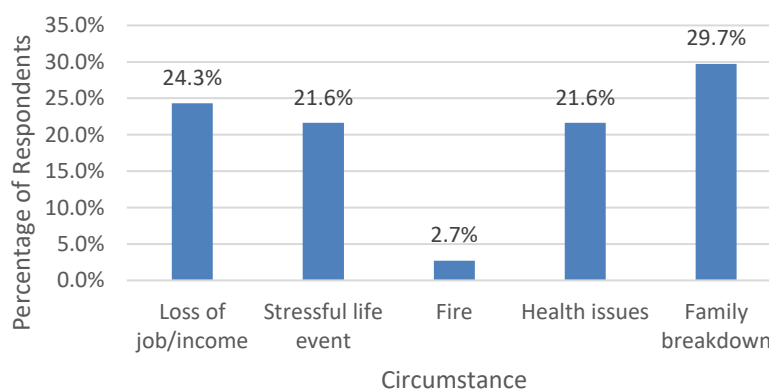


Figure 21: Circumstances under which shelter resident survey respondents first became homeless.

Twenty-two out of 36 (61.1%) OOTC guest survey respondents stated that they had been consistently homeless since their first experience of homelessness, while 38.9% (n = 14) said they had not. For those who had been consistently homeless, length of homelessness ranged between 1 month and 20 years, and the mean length of homelessness was 7.2 years.

## *Experiences Since First Episode of Homelessness*

### *Experiences of Housing Since First Episode of Homelessness*

Nearly two-thirds of the OOTC guest survey respondents who provided responses – 64.5% (n = 20) – have been housed since their first experience of homelessness and 35.4% (n = 11) have not. Among those who have had housing, some used terms like “on and off” to describe their housing situation. Some were only able to find short-term accommodations. In one case a respondent said they paid in cash to stay with someone for a couple weeks.

Nearly one-third – 30% (n = 6) of those who have been housed have experience living in rooming houses. Some respondents were only able to find rooming houses. Some had even stayed in multiple; one respondent reported four housing episodes in rooming houses since their first experience of homelessness. It is not clear how many of these were legal; one respondent specified staying in an illegal rooming house. According to city bylaws, rooming houses are properties in which four or more people share a kitchen or washroom and pay separate rents. They are illegal in North York, Scarborough, and East York. They are permitted in the former cities of York, Toronto and Etobicoke, though they must be licensed and subject to regular inspections. While in some instances, they pose problems around fire safety, parking and noise, Mark Sraga, director of investigations for the city’s licensing department, describes licensed rooming houses as “an important part of the city’s affordable housing stock” (Kennedy, 2017). Other OOTC guests used hotels, were able to find apartments or lived with family or friends. Some were reluctant to share their experiences around housing.

### *Number of Times Housed*

OOTC guest survey respondents have been housed on average two times since their first experience of homelessness. However, this number is not accurate since respondents often had difficulty recalling details and gave approximate or vague answers, or ranges. The mean values of the maximum and minimum values were used in responses that provided ranges. While some OOTC guests had not been housed at all since their first experience of homelessness, some had been housed as many as twelve times.

### *Longest Episode of Housing Since First Experience of Homelessness*

OOTC guest survey respondents were asked to share their longest episode of housing since their first experience of homelessness. Among those OOTC guests who had been housed since their first experience of homelessness, some had been housed for only three months, while others had been housed for seven years. The mean length of time was 2.8 years.

### *Longest Period of Homelessness*

On average, the longest period of homelessness for OOTC guest survey respondents was 7.2 years. Responses ranged between 11 months and 23 years. The same issues around accuracy applied in the responses to this question as did in previous questions involving length of time.

## 5.2.7 Current Experience of Homelessness

### *Barriers to Housing*

OOTC guest survey respondents were asked to reflect on the challenges they have faced in finding housing. In rare cases, a respondent said they felt content with their current situation or preferred not to have housing. Others described barriers such as landlord discrimination, health issues, alcohol and drug use, relationship or family breakdown. However, many cited reasons resulting from systemic barriers. These include lack of finances, supports, and decent and affordable housing as well as discrimination based on appearance.

Respondents identified many supports that would help them find housing. These include supports that would help them to understand what steps to take next as well as help in adopting a proactive mindset. One respondent who was an ex-offender said they face these challenges for having lived outside of society for so long. There is also a need for supports around daily chores; one mentioned feeling reluctant to find housing because being housed entailed a lot of responsibilities that they were not able to take on.

An oft-cited reason for Toronto's homelessness crisis is the lack of decent, affordable housing. Some OOTC guest survey respondents reported the long waiting lists for subsidized housing have paralyzed their search efforts. Availability is particularly a problem for those with unique needs, such as those living with pets. Another reason closely related to this dearth of affordable housing is income insecurity. This has myriad effects. For instance, one respondent mentioned they cannot afford first and last month's rent. Another mentioned not having a way of being contacted in past because they could not afford a cell phone. Reasons mentioned for their lack of wealth include unemployment, underemployment, low wages, wage theft and inadequate OW benefits. One respondent mentioned that being an ex-offender limited their job prospects. While none of the respondents attributed their employment situations to their education level, there is much literature that shows a causal link between these two factors. When asked their highest level of educational attainment, 35.1% (n = 13) said they had completed some college, 29.7% (n = 11) had completed high school, 10.8% (n = 4) had not completed their high school education. This means 77.8% (n = 28) did not have post-secondary education. However, the literature linking education, poverty and homeless emphasizes the relationship between not having a high school education and poverty and homelessness. In this group of respondents, only 11.1% (n = 4) lacked high school education. Little literature exists on the relationship between not having a post-secondary degree and poverty and homelessness. Other financial barriers mentioned by OOTC guests include rental arrears, unfiled tax returns and poor credit rating.

### *Place of Preference for Overnight Stays*

When asked their place of preference for overnight stays during the winter, 71.4% (n = 25) of 35 OOTC guest survey respondents said they preferred to use the OOTC program, 16.2% (n = 6) said they preferred the shelter system, 8.6% (n = 3) preferred other arrangements, and 2.9% (n = 1) opted to skip the question (Fig. 22).

