

CD 28.1.4



TORONTO DROP-IN NETWORK

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April 17, 2014

Councillor Anthony Perruzza,
Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee (CDRC),
City Hall, 100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Re: CD 28.1 & CD 28.2 (CDRC - 04/17/2014)

Dear Councillor Perruzza and Members of CDRC,

I am writing on behalf of the Toronto Drop-in Network to support the recommendations being made today to CDRC by the General Manager of Shelter Support and Housing in his report on *Feasibility of 24-Hour Drop-in Service for Women* and to share some concerns from the drop-in sector arising from the *2013 Year-End Report on Housing Stabilization Fund*.

1. The *Feasibility of 24-Hour Drop-in Service for Women* report is the product of an open and thorough consultation process led by Shelter Support and Housing Administration in which a range of stakeholders including the women most affected had input. As a result of these consultations, the report identifies the need for establishing two specialized low-barrier, harm reduction, trauma-informed services for women with complex needs that are not being served by existing services. The Toronto Drop-in Network participated in the consultation process and it is clear from this report that SSHA heard and understood the voices of women, community services and other stakeholders and combined with their knowledge and experience as the local service manager have validated the need for new 24/7 services for women and that this must be a service enhancement. It was also evident in the consultation that there is a wealth of knowledge in the community sector about how to ensure these services are effective and safe spaces for women coping with a range of issues including serious threats to personal health and safety on the streets of Toronto and looking for expressions of interest in operating the service from a community partner is appropriate.

On this point about safety, the timeline for establishing the 24/7 women's services remains a concern. While this report is a significant and important step in the right direction, driven by the desire of multiple stakeholders to keep women safe, until the services are established in 2015 there are a group of women who do not access shelters who without support or protection overnight continue to be exposed to the threat of violent assault and no number of hopeful and encouraging reports will mitigate that threat

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in the short term. We are counting on your action today to support the recommendations of SSHA to establish these two services as a service enhancement and to support opening an overnight space as an interim measure to keep women in Toronto safe, particularly this group of women in situations in which they are vulnerable and have so little protection from violence and violent sexual assault.

2. We support the recommendation in the **2013 Year-End Report on Housing Stabilization Fund** from the General Manager of Toronto Employment and Social Services to re-examine Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF) funding levels through the 2015 budget process to find funds to replace 2014 one time funding and, in addition, to make up a shortfall of 4.3 million dollars from the fund's initial levels following the withdrawal of the provincial CSUMB. We are looking to CDRC to add this additional point as an amendment to the recommendation as there are serious concerns about the fund's adequacy to meet the need and support housing stability for Toronto residents receiving their incomes from Ontario Works or ODSP. Of concern is the nearly 5,000 applicants not supported by the fund in 2013. Of this, approximately 3,000 were declined because they were not facing pending eviction or their new housing situation was not more affordable, i.e. cheaper. The report notes that the City defines housing stability as "having a place to live that is affordable, safe, secure, healthy, comfortable, and located in a neighbourhood of choice as well as being able to access and keep housing as one's needs change over time." As the principle tool all people who receive OW and ODSP have to ensure housing stability as their needs change over time, eligibility criteria for the HSF should be expanded to support the breadth of the City's definition of housing stability, rather than be narrowed through appealing only to a subset of housing stability indicators like whether or not one is in an eviction process or the dollar value of one's rent. To be a truly effective part of the City's plan to build housing stability and end homelessness, the Housing Stabilization Fund should be enhanced for 2015 not simply maintained.

Finally, thank you for the role CDRC has played in ensuring that these two important services and supports for people with low incomes and in vulnerable situations are established, monitored and evaluated to produce positive outcomes for people struggling with homelessness in Toronto.

Regards,

Linsey MacPhee
Manager, TDIN