

Report Card on Homelessness



working together to end homelessness

December 2009

Ending Homelessness Makes Good Economic Sense

In December 2008, **The World Bank** declared that the current recession was the worst economic slump since the Great Depression. Charities, especially those dealing with the vulnerable, have seen a significant decrease in donations combined with a dramatic increase in the use of their services.

This report card is a call to action on the current homeless situation in Simcoe County. In 2008, **1,463 different individuals** spent at least one night in the emergency shelter system.

This report card is a call to action on a rental market that has some of the most unaffordable rents in all of Ontario. The average three bedroom apartments in our County costs \$1,144 per month, the average income for a full time worker at minimum wage is \$1,645!

This report card is a call to action for the dire need to add significantly more subsidized housing units. Simcoe County has the lowest number of subsidized housing units per capita in the entire Province. The County has the highest number of people waiting for subsidized housing per capita anywhere in the Province.

*now, in 2009,
more than any time since
the Great Depression,
the needs are greater
than ever*

The findings of this report card are sobering. The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness are hoping this report will be a rallying cry for all of the people of Simcoe County to say – now, in 2009, more than any time since the Great Depression, the needs are greater than ever. And now, in 2009, we believe is absolutely

right time to end homelessness and that this report card will show - ending homelessness makes good economic sense.



Report Card

Grade		2008
Absolute Homelessness		
C-	Number of Different Individuals Served by Emergency Shelter System	1,463
	Number of Homeless Individuals Not Seeking Shelter Assistance	7,500 +
	Shelter Stay Gender	
	• Percentage Male	67%
	• Percentage Female	33%
	Shelter Stay Age	
	• Less than 25	30%
	• 25 to 34	21%
	• 35 to 44	25%
	• 45 to 54	19%
• 55 and older	6%	
Rental Housing Availability and Rental Costs		
C	Vacancy Rate	
	• One Bedroom	2.9%
	• Two Bedroom	3.8%
C-	• Three Bedroom	0.6%
	Average Market Rents (4.4% increase from 2007 to 2008)	
	• One Bedroom	\$860
	• Two Bedroom	\$954
	• Three Bedroom	\$1,144
Rental Housing Affordability		
D+	Minimum Wage (monthly income at 40 hrs week, before taxes, etc.)	\$1,645
	Ontario Works Program Maximum Shelter Allowance Single Person	\$356
	Ontario Works Maximum Shelter Allowance Four Person Family	\$660
	Ontario Disability Support Program Maximum Shelter Allowance Single Person	\$454
	Ontario Disability Support Program Maximum Shelter Allowance Four Person Family	\$842
Subsidized Housing Availability		
F	Number of Subsidized Housing Units	2,801
	Number of Subsidized Housing Units per 1,000 people	6.6
	Provincial Average Subsidized Housing Units per 1,000 People	16.2
	Ranking of Subsidized Units per 1,000 people	last
	Wait List for Subsidized Housing Units	3,317
	Number of Subsidized Housing Units per 1,000 people on the Wait List	0.8
	Provincial Average Subsidized Housing Units per 1,000 People on Wait List	1.6
Ranking of Subsidized Units per 1,000 people on Wait List	last	



SCATEH Comments

Absolute Homelessness

The County of Simcoe assisted 1,463 individuals with emergency shelter assistance. This number does not include the people who access the **Out of the Cold** programs in Barrie and Midland or individuals or families that are temporarily living with friends, living in motor vehicles, or living in alleys and parks. Based on surveys of the local housing registries in each community and homelessness advocacy agencies, this number is at least 7,500 people who experienced homelessness in 2008.

The analysis of the shelter users sees the changing face of homelessness. 30% of shelter users were under the age of 25; 33% of shelter users were female. At the housing resource centres, the statistics have shown a dramatic increase in services provided to families and recently laid off individuals. Homelessness is affecting people due to many reasons including insufficient affordable housing, low income, mental health and/or substance abuse issues, family conflict, job loss and inadequate discharge planning.

