

Re: Item EX31.2 2018 Capital and Operating Budgets

January 31, 2018

Dear Members of City Executive Committee,

We are sharing this **report** with you about a **survey** done by some of our program participants. The survey was done with 74 drop-in users in the downtown west community. Many of these drop-in users also identified as using shelters, warming centres and Out of the Cold sites. We did the survey so that these people could tell you their priorities for **City services** and the **City budget**. We trust you will find this information useful in your deliberations on the City budget.

For your information, drop-in centres provide food, warmth and vital support services in a congregate setting to people who are homeless, marginally housed and/or socially isolated.

The survey was designed and carried out by our Member Advocacy Committee. This group is made up of people with lived experience of poverty, homelessness, mental health and addiction issues.

Key findings include:


- Almost two thirds of respondents have stayed in a shelter in the past two years. 67% of respondents have used Out of the Cold, and 44% stayed in a warming centre.
- Half the respondents said shelters are overcrowded. A third of respondents said they have experienced not being able to get into a shelter.
- Most people reported they cannot afford the TTC fare.
- Two thirds of people have mental health/addiction issues. Supportive affordable housing is a top priority for people with mental health/addiction issues, followed by more counselling.
- Almost half the respondents are less than satisfied with the City response to drug overdoses.
- Hunger was raised repeatedly throughout the survey in many different comments about drop-ins, shelters, food banks, and enough money needed to buy food.

Key recommendations from our Member Advocacy Committee to respond to these priorities:

- Expand the shelter system to fund 1,500 new beds in the 2018 budget
- Invest in new supportive affordable housing and detox programs
- Offer greatly reduced or free TTC fares for people on social assistance and/or who are homeless
- Implement higher property taxes and new revenue tools to fund vital City services.

If you would like to discuss the survey results further in person or by phone, please contact Helen Armstrong at St. Stephen's Community House, 416-925-2103 ext. 4254 or ahelen@sschto.ca

Sincerely,


Helen Armstrong
Community Development & Social Action Worker

**St. Stephen's
Community House**

Survey of Drop-In Users

by Member Advocacy Committee
St. Stephen's Community House
January 24, 2018

The St. Stephen's Community House Member Advocacy Committee (MAC) conducted a survey of drop-in users in the downtown west community between January 17 and January 23, 2018. A total of 74 drop-in users were surveyed from Sistering (for women), St. Stephen's Community House Corner Drop-In and St. Felix Centre. The respondents identified as male (49%), female (48%) and Other (3%). Drop-in centres provide food, warmth and vital support services in a congregate setting to people who are homeless, marginally housed and/or socially isolated.

Respondents were asked about their experiences using city services including libraries, shelters, Out of the Cold, and TTC. They were asked if they had mental health and addictions, and what would make things better for them. Additional questions were about overdose response by the City. All respondents were asked to identify where improvements should be made in these systems. Each person who filled out a survey received one to two TTC tokens.

There is a patchwork of permanent shelters, Out of the Cold sites, temporary warming centres, and 24-hour drop-ins trying to cope with the homeless crisis. The survey was able to quickly reach a group of people with personal experience with all these places, and often a unique perspective from using multiple places at once to survive.

The MAC is a social action group made up of people with lived experience of poverty, homelessness, mental health and addiction issues, racism and more, who use their experience to advocate for change. This survey was a participatory action research project conducted by group members.

The questions were designed by group members with the intention that results would be supplied to the media and to City Council members to help them make decisions on spending in the 2018 City budget.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Key Findings

- Almost two thirds of respondents have stayed in a shelter in the past two years.
- 67% of respondents have used Out of the Cold, and 44% have stayed in a warming centre.
- Half the respondents said shelters are overcrowded.
- A third of respondents said they have experienced not being able to get into a shelter.
- Most people reported they cannot afford the TTC fare.
- Two thirds of people have mental health/addiction issues.
- Supportive affordable housing is a top priority for people with mental health/addiction issues, followed by more counselling.
- Almost half the respondents are less than satisfied with the City response to drug overdoses.
- More than two thirds of respondents use the Toronto Public Library system.
- Hunger was raised repeatedly throughout the survey in many different comments about drop-ins, shelters, food banks, and enough money needed to buy food.

What do you like about Toronto?

