

# HOMELESSNESS IN SASKATOON

*“When I was homeless and strange in this land  
searching for kindness, you held out your hand.”*

A report prepared by the Social Justice Committee of St. Joseph's Parish.

## 1. REASONS FOR PEOPLE BEING HOMELESS

1.1. No rent money (unemployed, insufficient wages, on social assistance).

Temporary financial crisis: Failure to budget. Cost of medication, school fees.

Other more immediate requirements, eg. car repairs, food.

1.2. Unsatisfactory accommodation requires a move to a more expensive rental.

1.3. Eviction by landlord for various reasons.

1.4. Social assistance shelter rates have not been changed since the 1980s and are well below the market rental rate.

NOTE: Government is faced with several dilemmas. To raise the shelter rates, taxes have to be raised, but there is an outcry against tax increases.

Raising the shelter allowance means more money to the landlord with no assurance of increased low rental accommodation.

All people, whether in government or as part of the populace, look to incentives to get people off social assistance. Increasing the shelter allowance may not do this.

Higher repair costs give little incentive for landlords to maintain rental property, with increasing numbers of properties being left empty. This further reduces the stock of available low rental housing.

1.5. Lack of safe affordable housing.

Given the above factors, the city has a permanent renters' market. This is worsened by the number of people moving into the city. Our population has increased by 25% since 1995, with half that number (in the region of 20,000) moving into the five core neighbourhoods. These people are at a low socio-economic level and desperately need low rental housing.

RESULTS: Overcrowding and substandard housing, often without basements (useful for extra sleeping space) can lead to problems associated with health, education, and social activities. These in turn can lead to increased crime. Statistics show that extra policing instead of providing

protection and safety can have the opposite effect. More police means more arrests which publicize the area as being rundown and unsafe reinforcing the downward spiral for people and housing.

#### 1.6. Lack of safe temporary shelter.

Temporary shelter operated by groups such as YWCA (for women and all ages, young girls and children) and the Salvation Army (men and youths) are not always safe. Dormitory style accommodation for the men is less safe than the individual rooms at the YWCA, but people with alcohol and other drug addictions are likely to cause problems such as stealing and fighting. Thus some people prefer to sleep rough.

NOTE: The police have extensive records of people being apprehended in a state of drunkenness and drug addiction. What do they do with a person who may be apprehended as many as 30 times in a six month period? Such people are turned away by both the above agencies.

The answer may be a "detox tank" similar to one operated in Vancouver. Saskatoon city police have been looking at such a facility for over three years, but whose financial responsibility (in the region of \$300,00 per year) is this? Provincial government, city government, police department or health district?

#### 1.7. Personal problems.

Many of the people for whom temporary shelter may be a haven have psychological problems. We have closed the institutions, such as Battlefords, with the intent that those people would be cared for by their families or in group homes (Jean Vanier) but this does not always happen. The people are sometimes a risk to themselves.

Others of significance, usually women and families or single youth, are living in conflict in often abusive homes.

In this category we can add transients who because of reciprocal arrangements between provincial social services may not be eligible for shelter allowance in a province through which they are travelling. Also, people arriving in the city seeking work are often without money until the second or third week of being employed.

## 2. EXPERIENCE IN OTHER CITIES

- 2.1. Calgary: 47% of the homeless are the working poor. Besides having a huge Salvation Army hostel downtown, there is a program operated by some churches.

Each evening a bus provided by a business transports men women and children (to a limit of 50 people) to a church where at least five different crews operate a night shelter. The crews include administration, clean up, providing supper, providing breakfast, on duty through the night. On a rotational basis one church can expect to be host at least once in six weeks (i.e. 42 churches). Note the cost and labour are never ending.

One alternative has been for people to camp out in the summer time so that they have enough money to rent housing in the winter months.

- 2.2 Toronto also has a number of downtown churches but uses donated sleeping bags. The homeless have problems in keeping the bags in good clean condition since they are expected to carry them during the day for use at the next night shelter.

## 3. POSSIBLE TEMPORARY SOLUTIONS (CHARITY MODEL)

- 3.1. The government provides long term aid to YWCA and other temporary shelter facilities.
- 3.2. Support organizations like Friendship Inn and the food bank, which besides providing food, also offer

courses in life skills.

- 3.3. Support agencies in the city working for change such as Communities for Children, Child Hunger Education Program with its Community Kitchen concept.

#### 4. LONG TERM (SOCIAL JUSTICE, CHANGING THE SYSTEM)

- 4.1 Press for government financing safe affordable housing. Presently, one in three renters pay more than 30% of their income on rent.
- 4.2 Become informed about local agencies such as Quint and Community First and their work.