Rental Housing Availability and Rental Costs

The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation release an annual report on the housing situation in several Canadian cities. This data is for Barrie (which includes Innisfil and Springwater Townships for 2008). SCATEH believes these numbers are consistent throughout the rest of the County.

There are two significant findings in the 2008 report. The first is the average rental increase was a disturbing 4.4%. This is significant increase from the 2008 cost of

living increase of 2.1% - showing that the costs for housing are rising faster than the cost of living and wage increases.

The second is the vacancy rate for 3 bedroom units at 0.6%. Housing analysts consider 3% to be the ideal rate – 0.6% indicates extreme difficulty in finding 3 bedroom housing even at an average rental rate of \$1,144.

Rental Housing Affordability

The key item that concerns SCATEH is the high rental rates in Simcoe County as compared to what a person earning minimum wage or a social assistance benefit would receive. Affordable rent is defined by CMHC as the rental costs being 30% of an individual's gross income. Using this formula, a 2 bedroom housing units that rent for \$954 require a full time hourly wage **\$18.36** to be considered affordable. A 3 bedroom housing unit

requires a person to earn **\$22.01** and hour working full time to be affordable. A family of 4 on OW receives a maximum of \$660 for shelter, the same family receiving ODSP receives \$842.

Subsidized Housing Availability

In 2002, when the Provincial government downloaded Social Housing to the municipalities, they established minimum numbers of social housing units for each Service Manager. For Simcoe County, the number of subsidized units was set at 2,801. When comparing those standards to other municipalities, based on subsidized units per 1,000 people, Simcoe County has the lowest number of units. This is simply a result of the 1995 decision of the Provincial government to cease all new development of subsidized housing. Since then,

Simcoe County's population has grown the fastest in all of Canada. As a result, the population has grown, but no additional subsidized housing has been added resulting in fewer units per 1,000 people.

The wait lists in Simcoe County are the longest per 1,000 people of any Service Manager in Ontario.

Ending Homelessness Makes Good Economic Sense

Malcolm Gladwell, best selling author of “The Tipping Point” wrote an article for **The New Yorker** magazine in March 2006 titled “Million-Dollar Murray”. The article highlighted the true story plight of Murray, a much loved alcoholic ex-US Marine, as he wound through the life of living on the streets of Las Vegas. Murray led a tough life and tragically, as is too often the case with the homeless, Murray passed away from health related complications of living on the streets.

In the article, two policemen recount a simple summary of the additional costs borne by Murray such as hospitalization, psychiatric help, incarceration and various other social expenses from spending 10 years on the streets. Their conclusion, **“It cost us one million dollars not to do something about Murray”**.

In 2009, the **University of B.C.** completed a 148-page report, **“Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia”** to examine the real costs of homelessness in British Columbia. The study found that the answer in B.C. is \$55,000 annually for every homeless person in health, corrections and social services spending.

However, the most disturbing aspect of the report was not the amount of money being spent annually but more the studies conclusion that if housing and support were offered to these people, it would cost the system much less — just \$37,000 a year! The study argues that after removing what the province is paying for health care, jail and shelters, and by spreading the capital costs out over several years, **taxpayers could ultimately stand to save nearly \$33 million annually.**

we believe that money spent on subsidized housing and increased support for those who are homeless and at risk of becoming homeless – is money well spent.

“Without adequate housing and support, people with severe addictions and/or mental illness who are homeless often cycle through the streets, prisons and jails, and high-cost health care settings such as emergency rooms and psychiatric inpatient units,” the study says.

“Research has shown that people... who are homeless, once believed to be unreachable and difficult to serve, can be engaged into services, can accept and benefit from mental health and substance use services, and can remain in stable housing with appropriate supports.”

