

**Report of Survey with Corner Drop In Users  
The Neighbourhood Group Community Services**

**December 2023**

Our TNG Member Advocacy Committee (MAC) undertook surveys with 34 Corner Drop In users in early December 2023 to determine their priorities for the 2024 Toronto City budget. The MAC is a group of people with lived experience of poverty, homelessness, disability and more. They use their lived knowledge to advocate for social change, in particular taking action to reduce inequality in our City.

**Top Survey Respondent Concerns:**

- Strong need for clear language and accessible city budget materials and for city officials to attend drop in and other community centre settings to share and discuss the budget and city issues.
- Increasingly unaffordable city with lack of supports for people at the lowest end of the economic spectrum.
- Shelters do not feel safe and are inaccessible to a number of people. People want more shelter beds, more spaces for couples and more privacy with doors that lock and lockers.
- Libraries are appreciated and get high praise but need longer hours and faster computers.
- Some people want more police presence on the street while others have a poor impression of the police. A number of people want the police budget lowered and funds redirected to shelters, housing and social supports.
- Many people want more mental health and addiction supports, especially supportive housing, followed by counselling.
- More rent supplements are needed, and the city should use public land to build deeply affordable housing.
- More Library wifi hot spots in Toronto would help this population have better internet access.
- A number of respondents are in favour of funding for non-police interventions when there is a mental health crisis

**Demographics:**

Of the 34 survey respondents just under 87 per cent were male, and 11 per cent were female. One person identified as “other”. Regarding age, 35 per cent were between 56 and 66 years old, while just under 30 per cent were between 46 and 55 years old. For the ages 26 to 35 and 66 and up both age categories included just under 12 per cent of respondents.

**Life in Toronto:**

A minority of respondents said they like living in Toronto as it is a vibrant city, but that it is getting very unaffordable:

“It’s very hard, as day to day is a big challenge. But there’s always help in the Big City of Toronto!”

“Toronto has grown and changed for the worse in the last 20 years.”

“Nice city overall but getting more and more unaffordable.”

“I love living in Toronto even though I live currently in a tent in Allan Gardens. They city did not help and wasted 2.5 months of my time and still no to housing. Not great in terms of affordability....Places like this (Corner Drop In) it helps.”

“Cold, should have more shelters. A lot of people are dying on the streets.”

Three quarters of respondents or 75 per cent (24 people ) indicated that Toronto is very unaffordable, while a further 22 per cent said the city is somewhat unaffordable. Only one respondent said Toronto is affordable.

### **Understanding the City Budget Process:**

A significant number of respondents indicated they require more information to understand the city budget. Of the 32 people who answered this question the top request was for clear language and easy to understand materials about the budget. Several respondents requested a pamphlet, book or guide. One respondent asked for a “Chart that displays where the budget comes from.” One person summed up: “I don’t have to understand it. They have to make it more affordable. There is only rich or poor, no middle.” One respondent asked for “more communication and transparency”. Clearly there is a yearning to understand the City budget but a lack of access to materials and clear explanations, which the City can take action on.

Regarding the following services people interacted with in the past two years, three quarters or 77 plus per cent used the library. About 57 per cent engaged with shelters, and almost 46 per cent had interactions with police. See the chart below.



### **Interactions with City Shelters:**

Shelters received mixed reviews, with some respondents saying they can’t even evaluate shelter services as they can’t get a shelter bed. Around 45 per cent said they had used City shelter services in the past two years while 55 per cent said they had not. There was a range of responses about satisfaction with shelters. Some people indicated they did not feel safe in shelters, and others said lack of access meant they had to sleep outside.

Positives: One person stated: “Shelters helped me with addiction and housing.”  
Another shared: “I used the showers and found jobs” at shelters.

Negatives: “What I’ve heard is disaster. Safer on the streets, don’t have enough room. The system is broken.”  
Another said that while they had partial help at shelters they would not use them again.