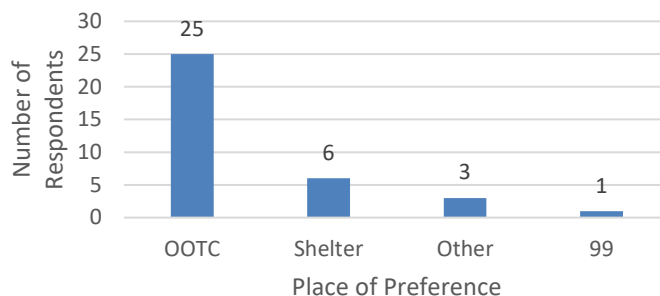


Figure 22: OOTC guest survey respondents' place of preference for overnight stays.

### *Places Used for Overnight Stays*

When asked where they usually stay overnight during the winter season, 75% (n = 27) of the 36 respondents said they use the OOTC program, 16.8% (n = 6) said they use shelters and 8.3% (n = 3) said they resort to other options (Fig. 23).

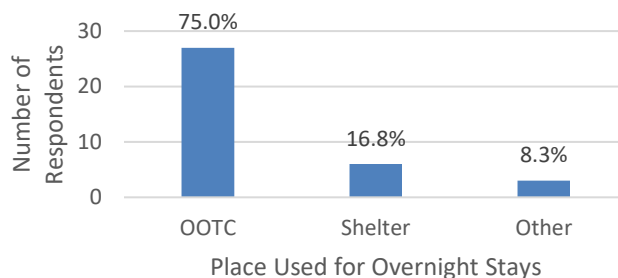


Figure 23: Where OOTC guest survey respondents usually stay overnight during the winter season.

### *Importance of Privacy and Anonymity When Seeking Services/Beds*

Most OOTC guests valued their privacy and anonymity. When asked how important this was to them, 69.4% (n = 25) said their privacy and anonymity when seeking beds was very important to them, 13.5% (n = 5) did not care, 8.3% (n = 3) said it was not important to them, 5.6% (n = 2) selected "other", and 2.8% (n = 1) selected "no answer" (Fig. 24).

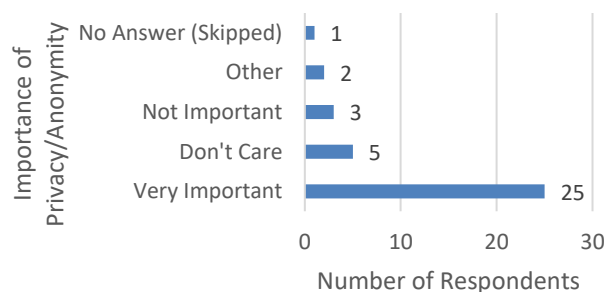


Figure 24: The importance of privacy and anonymity when OOTC guest survey respondents seek beds.

### *Where OOTC Guest Survey Respondents Went When No Beds Were Available*

Occasionally, people are turned away from OOTC sites because there are no beds available or because the individual exhibits behaviours that are against site rules and regulations. OOTC guest survey respondents were asked where they go when they are turned away from the site. Some reported resorting to calling 311 or visiting Central Intake – sometimes even sleeping right outside the office. Some seek beds at respite sites. Others prefer to stay outdoors if weather permits. They may find a bush and use cardboard or leaves to create a makeshift mattress, or sleep under a picnic table, or find sheltered areas at City Hall or at CNE grounds. Sometimes they even reported sleeping on warm air grates during cold weather.

Sometimes OOTC guest survey respondents would find alternative ways to stay indoors. One respondent said they were able to stay at their workplace. Some were able to stay at friends' homes or ride the bus all night. Others stayed at coffee shops, restaurants, bank vestibules, hospital emergency rooms, 24-hour internet cafés, airports, heated parking lots, or vacant building lobbies, hallways or stairways. This is testament to the resourcefulness homelessness necessitates. In some cases, women reportedly go home with men and when intoxicated, some people go to “drug houses”.

### *Where OOTC Guests are Currently Staying*

When asked where they were staying at the time of being interviewed in June, 32.4% (n = 12) of the OOTC guest survey respondents said they were staying outside, 21.6% (n = 8) were couch-surfing, 16.2% (n = 6) were staying at shelters, 13.5% (n = 5) were staying at respite sites and 29.7% (n = 11) were using other accommodations (Fig. 25). Some respondents selected more than one response.

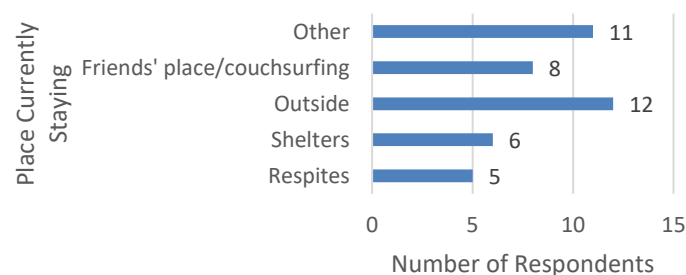


Figure 25: Where OOTC guest survey respondents were staying in June.

### *Greatest Source of Support for OOTC Guests*

Homelessness compels many to become primarily self-reliant. When asked to name their greatest source of support, some said they had no support network or that they were not seeking any support at the time. This may be testament to the sense of “abandonment, of rejection and loneliness” felt by many who are homeless (West, 2017). In fact, one respondent said they have trained themselves to avoid becoming emotional to be able to manage on their own.

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*“I do not bother with organizations or people.” - OOTC guest survey comment*

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However, others did rely heavily on their personal social networks. These include both acquaintances (e.g. friendly strangers, street-involved peers, employees at agencies who occasionally listen to their problems, etc.) as well as individuals with whom they have more intimate ties (e.g. close friends, family members, significant others, etc.). Some also mentioned their doctors, mental health case managers, housing workers and counselors. Others identified their service and pet dogs as their closest companions.

Some respondents relied on community centres, nunneries (e.g. Mustard Seed nunnery), OOTC sites (e.g. Evangel Hall), drop-in centres (e.g. Haven), as well as churches and the deacons who work there. Some also found upliftment through volunteer work. Lastly, some respondents listed sources of material support such as money, OW, ODSP, and OAS.