The focus of this report card is to look at homelessness in Simcoe County and look at some of the services that support these people. We believe these services are integral parts to the complex solution to homelessness. But greater, we believe that money spent on subsidized housing and increased support for those who are homeless and at risk of becoming homeless – is money well spent. ***Because quite simply, we believe that it costs far less to help the homeless by adding more housing and supports than the current model that has not worked at ending homelessness. Ending homelessness simply makes good economic sense.***



Subsidized Housing and Supports to Housing Keys to Ending Homelessness



There are many causes of homelessness, including insufficient affordable housing and housing supply, low income, the gap between income and affordability, mental health and/or substance abuse issues, family conflict, violence, job loss, breakdown, and inadequate discharge planning.

The solutions to homelessness are complex. SCATEH does however promote two key items to solving homelessness. Additional subsidized housing and supports for the homeless and at risk of becoming homeless.

Additional Subsidized Housing

In 2006, the Wellesley Institute completed a report called *"Housing and Homelessness: A look at 21 Ontario cities and communities"* by Michael Shapcott. This report analyzed the findings of a study of 568 formerly homeless families five years after being homeless. The conclusions were simple – 80% of the families that were living in stable housing 5 years later had been provided with subsidized housing.



The studies conclusion: "We found that subsidized housing succeeds in curing homelessness among families, regardless of behavioural disorders or other conditions. Whatever their problems – substance abuse, mental illness, physical illness or a history of incarceration – nearly all of the families became stably housed when they received subsidized housing."

improve quality of life and, in some cases, enable the individual to recover the ability to live and function independently

Supports for Housing

The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness also endorses the need to provide supports for housing. This includes the need to provide ongoing financial supports from all levels of government for housing resource centres, housing support workers, financial programs to assist in eviction prevention and counsellors to help those with the greatest impairments.

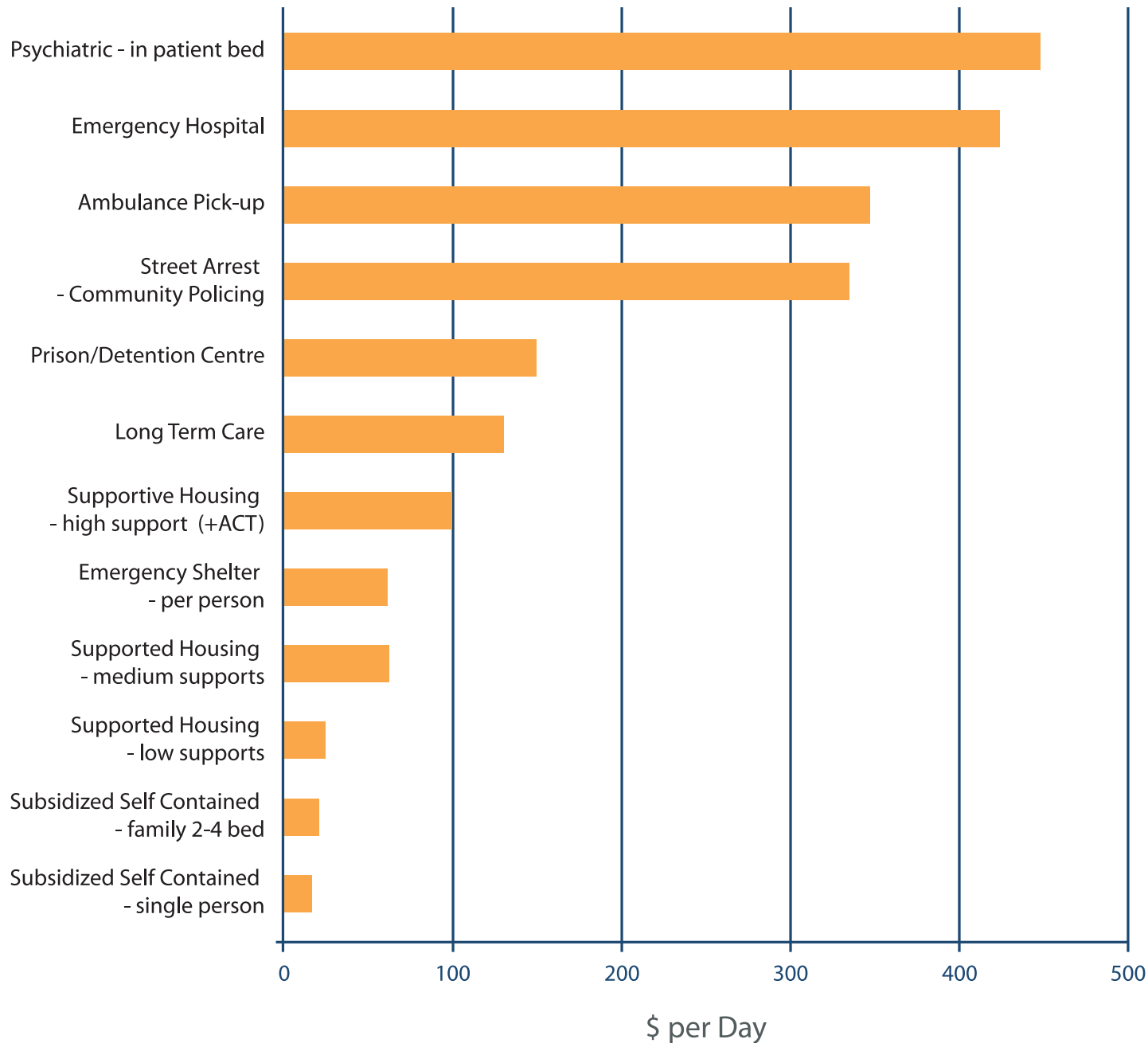
To this conclusion, the Region Waterloo completed an excellent study in 2007 titled: *"Pro-Active Versus Reactive Responses: The Business Case for a Housing Based Approach to Reduce Homelessness in the Region of Waterloo"*. The report found that **stable, affordable housing with support levels appropriate to needs** can remove an individual from the debilitating effects of repeated homelessness cycles, improve quality of