Respondents, most or all living in deep poverty, managed to identify things they like about Toronto. A number of people said they “love” living in Toronto, and it is a “great” city. Some identified the range of services for people in poverty as being a benefit to living here, including shelters, food banks, drop-ins, free clothing, referrals from workers, and treatment in hospital. A few identified entertainment, things to do and friends as highlights of the city.

Some participants indicated that they are satisfied with city workers, including shelter workers, paramedics and drop-in workers. Several women at Sistering and two users at St. Stephen’s shared that these centres make them feel better about their lives:

“Sistering gives me some social contact for free.”

“(At) Sistering the meals are delicious. The staff is helpful.”

“Coming to St. Stephen’s is a good experience.”

Toronto Public Library system

75% of respondents use the public library. Most find the library system helpful. A minority identified being followed or harassed by library security guards and sometimes watched closely by staff. Sample quotes are shared below:

“They look at me funny and follow me around sometimes like I am gonna steal something.”

“Your time in the library is always viewed like you’re not welcome.”

“Very helpful when asked. They are a little leery. But I understand.”

“It’s a calming experience.”

Participants had suggestions for library improvements:

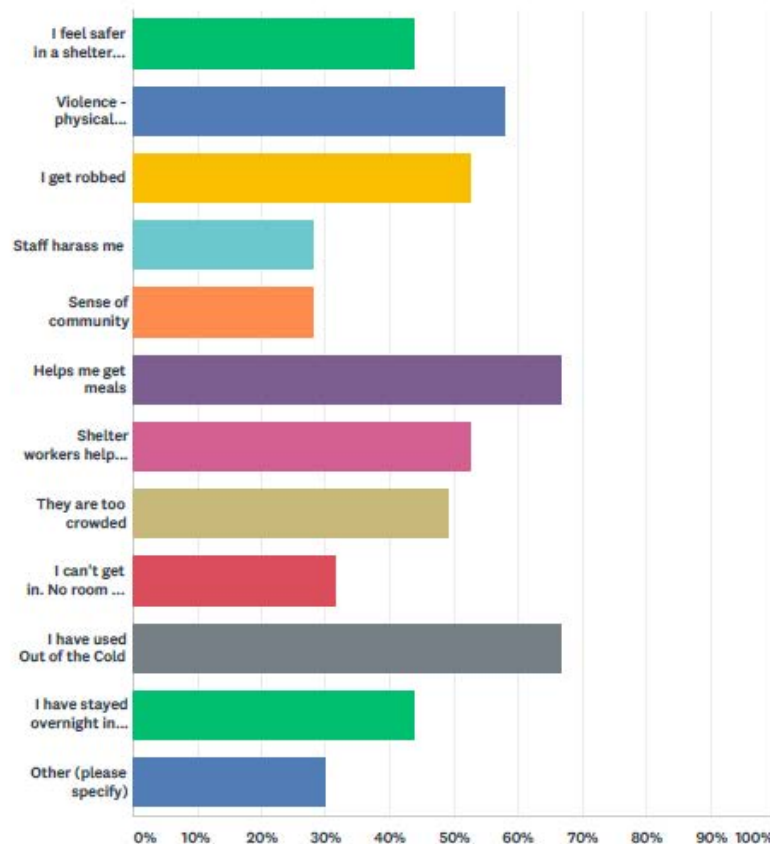
- More computers, better video and video viewing booths
- More security, and alternately security guards that don’t follow people around and don’t act suspicious of people who are homeless
- More comfortable seating

Toronto Shelter System

About two thirds of respondents have stayed in a shelter in the past two years. A slight majority said they experienced verbal and/or physical violence in a shelter, while just under half said they felt safer in a shelter than on the street. Some people also identified that shelter workers help them get services and they get meals in a shelter. One respondent said she values shelters for the services including doctors, nurses, dental care and TTC tokens.

If yes [to using shelters], what are your experiences using shelters?
Please check all that apply.

Answered: 57 Skipped: 16



- 67% said shelters help them get meals.
- 65% have stayed in a shelter in the past two years.
- 58% identified they experience violence in a shelter.
- 53% said they get robbed in shelters.
- 44% said they felt safer in a shelter than on the street.
- 49% said shelters are too crowded.
- 67% said they have used Out of the Cold.
- 44% said they have stayed overnight in a warming centre.
- 32% said they can't get in. No room in the shelter.
- 28% said staff harass them in shelters.
- 28% said shelters provide a sense of community.