### 5.2.8 Important for the Public to Know About the Experience of Homelessness

Study participants were asked what they felt was important for the general public to know about their experiences of homelessness. Some OOTC guest survey respondents reported there was nothing positive about their experiences and felt it was important to share that supports for the homeless population is lacking. Many also discussed at length the stigma surrounding homelessness. Some experienced so much shame they tried to hide their homelessness from others. They described feeling marginalized and feeling that “society looks down on [them]”. Some emphasized that those who have no experiences with homelessness need to understand that “[they] are one paycheck away from homelessness”. They also want the public to understand that many homeless people once lived different lives in the past, when they also had homes and lived lives similar to those lived by the housed population. They insisted on being treated with dignity and emphasized the strength of character, perseverance, faith, resilience and adaptability necessary to endure homelessness. One respondent said, “You must have goals, a level head.” They insisted the public recognize that homeless people are kind, that they do not all use drugs, and that even when they did use drugs, that they do not deserve stigmatization. One respondent said, “We are not always bad, as people think we are, we had lives at one time. Lots of people had homes.” Some respondents also shared personal stories of racial discrimination. One said, “because I am Native, does not mean I am drunk all the time”. They implored the public to not mistreat homeless people.

**“ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN TO ANYBODY. NO ONE IS IMMUNE TO HOMELESSNESS.”**

**- OOTC GUEST SURVEY COMMENT**

Some respondents felt the stigma and misconceptions around homeless population could be remedied through promotion of public awareness around homelessness. They emphasized the need for those who are housed to better understand the challenges faced by the homeless population rather than to condemn them for their circumstances. While a few of the OOTC guest respondents internalized stigma, telling people experiencing homelessness that they “...[brought] it on to [themselves]”, and instructing them to not “cry wolf, you’re not a victim, no one’s fault but mine”, others belaboured the point that they did not become homeless because they were lazy and had given up on life. They felt it was important for the public to know that no one is culpable in their own homelessness; one

respondent said, “I did not choose it”. Another said, “Not easy or by desire. Lasted longer than expected”. Many shared stories around the challenges they faced as homeless people. Some of these difficulties have rendered some pessimistic; some use terms like “cruel” to describe the circumstances. They experience psychological and emotional challenges that stem from the isolation, the uncertainty of day to day life, the stigma around mental health challenges from which a portion of the homeless population suffer. One respondent reflected that it is especially difficult to mend your life after falling once. Others mentioned that living on the streets makes one vulnerable to exploitation and danger (e.g. violence, theft, etc.) and necessitates vigilance and suspicion. Women experience unique risks. Some also shed light on the consequences of homelessness on the body, reflecting that it becomes harder as one ages and lowers one’s life expectancy. They describe how difficult it is to carry their belongings at all times and to live on a meagre income. Some stressed the need to pay attention to and to prevent homeless deaths and described how traumatizing it is for them when they learn their peers have died.

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*“It’s a very hard life. I hope no Canadian has to live like this.”*  
- OOTC guest survey comment

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*“Not easy to be a woman and homeless.”*  
- OOTC guest survey comment

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A few respondents shared their optimism around their futures. For instance, some reflected that it is not always a lonely experience, that they do receive support from compassionate people, and that while more support is needed, some organizations (e.g. John Howard Society) also do great work for the homeless community.

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*“There is a need for housing. More supports...Every year more and more people ending up homeless.”*  
- OOTC guest survey comment

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*“I’m a survivor.”*  
- OOTC guest survey comment

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### 5.2.9 Interest in Becoming a Homelessness Advocate

With respect to advocacy, some OOTC guest survey respondents felt their voice was lost on decision-makers. Respondents were asked whether they were interested in becoming advocates for the homeless community. Among 36 respondents, 47.2% (n = 17) were interested, 25% (n = 9) were not, 13.5% (n = 5) offered other responses, and 13.5% (n = 5) skipped the question.

### 5.2.10 Important Issues to Advocate Around

OOTC guest survey respondents identified many issues around which they felt additional advocacy was necessary. These are given in Table 2.

Table 2: OOTC guest survey respondents' suggestions regarding issues around which to advocate

• Increase in decent, deeply affordable housing
• Government accountability
• Increased financial support from all levels of government
• Increased social services (e.g. OW, ODSP, etc.)
• More transparency from OW around entitlements
• Increase in transitional housing
• Financial supports for first and last month's rent
• TTC discounts
• Reducing income inequality
• Increasing employment opportunities
• Keeping drugs out of shelters
• Additional education for homeless population around drug use
• More outreach and information sharing with homeless population around supports available
• Additional supports for populations who are uniquely vulnerable (e.g. those living with HIV/Aids, elderly population, ex-offenders, non-status population, etc.)
• Decreased wait times for services
• More hospitals
• Life and personal finance skills supports
• Additional information around legal rights
• Additional mental health and addictions support
• Promoting public awareness around homelessness
• Police accountability

*"Perhaps if I had housing, there [would] be no shelters. This is Canada. We have the resources to house everybody."*

*- OOTC guest survey comment*

*"I am university-educated, but...I cannot find work"*

*- OOTC guest survey comment*

### 5.3 October Surveys: OOTC Guest Respondents

During the second stage of data collection, OOTC researchers followed up with survey respondents to learn how they had been coping since the first stage of data collection in June. Researchers asked respondents where they had been staying overnight, how they had coped with heat and rain and how they had accessed various services. Among the 37 OOTC guests and 36 shelter residents who had participated in the June surveys, only 10 OOTC guests and 6 shelter residents participated in the October surveys. One reason for this low response was the challenge around



communication, despite the distribution of phones. The other reason is that many respondents were housed; among the 90 respondents, 25.6% (n = 23) had been housed since the beginning of the study.

### 5.3.1 Where OOTC Guests Stayed Between June and October

One of the objectives of this study was to better understand how OOTC guests coped between OOTC seasons. When survey respondents were asked where they stayed between June and October, one stated they visited family outside of Toronto. All other OOTC guest survey respondents stayed in Toronto in the months following the end of the OOTC season. Some had no alternative but to stay; a few respondents mentioned financial constraints and one respondent had been held in Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) detention. Others reported they stayed due to the availability of jobs as well as because they were familiar with the city and had knowledge of the services and programs available to them. Nearly half (45.5%) chose not to leave because they felt a sense of belonging to the city; they referred to Toronto as their “home”.



“Toronto is my hometown and I do not want to leave”

- OOTC guest survey comment



### 24-Hour Respite Sites

Seven of the 10 OOTC guest survey respondents reported having used the 24-hour respite sites between June and October. They reported benefits to staying at these sites, such as refuge from the elements, physical provisions (e.g. meals), the opportunity to shower, and freedom of movement.

However, some also described staff as patronizing, rude, aggressive, and rigid with the rules. They felt the rules were inconsistent across sites. There were many concerns around safety; some report possessions being stolen. Many also hoped to see improvements made to the food. Some describe other guests to have poor hygiene and the difficulties around sharing space with them.

