



**STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED**

Update on Options for an LGBTQ2S Youth Focused Shelter or Transitional Housing

Date:	June 11, 2014
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the work of City staff and community stakeholders to develop options to support LGBTQ2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, and Two-spirited) youth experiencing homelessness in Toronto. The report also contains recommendations on the future direction of this work.

Feedback received to date from stakeholders supports the need to create a standalone emergency shelter or transitional housing for LGBTQ2S youth. In addition, ongoing work is needed to make the current emergency shelter system for both youth and adults more accessible and safe for LGBTQ2S communities.

Staff will continue to gather information and research on best practices in other jurisdictions with the aim of developing a service model which will meet the needs of LGBTQ2S homeless youth in Toronto. Concurrently, staff will incorporate best practices into the development of new emergency shelter standards to be implemented in 2015.

Improving access and equity for specific client groups, including LGBTQ2S communities, is a strategic direction in the *2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework* adopted by City Council in 2014.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to issue a Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) in 2014 to explore community interest in operating an emergency shelter or transitional housing for LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness; and
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to report to Budget Committee during the 2015 Operating Budget process on the results of the REOI, feasibility of the service, and estimated program costs and tax impacts.

Implementation Points

Subject to the results of an REOI, if City Council decides to fund a new service, an Advisory Committee of City staff, service providers and service users would be created to work with the funded community agency and SSHA to refine the service model. A Committee with this mandate would support local capacity building and coordination among community partner agencies, a key action of the *2014 – 2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework*, while designing programming to meet the needs of vulnerable youth.

Equity Impact

Housing and homelessness services, including Toronto's emergency shelter system, serve a range of equity seeking groups including women, Aboriginal people, seniors, LGBTQ2S people and others. Creating accessible space for specific population groups allows service providers to increase safety for vulnerable people and address their unique needs.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications for the 2014 Approved Operating Budget for Shelter, Support and Housing Administration resulting from the recommendations of this report. If the recommendations in this report are approved, staff will solicit interest from the community by issuing an REOI to establish new services for LGBTQ2S youth. Costs associated with any new service enhancement will be reported to the Budget Committee for consideration as part of the 2015 budget process.

Program history indicates that the cost for a bed in the youth sector is \$22,000 per year (i.e. a 100 bed youth shelter would be approximately \$2.2 million). However, the number of beds for a shelter to support LGBTQ2S youth has not yet been determined.

The 2015 and 2016 Outlooks for SSHA include an operating pressure of \$125.150 million and \$56.330 million respectively to maintain 2014 service levels, primarily due to reductions in provincial and federal funding for social housing programs. Consequently, the future year budget processes will be extremely challenging for SSHA and the City.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

On October 8, 2013, City Council adopted a report on the results of the 2013 Street Needs Assessment. One of the key findings discussed in the report was the over representation (one in five) of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness among those using youth shelters in Toronto.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-61364.pdf>

On December 4, 2013, Community Development and Recreation Committee, in adopting CD 25.10, requested the General Manager, Shelter, Support & Housing Administration, to appoint a working group made up of community stakeholders and develop a work plan to address the over representation of LGBTQ2S youth in the emergency shelter system.

Furthermore, the Committee requested the General Manager, Shelter, Support & Housing Administration, to report in the second quarter of 2014 on the options for an LGBTQ2S youth focused shelter or transitional housing.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.10>

At its meeting on December 16-18, 2013, City Council unanimously adopted CD25.10, the *2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework*. A number of key actions within the report relate to improving access to and equity in the delivery of housing stability services as well as strengthening partnerships and coordination to enhance service delivery.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.10>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The emergency shelter system currently has 520 beds available for youth experiencing homelessness located at 12 shelters operated by community agencies. In addition, the Streets to Homes Program employs three youth street outreach counsellors to engage with youth who are living outside and/or are very street involved and to support their transition into stable housing. Respite services and supports are also available for youth at the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre (SHARC). Occupancy rates of emergency shelter beds in the youth sector have fluctuated between 91% and 94% in May 2014.