life and, in some cases, enable the individual to recover the ability to live and function independently.



The Hidden Costs of Homelessness

Typical Daily Cost for Service Across Typology of Responses to Homelessness



Taken from:

Pro-Active Versus Reactive Responses: The Business Case for a Housing Based Approach to Reduce Homelessness in the Region of Waterloo.



How SCATEH Members are Helping in Simcoe County

There are many short term solutions and programs that are meeting the needs of the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless in our community. The following pages of the Report Card on Homelessness focuses on but a few of the efforts and programs of several members of SCATEH that so effectively assist our greater mission to one day soon see an end to those living on the streets or in shelter programs.

Shelter Now - Midland

Shelter Now is a non-profit organization and a registered charity with a mission to provide transitional housing in the North Simcoe area. Our vision is a community that has safe and affordable housing for all.

Shelter Now has recently completed a 20 unit transitional housing complex that will serve those who are homeless or inadequately housed. This project is funded by two private donors and is an amazing gift for the people of North Simcoe.

Need for Safe, Affordable Housing

Emergency and transitional housing have been recognized as top priorities in the North Simcoe area. Emergency shelter needs are met now by a motel voucher system administered by **Community Link** in partnership with the **Midland Police Service** for after-hours service. Shelter Now is committed to providing transitional housing for up to one year in order to help individuals and families address the issues that created their housing crisis in the first place.

help individuals and families address the issues that created their housing crisis in the first place

Collaborative Solutions

Shelter Now has developed collaborative relationships with several organizations that may be able to provide on-site services once the building is complete. These organizations include **Wendat** for mental health outreach and crisis counselling, **Georgianwood**, part of the Mental Health Centre, for addictions/concurrent disorder counselling, **Community Link North Simcoe** for housing support services, budgeting assistance and mediation. Shelter Now works with many other organizations to prevent homelessness including the **Salvation Army**, **Out of the Cold**, food banks, soup kitchens, **Children's Aid**, **Community Living Huronia**, **Rosewood** and many more. Once the network of support is in place, this will prevent clients from falling through the cracks before long term housing can be established.