### Shelters

Only three (30%) among the ten respondents reported using shelters. One respondent mentioned the security camera on site allowed them to feel safe. Some also expressed appreciation for the meals on site and the opportunity for protection from the heat and rain.

However, some described staff in the shelter system to be aggressive, lazy and disengaged and expressed disappointment around the lack of shelter beds and limited access to showers.

### Encampments

Three (30%) respondents used encampments outside. They reported feeling safer outside; they felt there was a lower threat of violence and that they could avoid the conflicts with staff.

The drawbacks to encampments included cold weather in the mornings, the inconvenience of moving when asked to leave the premises, and having their encampments trashed by the City of Toronto.

### *Couch-surfing*

The majority (60%) of the respondents were able to stay with family or friends intermittently following the close of the OOTC season. This gave them protection from the elements, safety, and companionship. They also reported couch-surfing gave them hope and reassurance that they might someday find housing. However, they also faced challenges around interpersonal conflicts, unwanted responsibilities (e.g. caring for others' pets), sharing resources (e.g. hygiene products, food, etc.), and safety when staying in neighbourhoods where drug-related crimes were prevalent.

### *Streets*

The majority (60%) also slept on the streets at times. Some reported enjoying the weather during warmer months, the lack of responsibility toward others, as well as the safety in numbers when they stayed on the streets. However, some also felt unsafe and reported experiencing harassment and discrimination. They experienced significant discomfort from sleeping on the ground and from carrying their belongings wherever they went. Noise, mosquitos and challenges around food preservation were also negative aspects of living on the streets.

### *Other*

Half the respondents also indicated using accommodations other than the ones listed above. These included riding TTC buses and subways throughout the night, and sleeping in the airport, abandoned buildings, 24-hour restaurants and coffee shops, banks, stairwells, boats and cars. They list benefits of these alternative accommodations such as encounters with compassionate people (e.g. TTC drivers), the sense of pride in their resourcefulness, and in some cases, finding quiet and safe environments. However, some also reported experiencing a lack of safety and comfort.

## **5.3.2 Coping with Heat**

When asked how they stayed cool during summer months, 88.9% (n = 8) of the nine respondents reported they knew how to cope with the heat. Among 10 respondents, 70% (n = 7) felt there were enough places to keep cool in the summer. They mentioned seeking refuge from the heat in libraries, the City's designated cooling centres (e.g. Metro Hall cooling centre), malls (e.g. Toronto Eaton Centre), coffee shops, fast food restaurants, city pools, under trees and other spaces outdoors where they were able to find shade, and any location with air conditioning. One person said they dealt with the heat by staying hydrated.

### *Helping the Homeless Population Cope with Heat*

OOTC guest survey respondents offered suggestions around protecting the homeless community from extreme heat. These are given in Table 3.

Table 3: OOTC guests survey respondents' suggestions around protecting homeless population from extreme heat

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Additional outreach; distributing resource sheets listing cooling centre locations and hours of operation</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Free TTC rides</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Water trucks spraying cool mist throughout the city</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refreshment stalls providing snacks (e.g. light fruits and vegetables) and drinking water</b></li> </ul>

### 5.3.3 Coping with Rain

Respondents also shared the ways they coped with rain. These include wearing ponchos, finding shade, staying indoors, and using umbrellas. One person mentioned they factored weather conditions into their planning and scheduling, which indicates how important it is for the homeless community to be aware of weather conditions.

### 5.3.4 Services Accessed

Respondents were asked where they ate, socialized, stayed warm during the daytime, sought help with housing and healthcare services, charged their phones and computers, used the internet and read. Figure 26 represents the responses where font size correlates with the frequency of responses.

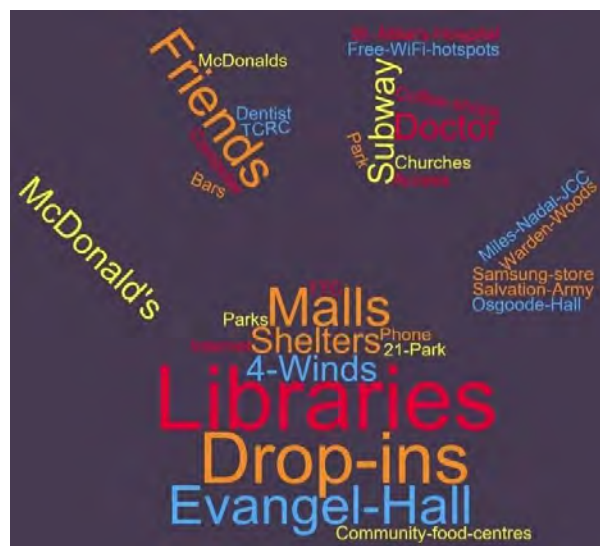


Figure 26: Word cloud demonstrating where OOTC guest survey respondents sought various services.

### 5.3.5 Experiences Outside the OOTC Program

#### Good Moments

OOTC guest survey respondents shared good moments they experienced despite the challenges surrounding their homelessness. They drew pleasure from good weather, visiting friends, socializing with peers, making new friends, and having special outings. They also felt a sense of satisfaction from earning money and making contributions to others, reporting they had gotten involved in Dixon Hall's programs. One respondent felt happy they found a space in a shelter. Another respondent was so

resilient while in CBSA detention that they applied for refugee status and recovered from drug and alcohol addictions.

### 5.3.6 Returning to the OOTC Program

Eighty percent (n = 8) of the respondents were still interested in being housed in October. One respondent mentioned they felt motivated to find housing before the start of the 2019/2020 OOTC season. Ninety percent (n = 9) plan to return to the OOTC program once it reopens. For some, this decision was based on a lack of alternative options. Others were drawn by the nutritious food, the availability of multiple sites as well as the fact that they were less crowded than other emergency shelter options. One respondent felt compelled to return because of their emotional attachment to the program. Guests also described deterrents such as security concerns and the discomfort of carrying their belongings throughout the day.

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*“OOTC has special place in my heart”  
- OOTC guest survey response*

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## 5.4 Advantages of Cellphones

All ten October OOTC guest survey respondents report having received cell phones at the beginning of the study. Seven (70%) intend to continue their cellphone plan, most of whom reported they intended to make payments with OW benefits. OOTC guest survey respondents mentioned various advantages and one disadvantage to having a smartphone. These are given in Table 4. Refer to Table 5 for the status of cellphones distributed through the survey.

