

Immigrant Housing Issues in the Context of an Economic Crisis

Presentation by Beth Wilson
Senior Researcher, Social Planning Toronto
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Setting the Context

- 2006 Census:
 - Half of Toronto's residents are immigrants
 - 1 in 5 immigrants are newcomers (2001-06), 81% from racialized groups
 - 46% before-tax poverty rate for Toronto newcomers
 - Toronto is a city of renters – 45.6% occupied dwellings are rented dwellings
- Social Housing Waiting List in Toronto:
 - 135,584 people in February 2010

Context Continued

➤ Discrimination in Rental Housing

- Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, “Sorry, it’s rented: Measuring discrimination in Toronto’s rental housing market”, conducted Summer 2008
- Ontario Human Rights Commission, “Right at Home: Report on the consultation on human rights and rental housing in Ontario”, released in 2008

Context Continued

- Immigrants and Homelessness
 - Street Health, “The Street Health Report 2007”
 - Centre for Research on Inner City Health, “The health of homeless immigrants”, published 2009

Toronto: Recession by the Numbers

➤ Unemployment:

- 10.07% in September 2009, up from 7.85% one year earlier

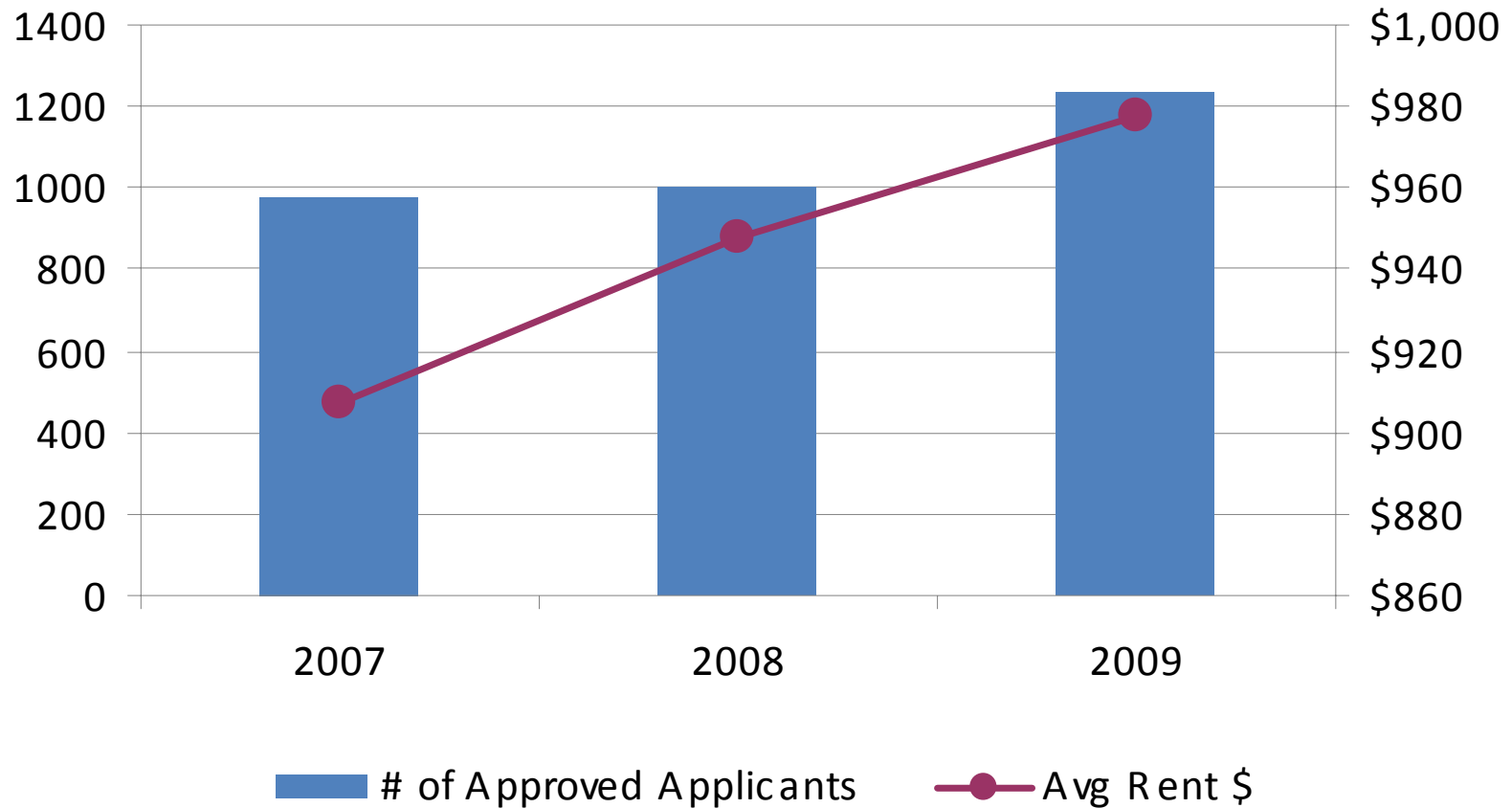
➤ Social Assistance:

- 92,466 individuals and families in August 2009, up from 76,124 in August 2008
- By end of 2009, just under 94,000 individuals and families were receiving social assistance
- 89,000 monthly average for 2009
- 105,000 projected monthly average for 2010

Recession by the Numbers Continued

- Food Bank Use (Greater Toronto Area):
 - Client visits in 2009: Over 1 million, increase of 8% over 2008
 - Jan-March 2009: Increase of 17% over same period in 2008
 - 49% born outside of Canada (almost half living in Canada for 10 years or more)
 - % income spent on housing: 76%
 - % who go into debt to pay for basic needs: 77%

Toronto Rent Bank Stats



Toronto Shelter Program Stats

- Total number of unique individuals using shelter system
 - 27,256 in 2008, up from 24,868 in 2007
 - Increase in all categories: adults, youth, families and children
- Shelter occupancy for single adults and youth
 - 94% in 2009, up from 93% in 2008

On the Front Lines

“Housing is the first thing that goes because there is no affordable housing in Toronto.”

“A typical solution for the immigrant community is doubling up. It’s very unhealthy, but hidden homelessness is very common.”

“Families they just have to live in a one-bedroom with three kids.”

Front Lines Continued

“Families doubling up, with two or three teenagers, sharing with another family with more kids...it is very stressful for everyone. Family relationships are strained.”

“The biggest issue [in the communities that we serve] that is not being addressed is the issue of hidden homelessness. What it does to a building...is each apartment would have enough people to populate a floor, each floor would probably have enough people to populate a building. Living in cramp quarters creates social tensions.”

Front Lines Continued

“This is not a renter’s market. This is more of a landlord’s market. There is that kind of pressure to give into the landlord and give them what they want.”


Front Lines Continued

“On average, women are staying 4-6 months, often with no status they stay up to one year. This is not what women’s shelters were intended to do. We use to have 200 women come through, now we have 50. Our programs are always full.”

“We found our food budget got out of whack quickly, and needed to provide food in all of our programs. Women who’ve left the program are coming back for food, diapers.”

Front Lines Continued

“[There are] different coping strategies for immigrants. Canadian citizens were more likely to go back and live with their family...Whereas with immigrants we were finding they were much more likely to end up almost absolutely homeless because of the lack of the social support system... communities they tend to [be a part of] are equally struggling.”

The background of the slide features several sets of concentric circles in a lighter shade of blue, resembling ripples in water. These circles are positioned in the lower half of the slide, with one set on the left, one in the center, and one on the right.

Front Lines Continued

“More and more people I’m seeing struggling with their housing accommodation situation are recent immigrants who just want a regular blue collar job but they aren’t getting it because of the economic situation. They have no problems with the English language. They have no problems with accreditation. They just can’t get those jobs that typically in a boom situation people would shy away from. They are looking for those jobs, but they just can’t get them and that’s affecting their housing.”

Front Lines Continued

“Many of them [newcomers] can’t find a job to start off with. When you don’t have a job, you don’t have a job. The question of job loss really doesn’t arise.”



Front Lines Continued

“We are overwhelmed with the needs. We are experiencing more demand for our services, and don’t have the people to deal with it.”

“Calls to the rent bank have doubled.”

Front Lines Continued

“Because of the downturn in the economy, one of the first things that we noticed was that the numbers of people who wanted to access our drop-in suddenly started to zoom. So much so that there were days in which people just had to stand. Packed.”

“[Because people are out of a job,] as much as we would like to help them, we have to turn them down [because there is no guarantee that they can repay the rent bank loan]. That’s not the kind of thing we would like to see but that has had an impact in terms of how many people we can declare as eligible in terms of accessing the program.”

Front Lines Continued

“Housing is integral to the settlement needs of new immigrants. They are not integrating properly because they can’t afford the housing.”

“There is no settlement without housing. The whole concept of settling people in Canada without a housing program...it is a failure of the migration system.”

Recommendations

- Introducing national and provincial housing strategies
- Providing a full range of housing options and supports, and promoting mixed income neighbourhoods
- Incorporating a gender analysis in housing policy and programs
- Intervening on hidden homelessness
- Introducing a portable housing allowance
- Expanding the rent bank program, including first and last month's rent

Recommendations Continued

- Supporting housing help services
- Educating tenants about their rights and ensuring enforcement of tenant rights
- Addressing inadequacy of social assistance and shelter allowance
- Including housing as a central aspect of local immigration partnerships
- Expanding Pearson welcome centre to assist newcomers with housing and settlement issues and getting information to new immigrants generally

Opportunities for Change

- Ontario Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy
- Housing Network of Ontario
www.stableandaffordable.com
- Housing Opportunities Toronto: 10-Year Strategy
- Local Immigration Partnerships
- Ontario Human Rights Commission's "Housing is a human right" campaign

Thanks

- Immigrant and Refugee Housing Committee
- City of Toronto, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

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- Contact: Beth Wilson, Social Planning Toronto,
beth@socialplanningtoronto.org, (416) 351-0095 x257