Some respondents who do not use shelters said they found them too crowded. Some pointed to the lack of shelter beds and problems with having to sleep on a mat in an overnight respite centre. One woman stated:

“More beds needed for shelters. We sleep on mats at Sistering.”

To improve the shelter experience, people suggested the following:

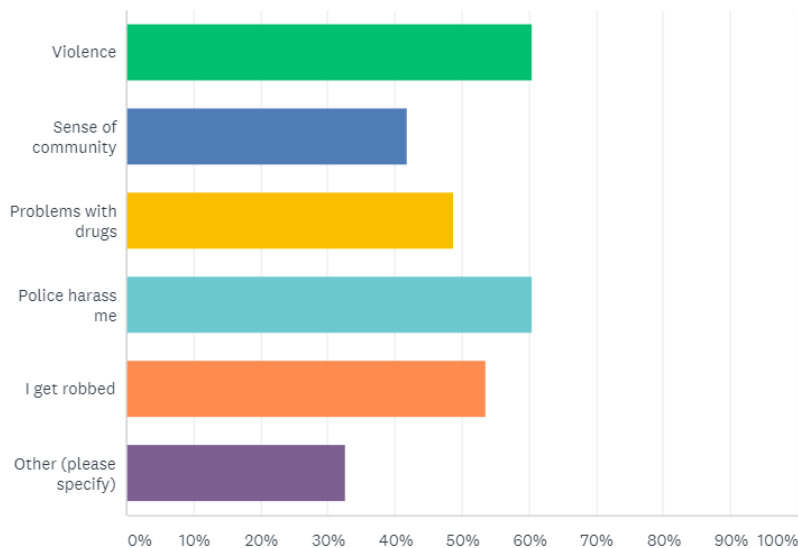
- Better and/or more staff
- More security and cameras
- Lockers with locks
- Smaller rooms and private rooms
- Harm reduction in all shelters
- More shelters – including couples' shelters
- Open unused schools as shelters

Sleeping Outside

40% of respondents indicated that they sometimes slept outside. More than 60% said that when sleeping outside police harassed them. The same number said they experienced violence outside. 42% had a sense of community sleeping outside. And 49% had problems with drugs outside. 54% said they got robbed when sleeping outside. 54% said they got robbed when sleeping outside.

Have you experienced any of the following when you sleep outside? Check all that apply.

Answered: 43 Skipped: 30

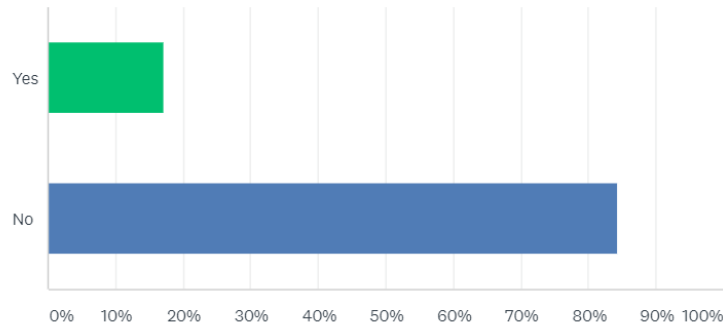


Toronto Transit System

85% of people said they could not afford the TTC fare, while 17% said they could. Almost 40% indicated they had less than positive experiences when using TTC.

Can you afford the TTC fare?

Answered: 70 Skipped: 3



A number of respondents indicated they felt stressed taking the TTC. Some mentioned fines they have received for not paying a TTC fare:

“Half way through the month I have no money for TTC fare. I can’t afford a Metropass. I use my food money for TTC fare.”

“Overcrowding. I can’t get on.”

“Too many fines. TTC/transit is bad on folks who can’t afford to travel.”

“Improve the service – need more frequent service.”

However, some people said they appreciated the TTC and its staff:

“Two times caught by fare inspector and told them I’m homeless they gave me a break.”

“Most operators are sympathetic to the homeless situation.”

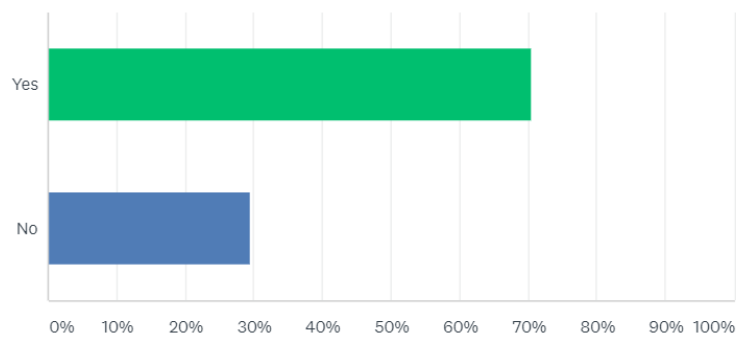
“The drivers are fairly nice.”