**Table 4: Advantages and disadvantages of cellphones as described by OOTC guest survey respondents.**

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Ability to look up weather	• Difficult to operate
• Ability to make phone calls	
• Ability to use phone alarm	
• Access the internet wherever WiFi is available	
• Ability to communicate more easily and effectively	
• Ability to connect with people (e.g. Dixon Hall staff)	
• Ability to search for services	
• Increased social interaction	

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*“Took me out of my cave”  
- OOTC guest survey respondent*

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Table 5: Status of cellphones distributed through study

Cellphone Status	Number of Cellphones
Number distributed through survey	51
Number reported lost	15
Number reported stolen	2
Number whose status unknown (could not contact client)	12
Number reported damaged/broken	1
Number broken phones replaced	1
Number still active with the clients who received them	20
Number of clients housed outside OOTC season due to connection with Client Intervention Workers (CIW) through phones	7

## 5.5 June Surveys: Shelter Resident Respondents

### 5.5.1 Who are the Shelter Residents?

Shelter resident survey respondents were between 25 and 68 years of age. The mean age was 49.4. Compared with the 2018 SNA, the shelter residents who participated in this study are overrepresented in the senior category (60+); 21.9% of the shelter residents were above the age of 60, compared with only 10% of SNA respondents (Fig. 27). Meanwhile, none of the shelter resident survey respondents were youth, while 10% of SNA respondents were youth. Seniors also made up a higher percentage of shelter resident survey respondents than OOTC guest survey respondents. There are also no OOTC guest survey respondents under the age of 35, while 18.8% of the shelter resident survey respondents were below this age.

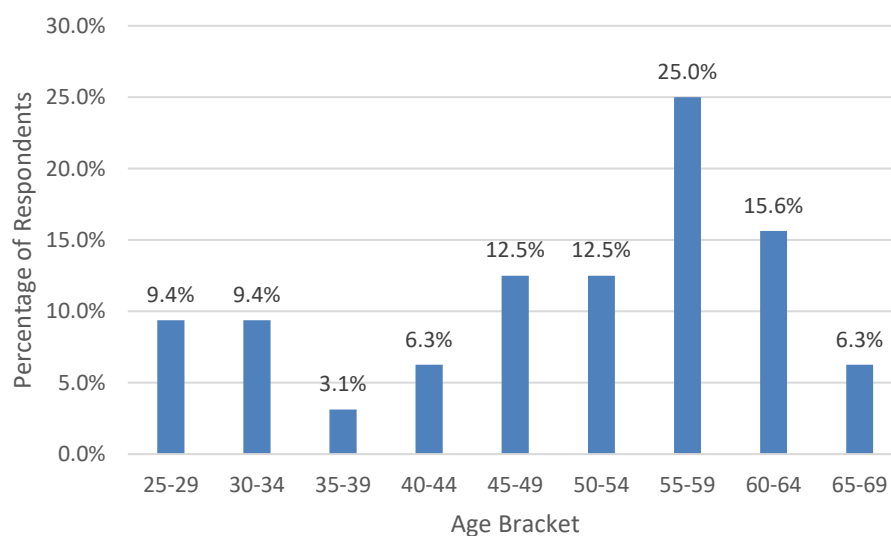
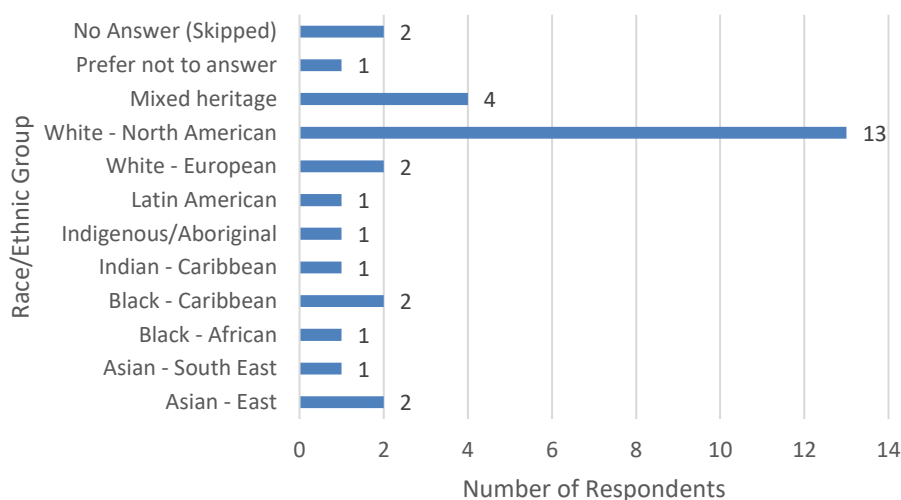


Figure 27: Age distribution of shelter resident survey respondents.

The gender and sexual orientation distributions of shelter resident survey respondents were quite similar to those of OOTC respondents. They were 75% (n = 27) male, 22.2% (n = 8) female and 2.8% (n = 1) transgender. The majority – 88.9% (n = 32) – are heterosexual, 5.6% (n = 2) are homosexual, 2.8% (n = 1) bisexual, and 2.8% (n = 1) are two-spirit. Most respondents – 72.2% (n = 26) were also born in Canada, 19.4% (n = 7) arrived in Canada before 2008 and only 2.8% (n = 1) arrived in Canada after 2008. These statistics are similar to those representing OOTC respondents' arrival to Canada, though the percentage who arrived before 2008 was slightly higher among OOTC respondents than among shelter residents. The racial/ethnic characteristics of this group, shown in Fig. 28, were similar to those of the OOTC guests. The largest group – 41.9% (n = 13) were white – North American, 12.9% (n = 4) were of mixed heritage, 6.5% (n = 2) were black – Caribbean and 6.5% (n = 2) were white – European.



**Figure 28: Race/ethnicity of shelter resident survey respondent.**

Nearly one-fifth – 19.4% (n = 7) – of the shelter residents reported they live with mobility issues, while 38.9% (n = 14) did not. A higher percentage – 41.7% (n = 15) – of these residents also self-reported living with mental health issues than did OOTC guests. Among these residents, 53.3% (n = 8) seek out mental health supports. One respondent who did not identify as having mental health challenges reported, however, using mental health supports. Nine residents (25%) self-reported suffering from an addiction and among them, 66.7% (n = 6) used addictions supports. Again, four respondents who reported not living with an addiction or who skipped the question said they were receiving addictions support. While a similar number of OOTC respondents reported seeking addictions support, more reported living with addictions.

