

CD19.1.14

Deputation to the City of Toronto Community Development and Recreation Committee of Council. March 18, 2013

Re: Agenda Item CD19.1

Good Morning, my name is Linsey MacPhee and I am manager of the Toronto Drop-in Network a member-led network of 50 drop-ins located throughout the City of Toronto.

Drop-ins are vibrant places of community and support where people connect for basic needs, connect with other people in their communities and neighbourhoods and get information and support to connect to the broader service delivery system. And yet, in some regards the drop-in sector is the wraith of a number of systems where the people who move in drop-in spaces witness a reflection of what is not working in those systems.

Since July 2012, drop-in workers have been talking about the problem of lack of access to the shelter system. As one of our members has said, "It is as if a switch was flipped last July and the system filled and has been full ever since". Drop-in workers have been talking about the need for beds for women, couples, and people with pets; about a better process for dealing with incidents (that unfortunately often result in barring from the entire system) and that that process include a review and appeals process- and they have been talking about the issue of timing – the need to make beds available early in the day when drop-in workers can assist people with problems with access. In many ways the Peter Street Assessment and Referral Centre also operates like a drop-in and also began reflecting problems in the shelter system with the space filling night after night.

We very much appreciate that the staff report before you has identified some service improvements that when implemented will increase the flow of beds in the system and also that this report is a product of a particular kind of dynamism where advocates, activists, councilors, city staff and community each playing a different role have come together to focus on this issue of lack of access to shelter and have created some movement, validating anecdotal reports with system generated evidence; but more movement is required.

We support the vision of work toward enhancing long term housing stability built on a bedrock of investment in affordable housing and housing with supports. We do support the direction of transformation to more lasting solutions, however, the problem of unmet need will persist until those solutions are in place - and we cannot wait for the ideal future, we likely face years or decades of transformation. We will always need a functioning Emergency Shelter System designed to meet a diversity need and it is equally clear that we need that system now. I believe between all of the players who have brought us to this moment of reflection we have everything we need to create that system - knowledge, resources and political will – as much as I am sure we can use more of each of those elements.

We support an independently facilitated process to leverage the knowledge from the shelter system, the community sector and the people who use the system. There are three questions

2013 MAR 25
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that might unearth some concrete operational recommendations: Who are trying to access beds and are being turned away and why? Who are refusing beds offered and why? What is the profile of the unused beds and why are they unused? Is it too idealistic to suggest that City staff and community based researchers can work together to get answers to these questions? There is a valid concern with timing in proposing this type of study and it is important it be focused and time-limited – there are however two immediate opportunities before us:

1. Such an independently facilitated study consulting all relevant stakeholders could be embedded in the development of the CHPI service plan, and
2. One key question could be added to the SNA questionnaire: Have you ever tried to access a shelter bed and been unable to do so? If so, why?

That concludes my remarks this morning, thank you for your time.