Another person indicated that shelters partly helped them with “detox help, AA help, food, clothing.” Another summed up: “Toronto shelters helped me. I would go back, but there is not enough space. When I found a bed it helped. I enjoyed being there. It was clean and they took care of you. I am currently looking for a bed.” One person indicated they had good support from the O’Neil program at 239 George Street.

A number of people shared that they do not feel safe in shelters and one person said shelters are noisy. Some said they would rather sleep outside because of fears of theft and violence in shelters. One person said, “If I didn’t have an apartment I’d rather sleep on the street.”

To improve shelters, respondents said they should be less crowded, offer more privacy and add more beds and shelter locations. One suggested the shelters should be run more like the Salvation Army Gateway shelter. Another person said: “Shelters need to be safer, maybe more staff.” One person urged shelters to open more space for couples and the elderly. Another said we need more housing workers and private rooms for singles and privacy. They urged shelters to have lockers as often people experience theft, while another respondent urged the city to have single rooms with locks on doors, “definitely not a cot in open style room, no security. Many things are stolen.”

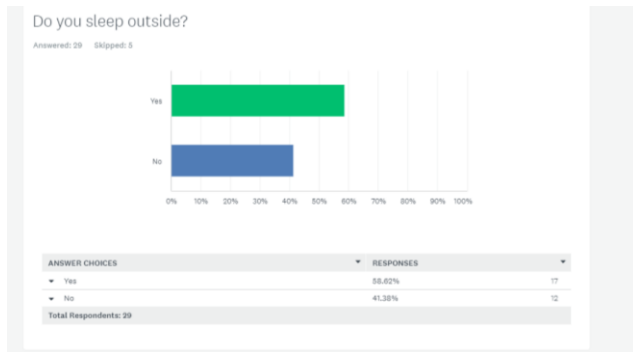
More than a few respondents indicated they want staff to be more respectful to shelter users: “Try to select proper people. Don’t make people feel like it’s a favour to use it. People don’t have a choice.” One person said they signed up for Streets to Homes but have not had a placement in rental housing since they are not considered part of the priority population.

### **Housing Stability:**

Just over 65 per cent of respondents said they lacked stable housing, while almost 35 per cent said they did have stable housing.

### **Sleeping Outside:**

More than 58 per cent of respondents said they slept outside, while just over 41 per cent said they did not. One person said they sleep outside when it’s nice out, while another said they sleep outside because shelters are full. One expressed enthusiasm: “24/7 every day, every year!” Another person said they feel safer outside, while several said they could not get a shelter bed, so sleep outside. One person said they sleep well outside.



### **Experiences with Toronto Public Libraries:**

The libraries were mentioned by many respondents as a very positive city service. More than 64 per cent of respondents said they used the library system while just over 35 per cent said they did not. The most frequent request for improvement was for longer hours, especially on Sundays. People used the computers, found libraries offered a respite from the heat and cold and found the staff to be friendly and helpful. They also appreciated the wifi and computer access. One person appreciated getting a free Presto card at a library. A minority of respondents did not use the library and showed no interest in it.

Some comments follow:

“I use the library every day. The library is the best service in the city.”

“Library helped me with daily reading and computer.”

“Libraries always help...there awesome, people always helping everybody!”

One respondent expressed a need for improvement:

“The library should have more information online. The computers are slow.”

Two people said they were upset about the recent library cyber attack. One stated: “Fix the cyber attack please.”

Other suggestions include:

“The library needs accessible workshops for older folks.”

“The libraries need more space to read, with no cellphones.”

“Library needs wifi, more locations with 3D printers, movies.”

“Possibility to sign out computer/laptop during hours. Community/social support access in the library.”

The need to teach people to use computers was also mentioned.

One respondent wants a library card program for people without an address.