With respect to source of income, a significant portion – 41.2% (n = 14) – reported receiving ODSP (Fig. 29). More than one-quarter – 26.5% (n = 9) – received OW, and 17.6% (n = 4) selected that they preferred not to answer the question or skipped the question altogether.

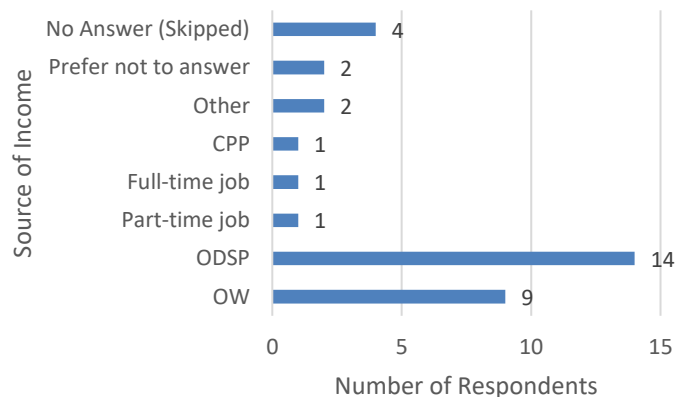


Figure 29: Income sources of shelter resident survey respondents.

There were more shelter resident survey respondents whose income ranged between \$0 and \$400 than there were OOTC guest survey respondents. With respect to income, 5.7% (n = 2) of shelter residents earned more than \$1400, 28.6% (n = 10) earned between \$801 – 1200 a month, 22.9% (n = 8) earned \$401 – 800, 22.9% (n = 8) earned between \$1 – 400, 11.4% (n = 4) reported no income and 8.5% (n = 3) opted not to respond (Fig. 30). Fewer shelter residents left this question unanswered than did the previous question around source of income.

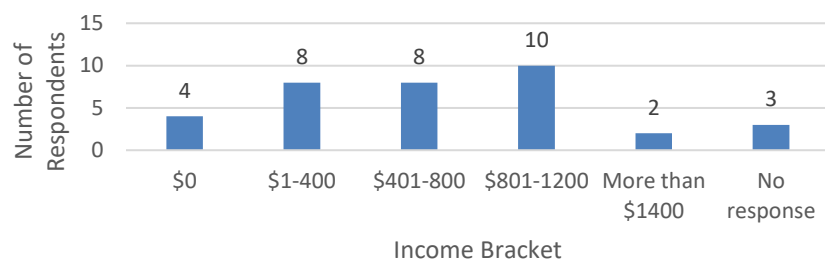


Figure 30: Income brackets of shelter resident survey respondents.

With respect to educational attainment, 19.4% (n = 7) of shelter resident survey respondents had not completed a high school diploma, 25% (n = 9) completed high school, 27.8% (n = 10) of completed some college, 11.1% (n = 4) completed their bachelor's degrees, and 2.8% (n = 1) completed a master's degree (Fig. 31). While there were more shelter resident than OOTC guest survey respondents who had Bachelor's degrees, there were also more who had not complete their high school diploma.

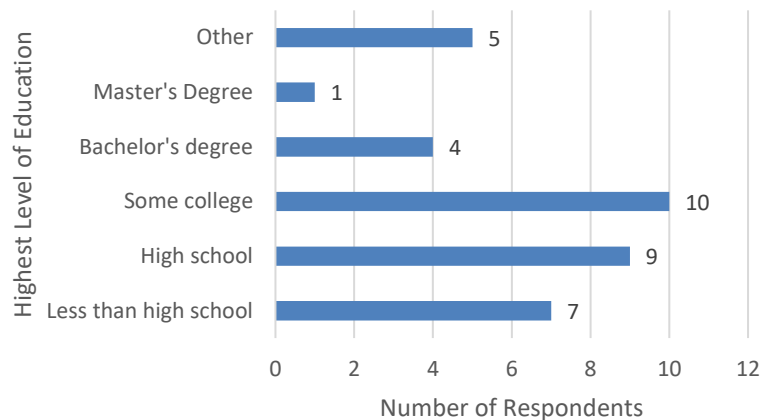


Figure 31: Educational attainment of shelter resident survey respondents.

### *Shelter as Housing for Longer Term Stays*

Among the 36 respondents, 72.2% (n = 26) responded that they did use shelter as housing, while 19.4% (n = 7) said they did not, 2.8% (n = 1) selected the skip option and 5.6% (n = 2) did not respond.

### *Positive and Negative Experiences in Shelters*

Shelter resident survey respondents were asked to share positive and negative experiences in shelters. These are summarized in Table 6. One factor that makes it difficult to interpret this feedback is that they are reflections on individual shelters, rather than the shelter system.

Table 6: Advantages and disadvantages of the shelter system as described by shelter resident survey respondents

Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protection from elements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsafe environment (e.g. gang activity, racism, psychological abuse, theft on site) despite existence of security cameras on site. Respondents requesting more action to ensure resident safety (e.g. cameras in dorms)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety of shelters to choose from</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges around living with residents suffering from addictions and mental health challenges</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff attributes (e.g. nice, polite, helpful in sharing information)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for cleaner facilities, better maintained washrooms and showers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quiet environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crowded environment, leading to increase in spread of pathogens</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safer environment than the outdoors due to zero tolerance policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for improvements around staff and volunteer performance (e.g. housing staff, cooks). Some report favoritism and invasion of privacy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality sleep, opportunity to sleep when you need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for additional physical provisions (e.g. packed lunch, more towels, more beds)</li> </ul>



• <b>More structure</b>	• Need for improvements to food (e.g. more variety in menu, more nutritious food, posting meals in advance)
• <b>Place where someone can work on and improve themselves</b>	• Need for additional services or improvements to services (e.g. more mental health and housing services, life skills)
• <b>Sense of community and an opportunity to socialize</b>	• Need for better dissemination of information and more support in navigating services
• <b>Donations (e.g. money, food, clothing, personal hygiene projects)</b>	• Need for opportunities to exercise
• <b>Consistent meals</b>	• Difficult to strike a balance between respecting privacy and ensuring safety of residents (i.e. some felt the vetting process was too strict, while others felt it was not strict enough)
• <b>Beds</b>	
• <b>Access to showers</b>	
• <b>Access to free WiFi</b>	
• <b>Access to services (e.g. health, harm reduction, job programs)</b>	
• <b>Opportunity to save money</b>	

#### Reasons for Being Turned Away from a Shelter

As was the case among OOTC guests with experience in the shelter system, most often, respondents were turned away due to a lack of beds. However, some report also being turned away due to fighting, conflicts with staff, expressing anger, intoxication or for no given reason. One respondent said they were turned away from a youth shelter.

