

**Deputation for Community Development and Recreation Committee
Item: CD24.7 – 2018 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Progress Report
Submitted by: Steve Meagher, Shelter Manager, Christie Refugee Welcome Centre**

Friday, November 17, 2017

Community Development and Recreation Committee,

As Shelter Manager of Christie Refugee Welcome Centre, one of six family shelters in Toronto, I'd like to take this opportunity to address the city's response to Toronto City Council's directive that staff report on the feasibility of establishing a 24/7 interim assessment and referral centre for homeless families at the November 20, 2017 CDRC meeting.

For context, I'd like the committee to first examine the following facts, all of which have either been published on the City of Toronto's website or have been verified in recent reports released by city staff:

- For the past year, family shelters in Toronto have been regularly operating at 100% capacity, as indicated on the City of Toronto's *Daily Shelter Census*.
- Currently, homeless families constitute the largest segment of Toronto's homeless population, with over 2,000 children, parents and family members requiring emergency shelter on a nightly basis.
- Due to the lack of emergency shelter space for homeless families, the city continues to operate a waiting list through its Central Intake Program, wherein homeless families can be made to wait up to a week for a referral for emergency shelter.
- Out of the five 24-hour winter respite centres that the City of Toronto has recently opened, none are available to homeless families.
- Out of the numerous volunteer and community-led Out-of-the-Cold Programs that will be in operation during the current winter season, none are designated for homeless families.

In summary, what we are currently experiencing is the largest sector of Toronto's homeless population operating at 100% capacity, which has resulted in the city keeping a lengthy waiting list for families in need of emergency shelter. Moreover, families who are being forced to wait for emergency shelter are not being provided with anywhere to go, as none of the city's 24/7 support services for the homeless are accessible or appropriate for children and families.

This dangerous gap for homeless families is what led to City Council's directive that the city report on the feasibility of establishing a temporary 24/7 assessment and referral centre for homeless families, so that a safe space is provided where families can receive immediate support and secure emergency shelter space. This report is to be delivered at the November 20, 2017 CDRC meeting, and has been included as part of SSHA's '2018 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Progress Report'.

Our main concern is that, based on the information contained within the '2018 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Progress Report', the city has not, to our knowledge, addressed CDRC's and City Council's directive, as there is no actual report on the feasibility of setting up a temporary assessment and referral centre for homeless families. In fact, the only mention of this directive can be found on page 8 of the report, where it is stated that the city will examine the feasibility of establishing an interim assessment and referral centre for homeless families as part of its 10-year shelter capacity infrastructure growth plan and its refugee capacity plan, both of which will be in development starting next year. We will leave it to the members of CDRC and Toronto City Council to determine if this an adequate response, but we find it deeply troubling that a requested report on such a critical service can be deferred in this manner, leaving homeless families without access to safety and support during the upcoming winter season.

Asking homeless families to wait for emergency shelter is not an appropriate, responsible or compassionate response. Failing to provide these families with a safe space to wait for emergency shelter is absolutely dangerous. Choosing to defer action on this critical issue is highly disappointing and problematic.

As a city, we may view our success based on how well we look after our most vulnerable residents. Without question, homeless children are among our most at-risk and defenceless, and we must do more to protect and care for them. Once again, we implore this committee, Toronto City Council and city staff to stand-up for what is right and to ensure that families are not made to suffer without access to shelter and essential supports any longer.

Steve Meagher
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Christie Refugee Welcome Centre