SSHA also funds a number of other youth specific services and services used by LGBTQ2S communities. These include drop-in services for youth, supports to help find

and keep housing, employment and pre-employment programs, a training initiative for service providers on trans access issues, homeless prevention initiatives and supports for young parents.

Staff met with a group of community stakeholders from the LGBTQ2S community in the fall of 2012. At the time the group identified, among other issues, the lack of demographic data related to homelessness among the LGBTQ2S community. As a result of these discussions, a question was included in the 2013 Street Needs Assessment to determine an estimate of the number and needs of LGBTQ2S people experiencing homelessness in Toronto.

The Street Needs Assessment conducted in April 2013 asked respondents if they identified as part of the LGBTQ2S community. Twenty-one percent of respondents in youth shelters responded affirmatively, more than twice the overall rate for all survey respondents (9%). Given the stigma which can be associated with 'coming out' as LGBTQ2S, combined with the fact the survey was administered by volunteers who were strangers to the respondents, it is possible that the response rate is an under estimate of the total number of LGBTQ2S people who are homeless. Nonetheless, these results confirmed that a significant proportion of youth who are homeless identify as LGBTQ2S.

The pathways into homelessness for LGBTQ2S youth are the same as for other youth but are compounded by conflict and rejection in their family and school lives due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Although societal attitudes and legislation are changing, as represented by amendments to the Ontario Human Rights Code to include protection on grounds of one's sexual orientation (1986), gender identity and gender expression (2012), LGBTQ2S youth continue to experience higher rates of harassment and violence than their heterosexual peers.¹ A needs assessment conducted for Egale with LGBTQ2S youth in Toronto (2012) found that challenges at home and at school were the most commonly cited explanation for homelessness.

Community stakeholders and service users have reported that there are often barriers in place and safety risks for LGBTQ2S youth in accessing emergency shelter services. Barriers may include lack of sensitivity to the unique needs of LGBTQ2S youth including homophobic and transphobic attitudes of staff and other services users, as well as inappropriate personal space, and/or washroom and shower facilities which do not respect the dignity and gender identify of LGBTQ2S youth. Mainstream services may also not have the capacity to support youth facing complex issues related to gender transitions, internalized homophobia and transphobia and risk factors related to HIV transmission.

Change is underway from within the emergency youth shelter sector. A number of recent initiatives have been adopted leading to changes in policy, intake practices and training

¹ Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report.* Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

for staff. SSHA has begun updating its shelter standards and expects to incorporate feedback from service users, community stakeholders and providers which will continue efforts to increase accessibility and safety for LGBTQ2S communities (both youth and adult) using emergency shelter services.

COMMENTS

Stakeholder Working Group

A working group of community stakeholders has been created to develop a strategy to address the over representation of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness. The group has met three times and includes representatives from the following organizations; The 519, Sherbourne Health Centre, The Homeless Hub, Planned Parenthood, Fife House, Egale, Eva's Initiatives, Covenant House, the LGBTQ2S Youth Line, Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention and Dixon Hall.

Several areas of work in consultation with the working group are currently underway. All are intended to increase the knowledge and capacity of SSHA and the sector to respond to the needs of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness.

Options for an Emergency Shelter or Transitional Housing

As noted, stakeholders of the working group have identified that a service gap exists within the emergency shelter and housing service system. Accordingly, it is recommended that Council authorize staff to release an REOI to solicit options for service models which will meet this gap. Community agencies working in the LGBTQ2S community have expressed interest in operating services in the past and it is expected that there will be interest from through the proposed call.

The *2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework* identifies the strategic importance of supporting the transition to permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness. The Service Planning Framework also recognizes the essential role emergency shelters play in meeting the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness. However, with limited resources, the creation of both an emergency shelter and transitional housing may not be feasible in the short term. As such, when drafting the specifications of the REOI, staff in consultation with the working group will consider whether to focus on emergency shelter models or a transition to housing (or interim housing) model designed to assist participants in developing a housing plan so they can move successfully into permanent housing after a fixed time period. If a transition to housing model is chosen, SSHA will explore the possibility of dedicating a fixed number of existing beds, with tailored supports, in the existing youth emergency shelter for LGBTQ2S youth.