#### Reasons for Being Service Restricted

Out of 36 shelter resident respondents, 33.3% (n = 12) report having been service restricted. Among those, 11 shared reasons for being barred; 9.1% (n = 1) were barred for fighting, 9.1% (n = 1) for theft, 36.4% (n = 4) for alcohol/drug-related reasons, and 45.5% (n = 5) due to discrimination.

#### Experiences of Shelter Residents in OOTC Program

Shelter residents with experiences using OOTC sites were asked to share positive and negative experiences in the OOTC program. These are given in Table 7.

**Table 7: Benefits and drawbacks of the OOTC program as described by the OOTC guest survey respondents**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Drawbacks</b>
• <b>Availability</b>	• Women felt uncomfortable with male presence
• <b>Staff and volunteer attributes (e.g. polite, respectful, helpful)</b>	• Poor hygiene of other guests
• <b>Warm environment</b>	• Lack of safety
• <b>Safe environment</b>	• Short season
• <b>Physical provisions (e.g. food, clothing)</b>	• Pest infestation (e.g. cockroaches, bed bugs)

• <b>Protection from cold weather</b>	• Schedule (early mornings)
• <b>Convenient location</b>	• Seasonality of program makes it difficult to find housing
	• Crowded
	• Cleanliness

### 5.5.2 Housing History of Shelter Residents

The mean length of homelessness for shelter residents is lower than that of OOTC guests. Both groups were asked when they were last housed. The mean response for the former was 3.6, while it was 7 for the latter. The range of responses for shelter residents was 1 month ago to 38 years ago. Shelter residents were also asked the longest period they had been homeless. The mean response was 3.4 years while for OOTC guests it was 7.2 years. The range for shelter residents was 30 years. The same percentage – 83.3% – were interested in being housed.

#### *Previous Housing Experience: Accommodation Type*

Shelter residents resorted to rooming houses less often than had OOTC guests. While 24.3% (n = 9) of the OOTC guests used rooming houses as their most recent experience of housing, 17.1% (n = 6) of shelter residents used this type of housing (Fig. 32). Meanwhile, more shelter residents used private apartments. While 18.9% (n = 7) of OOTC guests used private apartments, 31.4% (n = 11) of shelter residents did.

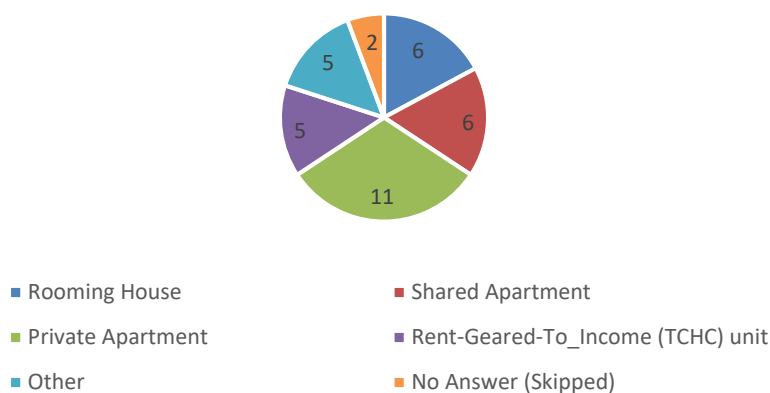


Figure 32: Shelter resident survey respondents' most recent accommodations.

#### *Housing Search Methods: Shelter Residents*

A larger percentage of shelter residents found housing by themselves than did OOTC guests; 35.3% (n = 12) of shelter residents found their own housing, while 25.7% (n = 9) of OOTC guests found their own housing (Fig. 33).

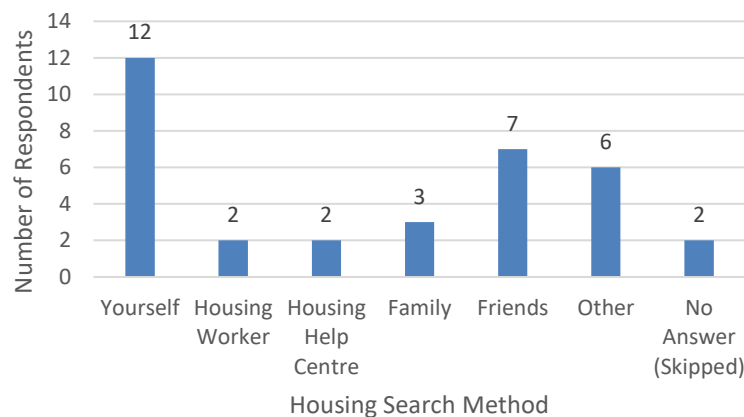


Figure 33: How shelter resident survey respondents found housing.

### *Housing Quality*

Out of 35 respondents, 68.6% (n = 24) found their last housing good, while 22.9% (n = 8) did not, 2.9% provided other responses and 5.7% (n = 2) did not answer the question.

### *Barriers to Keeping Housing*

Unclean accommodations (26.1%) accounted for the most prevalent barrier faced by shelter resident survey respondents to maintaining housing, followed by finances (21.7%) and conflict with roommates (17.4%). A larger percentage of shelter residents faced challenges around keeping housing due to finances than did OOTC guests (Fig. 34).

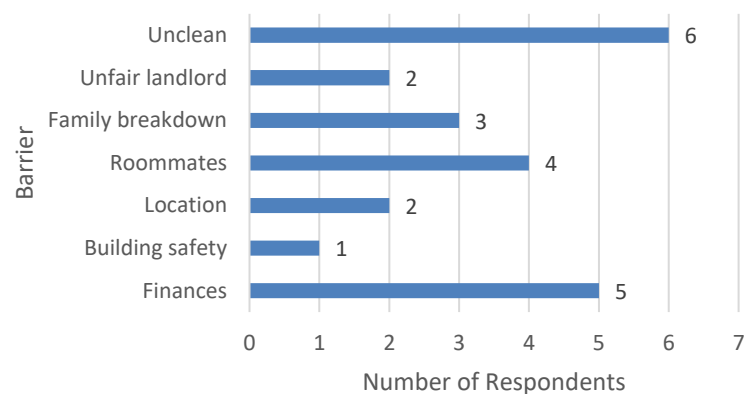


Figure 34: Barriers faced by shelter residents in keeping housing.