Contact Info

For more information please contact Sheila Storey at sstorey@shelternow.ca.

Home Horizon Transitional Housing Services - Collingwood

Home Horizon has 5 transitional housing units located in Collingwood. Through a partnership with the County of Simcoe this transitional housing service has developed a unique approach to providing transitional housing to those who need time to stabilize their situation before transitioning into permanent homes. Through goal setting, group peer support work and life skills counseling participants gain the skills and confidence they need to move forward to build a better life for themselves and their families.



Georgian Triangle Housing Resource Centre - Collingwood

For many people who live on fixed or limited incomes, the search for permanent affordable housing can be both challenging and discouraging. The Housing Resource Centre's primary focus is to assist individuals looking for permanent housing. We also provide practical housing support to those facing other housing challenges.

Our staff is committed to increasing awareness of homelessness within the Georgian Triangle.

The Housing Resource Centre provides many important services at no cost to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless including:

- Access to all available rental listings throughout the Georgian Triangle
- Practical support and advice to assist tenants in their search for housing
- Other practical assistance including; budgeting, debt counseling
- Comprehensive information relating to the Residential Tenancy Act. (RTA 2007)
- A confidential interview with a staff person will help to determine housing needs and to assist individuals in finding the most suitable housing.

provides many important services at no cost to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless

Georgian Triangle is one of five housing support services located throughout Simcoe County. The supports and services provided by these housing resource centres are a key in assisting the homeless and those at risk of homelessness from obtaining and retaining stable affordable housing.

For more info visit the Georgian Triangle Housing Resource Centre, 115 Hurontario Street, Suite 203, Collingwood, ON or call 705-445-0643. Our website is: www.housinginfo.ca

211 – Simcoe County

Need more information regarding housing supports. 211 Simcoe County provides help

connecting individuals to more than 5,400 community, social, health and government agencies. Just dial 211 for more help.

www.211simcoecounty.ca





David Busby Street Centre - Barrie

The David Busby Street Centre is a drop-in centre designed to provide a safe environment for people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in the community. Using a non-judgmental approach and philosophy of empowerment, the Centre offers a number of services including case management and crisis support. The Centre also offers practical assistance including food/beverages, clothing, hygiene supplies, and a place to shower. The Centre's harm reduction program is the leading outlet for needle and safe inhalation kit distribution, and used needle returns in Simcoe County.

Over the past year, the Centre saw 30,226 visits to access our drop-in services. Our counselors assisted people in 2,375 instances with housing issues and

connected with 683 individuals through our **Outreach Van** services. **Central Intake**, operating from November until April, directed 436 individuals who were homeless to temporary shelter in the City of Barrie.



The Centre has continued to see increasing numbers of people accessing services. As a result of the poor economy, many more people are vulnerable to losing their housing and hydro, and are relying on grocery assistance vouchers, free clothing and infant need supplies, and access to services like our **VON** contracted Nurse Practitioner. We have seen a marked increase in young people attending the drop-in-centre. A recent review of our program statistics also revealed that during the 4-month period May through August 2009 we assisted 105 unique families with children.

Through the VON, our Nurse Practitioner addresses the complex needs of individuals who are insecurely housed. Some of our participants with disabilities have been helped to transition from **Ontario Works** to **Ontario Disability Support Program**, thereby increasing their quality of life. The **Canadian Mental Health Association** provides an onsite outreach worker two half-days per week, to assist individuals with mental health issues to feel more comfortable accessing their services; their crisis team is here one half-day weekly; and a mobile crisis team joins our outreach van staff one night each week. Ontario Works has a transitional worker attend our Centre one half-day per week. Simcoe Community Services (Barrie Housing) provides a housing worker to assist our clients two full days and two half-days each week.

a drop-in centre designed to provide a safe environment for people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in the community

The current challenge is relocation and raising funds for both our operational and capital requirements. Given the need to be located downtown in the City of Barrie; this increases the costs of purchasing adequate facilities and narrows the scope of potential properties.