If City Council supports the recommendations in this report the REOI process could be complete and further recommendations for operating funding brought forward for consideration as part of the 2015 budget process.

Panel Discussion during World Pride Human Rights Conference

In late June 2014 Toronto will host World Pride, an international celebration incorporating activism, education and the history and culture of global LGBTQ2S communities. World Pride 2014 will highlight Canada's continued progress in human rights and celebrate the diversity and dynamism of Toronto. During World Pride Week an International Conference on Human Rights is being organized by the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto.

SSHA will be sponsoring a panel discussion during the conference on the issue of LGBTQ2S youth homelessness. In a format staff have used before while developing new services models, leaders in the provision of services from other jurisdictions have been invited to participate in a panel discussion and share their expertise in the development of programs serving LGBTQ2S homeless youth. Invited panel members include:

- **Yvonne McCalla – Sobers, Dwayne's House, Kingston, Jamaica.** Yvonne, a former school teacher and member of J-FLAG is working with others to establish Dwayne's House, a residential home for LGBTQ2S youth in Kingston, Jamaica.
- **Jerry Peterson – Executive Director, Ruth Ellis Centre, Detroit, Michigan.** The mission of the Center is to “provide short and long-term residential safe space and support services for runaway, homeless, and at-risk lesbian, gay, bi-attractual, transgender, and questioning youth.” The Ruth Ellis Centre is the only organization in the United States that has a Residential program for LGBTQ2S youth in the foster care and juvenile justice system, and its mission is specific to LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness.
(<http://www.ruthelliscenter.org/>)
- **Jama Shelton - Project Director, True Colours Fund, New York.** For more than a decade, Jama has worked in the field of LGBTQ2S youth homelessness in a variety of roles - first as a service provider, then as a program administrator, evaluator, trainer, and researcher. In her current role, Jama is focused on systemic change efforts and resource development to improve the daily lived experiences of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness and to support the providers with whom they work. (<http://fortytonone.org/>)

The discussion will allow experts to share their experiences in responding to the unique needs of LGBTQ2S youth within their local community. The information and engagement opportunities of the event will contribute to the information necessary to help staff make future recommendations on options for emergency shelter and transitional housing. In addition, opportunities will exist to strengthen international links amongst participants.

The panel discussion is open to the public and will be held on the University of Toronto campus on June 27, 2014.

Literature Review on LGBTQ2S Youth Homelessness

A further area of work endorsed by the stakeholder working group is to conduct a literature review on LGBTQ2S youth homelessness. The review will encompass Canada and several other jurisdictions in order to develop awareness of successful/best practices and trends that may help inform the City's next steps in exploring options for emergency shelter and transitional housing.

SSHA will contract with experts in the housing and homelessness sector to prepare and undertake a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional literature review on three key concepts:

- LGBTQ2S youth homelessness
- Housing models for LGBTQ2S youth
- Interventions to address homophobia and transphobia within social service agencies (specifically those within the housing and homelessness service systems)

LGBTQ2S Workgroup to Review Shelter Standards

A fourth area of work is focused on updating the Toronto Shelter Standards, as identified in the *2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework*.

A workgroup to review this component of the standards has been created and is comprised of shelter providers, LGBTQ2S serving agencies, the Homeless Hub and staff from SSHA and Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA).

The mandate of the workgroup is to provide input, feedback and recommendations on the current shelter standards based on members' experience or expertise with LGBTQ2S issues as they relate to the shelter context to improve the services that LGBTQ2S clients experience and receive in homeless shelters. The workgroup has met on two occasions and has plans to continue the detailed review including recommendations for the standards related to access, complaints and training.

Funding Recommendations and Next Steps

Service providers and stakeholders have identified a need for additional services to support the needs of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness. The 2013 Street Needs Assessment confirmed there is an over representation of LGBTQ2S youth in the emergency shelter system. Information gathered from the release of an REOI, from a literature review and engagement with experts from jurisdictions inside and outside Toronto will provide increased knowledge, capacity and bring change to the current emergency shelter system as well as provide options for a new standalone service.

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