### *Landlord Discrimination Based on TTHAP, OW, and ODSP*

While 41.7% (n = 15) of shelter resident survey respondents had knowledge about TTHAP, 11.1% (n = 4) faced landlords who avoided TTHAP. Meanwhile, 37.1% (n = 13) faced landlords who discriminated based on OW or ODSP.

## 5.6 October Surveys: Shelter Resident Respondents

Only six shelter respondents participated in the October surveys. This low participation is due to the high turnover in shelter system during the summer months. All six residents stayed at the shelter. One person described the shelter as their home, another reported staying at the shelter for a lack of other options and the others did not share what compelled them to stay at the shelter.

### 5.6.1 Positive and Negative Experiences

Shelter resident survey respondents described positive and negative moments between June and October. Some positive experiences include finding part-time work, watching grandkids grow up, socializing, finding a volunteer opportunity, receiving gifts from staff, and receiving news from their housing workers about the possibility of being housed within the next year. Negative experiences include receiving threats, witnessing police escort people from the shelter, being targeted by shelter residents suffering from mental health challenges, losing potential housing due to misunderstanding, experiencing depression, and not being able to see family members since they began staying in the shelter.

## 5.7 Visualizing Research Findings



## 6.0 Recommendations

Twenty-five years ago, the Canadian homeless population was a small number of predominantly males experiencing chronic homelessness. Today, this number has grown to a national annual average of 235,000, with more than 35,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night. Youth, families, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, and individuals identifying as LGBTQ2S are now overrepresented among the homeless population. In reaction to this crisis, a large, expensive, emergency response infrastructure has been established; this has involved the building of shelters and

day programs. While there is widespread consensus that investment in emergency supports is a crucial aspect of the response to homelessness, it neither helps to prevent homelessness nor to house the homeless (Gaetz et al, n.d.). Dixon Hall makes the following recommendations to address these needs:

1. **Improve the income security system. It is imperative to address income disparities assuring that everyone has access to income that reflects the cost of living in Toronto.**
2. **Increase deeply affordable housing stock. Convene a multi-sectoral table or table(s) designed to create strategic coordinated solutions to homelessness in our city:**
  - **increase the availability of low barrier housing, shelters and respites. These shelters and respites must function as housing delivery systems designed to mitigate the current reality where shelters have become de facto housing.**
3. **Increase the number of supportive housing units, diversify populations served by supportive housing units, and integrate supportive housing units into all communities across our city.**
4. **Design effective workforce strategies for individuals who work in the shelters and respites and social housing field; embed opportunities for workforce advancement in the housing delivery system. This includes but is not limited to the most up-to-date training and improved compensation for front-line workers.**
5. **Assure a continuity of services to individuals who access the range of Shelter, Respite and Out of the Cold Programs in the City of Toronto. These services include but are not limited to:**
  - **Focussed health supports**
  - **Coordinated access to Housing and Housing Supports**
  - **Contemporary Harm Reduction and Mental Health programming and supports**
6. **Increase opportunities for decent employment, peer programming and community engagement. Survey respondents asked for peer workshops, skills development and professional employment supports.**
7. **Build Strategic Community relationships to assure collaborative community-based shelter and Housing initiatives. Transitional housing elements were are seen as a critical component of moving individuals from chronic homelessness to stable housing.**
8. **Make evidence-based research and program decisions in collaboration with People with Lived Experience. Commit to making Community Based Research central to all decision-making processes.**
9. **Invest in research that assures continued commitment to the implementation of best practices in serving homeless men and women, assuring that we as a city can foresee and mitigate trends that affect our city to the best of our capacity. Ensure that implementation strategies are central to the research.**
10. **Enshrine Housing as a Human Right in legislation as per the National Housing Strategy (NHS).**

## 7.0 Wrap-up

### 7.1 Positive Outcomes

This study gave rise to meaningful engagement with and insight from a highly marginalized group of homeless people. Their feedback informed the research planning process. This insight also provided significant suggestions around improvements that can be made to the OOTC program and shelter system. It also provided some meaningful suggestions around improvements that can be made to 24-hour respite sites. These insights could help to inform City staff around respite planning. This study also gave Dixon Hall the opportunity to advocate for their homeless clients. It gave a voice those who are not interested in housing and to recognize that needs and priorities vary. It provided those who were interested in doing advocacy work around homelessness training opportunities as well as the opportunity to speak at Dixon Hall's knowledge dissemination event scheduled to take place March 2019.

Some of the recommendations gleaned from this study have been implemented. These include:

- Increased information sharing
- Increased staff
- Increased staff training

### 7.2 Thoughts on Next Steps

Many improvements can be made to this study's methodology. In order to ensure the findings are representative, larger sample sizes should be used. Most of the interviews done through this research were done with heterosexual, white males. It is important to gain insight from other communities (e.g. women, LGBTQ, racialized, etc.) Some changes should also be made to the survey. These include questions around gender, sexual orientation, disability and education.

Further research is needed to advance our understanding of the OOTC guests' experiences and histories around homelessness and housing. Research topics include women's experiences, changing demographics and the need for more individualized supports in the OOTC program. Moreover, this study focused on the experiences of the homeless population in OOTC sites and shelters. While some insight into the homeless population's experiences in 24-hour respite sites were collected through discussions with OOTC guests and shelter residents who have used respites, limited information was collected around the histories of housing and homelessness of the population who are dependent on respites or around the positive and negative aspects of respite sites. Future research should explore this field.

Future research should also consider the following questions:

- **What information did this study not manage to collect?**
- **What information is needed to better serve this population?**
- **How can clients be engaged differently considering they are in a temporary living arrangement in a City with minimal affordable housing?**
- **What goals other than finding housing should guide the research?**



- Are there tools Dixon Hall and City of Toronto can share or develop together?

### 7.3 Phase 3

The third phase of this project will involve knowledge transfer and exchange activities. Stakeholders will be informed of research findings through a spring forum on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019 with the goal of improving access to necessary resources and housing opportunities.

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