Contact Info

For more information or how you can help, please contact Yis Cohen at executivedirector@busbycentre.ca



Lighthouse Christian Ministries

Orillia's Soup Kitchen and Shelter

The **Soup Kitchen** opens its doors at 9:30 am daily with the exception of Sunday. Coffee, tea, donuts and muffins are provided and the tables are ready for the folks to sit down and visit with friends old and new. A short devotional is offered, grace is said and the food is served to a hungry crowd ranging in number from as low as 25 to as many as 55 men and women.

The food is faithfully prepared each morning by the kitchen staff. The food itself comes to the café by various means. We receive food that has been donated by individuals and organizations when they have a surplus. For this reason the menu is varied and changes often.

The **Drop-In Centre** opens for 2 hours starting at 1:30 pm, after we have ample opportunity to clean up from a busy lunch hour. People are free to come and go as they please, grab a cup of coffee, watch a bit of television, play board games, visit, or simply enjoy a reprieve from the weather.

The **Emergency Shelter for Men** opens its door at 6:00 pm 365 days a year without exception. Any individual not already registered must apply for shelter assistance at this time in order to determine his eligibility. Once again, the kitchen springs into action as a hot supper is prepared for as many as 14 hungry men (shelter capacity is 14 dormitory-style bunk beds). The shelter remains open from 6:00 pm to 8:00 am, allowing each man supper, a hot shower, a warm bed, breakfast and a place to "hang their hat" for a short time.

Who are the poor in Orillia? Of the hundreds of individuals we see walk through our doors each year, it seems each has their own life story to tell. Many collect a meager disability pension each month and require an extra meal here and there to get by. Others find themselves unable to find meaningful, full-time employment for extended periods, often needing assistance either for housing, food and groceries, or even clothing.

Many, including those individuals struggling with addictions and/or mental issues, also find that rent takes up an enormous percentage of what little money they see each month, leaving little for other necessities. When relationships break down, many who formerly relied on dual incomes to make ends meet now find it much more costly, especially for housing. Often times the Lighthouse is the last resort.

Young or old, all are welcome in the café. It is a meeting place of sorts where the common bond that runs through everybody's lives is the need of fellowship, community and friendship. Rest assured, the Lighthouse has always maintained an open door policy in order to create an environment where people can meet and share with one another. Stop by any time for a free bowl of hot soup and a lunch!

Of the hundreds of individuals we see walk through our doors each year, it seems each has their own life story to tell.

Salvation Army Food Bank - Midland

Each year nearly 4,000 households receive assistance from the Salvation Army Food Bank in Midland. The Food Bank, part of the **Community and Family Services Department**, also provides an extensive referral service, advocacy, counseling, Christmas assistance, a nutritional program, supports for those being released from jail, a lunch program for seniors, and support during disasters and emergencies. These, plus services delivered by other departments, such as the **Thrift Store**, are part of the church's ongoing outreach to the most disadvantaged members of our community. We do not use the term "ongoing" lightly: The Salvation Army has been active in Midland for 124 years.

The Food Bank's core service is the provision of basic groceries to those in need in North Simcoe, an area with a population of 55,000. In a typical year the Food Bank provides groceries to nearly 7,000 individuals. Our objective is to provide each client with groceries for approximately three days, no more than once a month. What goes into a food hamper varies with family size and our stock on hand. Our stats tell us we can attribute a value of \$167,184 per year to these basic food hampers.

How is this \$167,184 aiding the fight against homelessness? Persons with a low income often have to make difficult choices. Whether to pay the rent or buy food is, too often, one of those choices. By providing a safety net for the grocery part of their budget, a food bank tips the choice in favor of paying the rent, staving off homelessness for another month.





