



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Toronto Central Council
240 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1Z2

March 14, 2013

Members of the Community Development and Recreation Committee;

As one of the largest providers of women's shelter spaces in Toronto, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (Toronto Central Council) wholeheartedly endorses the Social Planning Council's Open Letter of March 6 calling for extra shelter spaces.

As recently as 2006 Toronto was served by 65 shelters and 4200 beds versus today's total of 3836 spaces at 57 locations. Indeed, part of this reduction can be attributed to the success of the Streets to Homes program, where an emphasis has been placed on finding more permanent housing for homeless families and individuals.

On the other hand, extraneous factors insure that the overall number of homeless people is never appreciably depleted. An ever increasing population; lack of affordable, transitional and supportive housing spaces; the growth of precarious employment and the prevalence of mental and physical health issues effecting this group of people account for a steady stream of 'newly' homeless to replace those that move on to find more permanent solutions.

The March 4 report from the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to the Community Development and Recreation Committee states that "goal of the emergency shelter system is to intervene at a time of crisis in people's lives and help them, in a short period of time, to get into permanent housing." This objective is seriously compromised when the shelter system itself is in crisis.

On several occasions, City Council has endorsed a target of 90% capacity as optimal for the effective operation of the shelter system. We are consistently operating in the 98% range at our women's shelters. This level of occupancy challenges our staff and does not allow for the kind of attention our residents require in order take the first steps out of homelessness.

We urge the Community Development and Recreation Committee to recommend that Council take immediate steps to increase shelter capacity in order to achieve an overall 90% occupancy rate. An effective and responsive shelter system is essential in order to achieve the stated objective of helping people realize more permanent and appropriate solutions to their housing problems.

Sincerely;

Danny Bourne, Chair Advocacy Committee
Louise Coutu, Executive Director
Society of Saint Vincent DePaul, Toronto Central Council

Amelie House, Elisa House, Mary's Home, St. Clare's Residence

Cc; Anne Longair, Shelter Support and Housing, Toronto
Beth Wilson, Social Planning Council Toronto