Mental Health and Addictions

More than two thirds of people said they lived with mental health issues and/or addictions. 30% said they did not. A top priority for this population is more supportive affordable housing, with 80% stating Toronto needs more of this housing type. 51% said the city needs more counselling for people with these issues, and 36% said there should be more detox programs. 34% want more safe injection sites, and 30% want all drugs to be decriminalized. One person said we need a National Housing Strategy to address these issues.

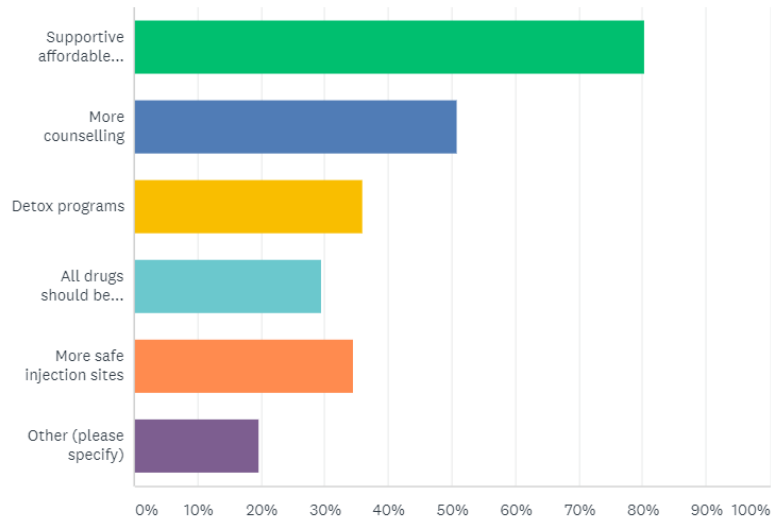
Do you identify as having mental health and/or addiction issues?

Answered: 71 Skipped: 2



Thinking about mental health and addictions, what would make things better for you?

Answered: 61 Skipped: 12



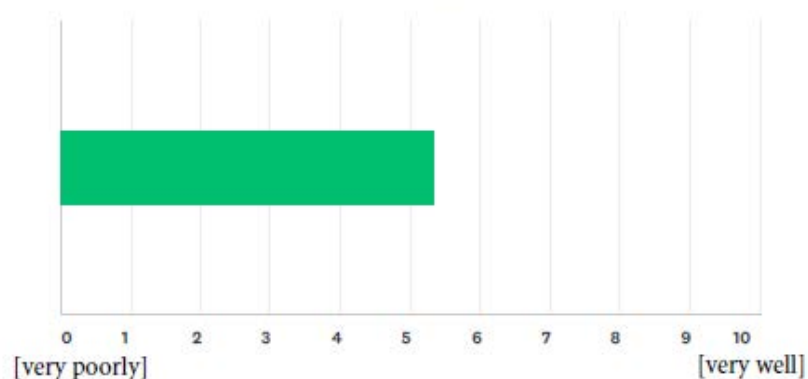
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Supportive affordable housing	80.33% 49
▼ More counselling	50.82% 31
▼ Detox programs	36.07% 22
▼ All drugs should be decriminalized/legal	29.51% 18
▼ More safe injection sites	34.43% 21

City Response to Drug Overdoses

Almost 50 per cent of people said they are less than satisfied with City action on drug overdoses:

How well do you think the City is doing with its response to drug overdose?

Answered: 59 Skipped: 14



Suggestions for improvement include:

- More naloxone
- More safe injection sites and overdose centres
- More counselling and detox centres
- Outreach workers
- Spend the money to help with housing
- Help train people in First Aid
- Need more safe spaces for women

Problems with Toronto and What Else Needs to Change

Some respondents indicated they can't find affordable housing, shelter space or work. The cost of living is high in Toronto. Some people identified that the system is stretched and overworked.

Some comments are provided below:

"I enjoy (Toronto) except for the cost."

"They need more shelters and affordable housing."