Youth Haven - Barrie

Last year, Youth Haven helped well over 500 young homeless people between the ages of 16 to 21 with emergency and transitional housing. Youth Haven is the **only** youth shelter in **all** of Simcoe County. Our non-profit organization strives to protect homeless youth from external elements and provide them with the tools to survive and grow.

Although Youth Haven provides nutritious food and clothing for youths that find themselves without parental support, many people are unaware of the complex and vital roles that Youth Haven strives to achieve everyday for each young person that seeks our help. Along with the basic necessities for survival, Youth Haven believes that equipping youths with life skills is tantamount to ensuring that hunger is satiated and an environment of safety is upheld. Residents are required to actively seek out fulltime employment opportunities, educational and vocational goals and life skills- training in self sufficiency. With the aid of a life skills coach, these youth set up an "action plan" outlining goals they wish to achieve during their 30 day stay in order to foster an environment of consistency, security and ownership of personal goals.

We will be celebrating our 22nd anniversary this year. We have recently relocated to a larger facility at 22 Wellington Street East which can house up to 20 young homeless people overnight.

The focus is to ensure that they not only stay off the streets in the short term, but also in the long term.

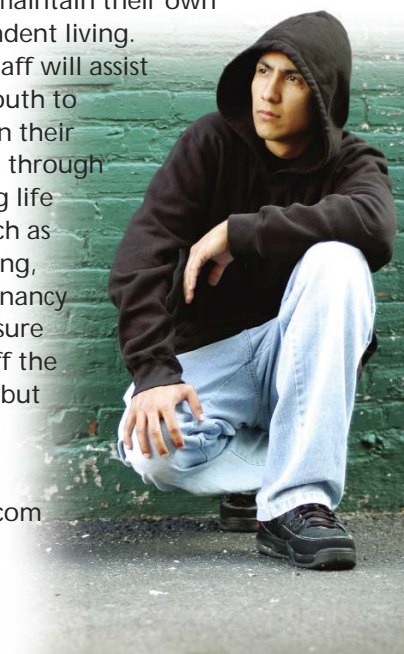
As the fastest growing city in Canada, Barrie has experienced tremendous growth over the past three years and the number of teens we serve each year has more than doubled.

Youth Haven is currently developing an aftercare program to redirect ex-residents out of the cycle of homelessness. While we know that supplying care packages and meals to ex-residents helps to alleviate the

stresses, these items do not resolve the root of this problem. We need more staff to specifically focus on the youth that have found affordable housing and to maintain their own independent living. These staff will assist these youth to maintain their housing through teaching life skills such as budgeting,

conflict resolution and tenancy issues. The focus is to ensure that they not only stay off the streets in the short term, but also in the long term.

Website:
www.youthhavenbarrie.com



The Key Program - Orillia

The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care funds a program in Simcoe County aimed at housing and supporting 200 individuals county-wide who have a serious mental illness and who face issues or homelessness or are at risk of same. Orillia was identified as one of six communities in the County to receive funding to provide **case management**, **community support** and a **rent supplement** to individuals meeting the criteria. The Homeless Initiative, or the Key Program as it is called in Orillia, is currently meeting the needs of twenty-four people. Safe and affordable housing with appropriate supports in place is seen as the "key" to a better quality of life.

The Key Program is making a positive difference in the lives of individuals who have lost hope that things will be different.

Here are some comments:

"The Key Program rescued me from living in my car and hopefully will continue to help me return to a life."

"With the support of the Key Program I have been able to get the support I need and to find part time employment. I feel better when I work and I feel like I am contributing."

Over 50% of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness struggle with a mental illness. At almost \$1,000.00 per hospital day, it is much more cost effective to provide staffing support through programs like the Key Program.

Life is not fair and we are not born equal. Poverty and homelessness is as much an issue in the city of Orillia as it is in other larger centres, and this is just one way that the needs of the people are being met.