*"Far too expensive. No money to socialize as most goes to rent.
Social isolation."*

"The humiliation of "being served.""

"Drop-in not open late enough in winter."

"Feeling lonely and vulnerable."

"Drug addiction, lack of housing, lack of support."

"City Council needs to show more concern for citizens."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

FROM MEMBER ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

The Member Advocacy Committee sees the Toronto City budget, even with the possible \$50 million extra funding recommended by the City Budget Committee, as being a bandaid budget. We are concerned that property taxes for the wealthiest homeowners are too low. We need higher taxes and new revenue tools to fund vital City services. Our survey reveals that people are in desperate need of serious investments in supportive affordable housing, as the Housing Opportunities Toronto report revealed almost a decade ago. We also need an expansion of shelter beds totaling 1,500 new beds in the 2018 budget, not mats on the floor. We also are looking for more City-funded detox programs. We see the low-income TTC pass as a start, but people on social assistance need deeper discounts. We need to be able to ride the TTC for free.

Our group is concerned that we have to fight these battles at City Hall every year. This has to stop. We must have real measures to address poverty, not a bandaid approach which produces little change. The desperation and destitution we saw while conducting these surveys has left a strong impression on us. Toronto must do better in 2018 and 2019.

Our group is engaged with the Toronto Can Do Better campaign through Commitment to Community. We back their calls for:

- 2,000 new affordable homes
- 1,000 new childcare spaces
- Action on climate change in every neighbourhood
- Lower TTC fares for low-income riders
- More decent jobs and employment training programs
- Dental care for 3,000 seniors

Member Advocacy Committee:

Cory, Howard, Marie, Richard, Sandi, Toby, Barb and Helen

Drop-In Users' Survey – MAC 2017-18

1. What age are you?
 - 17 to 25
 - 26 to 35
 - 36 to 45
 - 46 to 55
 - 56 to 65
 - 66 and up
2. What gender are you?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Trans
 - Other
3. How do you feel about living in Toronto? Please explain.
(Comment field)
4. Do you use the public library system?
 - Yes
 - No
5. How welcome do you feel at the local public library?
(Scale of 1 to 10)
6. What happens when you try to use the local public library? Which library/s do you use?
(Comment field)
7. Is there anything that could make you feel more comfortable in the library?
(Comment field)
8. Have you stayed at a shelter in Toronto in the past two years?
 - Yes
 - No
9. If you answered no, please explain why not:
(Comment field)

10. If yes, what are your experiences using shelters? Please check all that apply.

- I feel safer in a shelter than on the street
- Violence – physical violence, verbal violence
- I get robbed
- Staff harass me
- Sense of community
- Helps me get meals
- Shelter workers help me get other services
- They are too crowded
- I can't get in. No room in the shelter.
- I have used Out of the Cold
- I have stayed overnight in a warming centre
- Other (Comment field)

11. If you use the shelter system, what would make you feel safer?
(Comment field)

12. Do you sleep outside?

- Yes
- No

13. Have you experienced any of the following when you sleep outside? Check all that apply.

- Violence
- Sense of community
- Problems with drugs
- Police harass me
- I get robbed
- Other – please specify (Comment field)

14. Can you afford the TTC fare?

- Yes
- No

15. If you take the TTC what happens? Bad to good.
(Scale of 1 to 10)

16. Please explain why you chose your answer.
(Comment field)

17. Name one good experience you have had in Toronto. This could involve City services or something else.
(Comment field)

18. What makes life difficult for you in Toronto? Please explain.

(Comment field)

19. Do you identify as having mental health and/or addiction issues?

- Yes
- No

20. If yes, how well have your needs been met by services in Toronto? 1 is not well, 10 is very well.

(Scale of 1 to 10)

21. Thinking about mental health and addictions, what would make things better for you?

- Supportive affordable housing
- More counselling
- Detox programs
- All drugs should be decriminalized/legal
- More safe injection sites
- Other – please specify (Comment field)

22. How well do you think the City is doing with its response to drug overdose?

(Scale of 1 to 10)

23. What could the City do differently to respond to overdoses?

(Comment field)

24. Is there anything else you would like to share about city services?

(Comment field)

25. Drop-In/Program

- Corner – St. Stephen's
- Sistering
- St. Felix

St. Stephen's Community House is a United Way Anchor Agency

Learn more about our work at:

<http://www.sschto.ca/About-Us/Social-Action>