### **Policing in Toronto:**

The subject of policing elicited strong criticism but also some praise. A number of respondents had interacted with Toronto Police, and some found them helpful. Several respondents emphasized that police are not to be found on the street when you need them. Some people experienced negative interactions with the police and several said they did not trust them. Some

critical comments follow:

“Police – don’t trust them.”

“I have used the police services. They partially helped. They don’t want to know the truth. They give warnings but no solutions.”

“Police: Don't help. Assholes. They are pigs. Discriminate and don't listen. Buddy got beat by them. Cops put friend in coma.”

“Police – actively made life worse – 14 Division!”

Positive feedback about the police was also shared:

“The police are ok.”

“I love the Toronto police. They support everyone.”

Some respondents had advice on how to improve policing:

“Police need to be more responsible.”

“Police need to act better.”

“The police need to be educated in housing issues, and stop manipulations, judging and discrimination.”

“Police – better training - more police where you need them. I like bicycle cops better than the ones in cars/SUVs - more accessible.”

“Police: better attitude needed/less judgement. Check on people with crystal meth.”

“Stop targeting people and racially profiling for nothing.”

One respondent indicated that they appreciated that police must now wear cameras as they think it makes them more accountable.

### **Police Budget:**

A number of respondents shared that the police budget is too high, while a significant number said they were ok with the amount. One respondent said, “Yes they need money. Without police there would be chaos.” Another person disagreed: “Cut (police) expenses by 20 to 25 per cent.” Another said: “Too much money for police but never see them.” Another said of the police budget: “No, spend money on homeless people.”

One respondent urged the police to look at their budget for savings: “Does a large budget equal waste? Are there ways to improve the efficiency of the budget use. Smarter spending, also show need.” Another person said some police money should go instead to shelters and housing.

One person wants to see more money go to community supports: “I feel there should be mental health support, timely with social work professionals to de-escalate situations and offer access to community supports.”

### **Access to the Internet:**

More than 61 per cent of respondents said they lacked reliable access to the internet while just

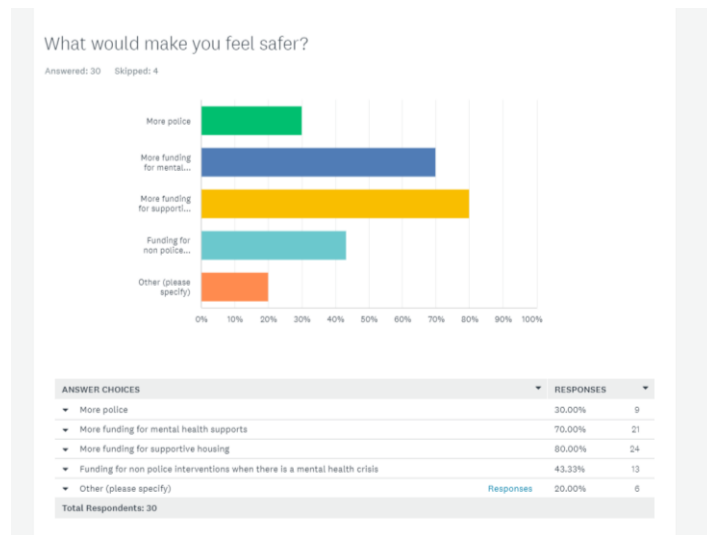
under 39 per cent said they had reliable access. More than 65 per cent thought that more Library wifi hot spots in Toronto would help them access the internet, while 34 per cent did not.

### Community Safety:

More than 22 per cent of respondents shared that they felt very safe in their community and another 22 per cent said they felt quite safe. This totals 44 per cent. It would have been useful to probe what helps people feel safe, as drop ins are known for providing congregate dining and social contact, which can build a sense of community and thus increase feelings of safety.

Roughly 16 per cent of people said they felt somewhat safe, while 6.5 per cent put themselves in the middle of safe and unsafe and the same number felt rather unsafe. The same number said they felt quite unsafe, while more than 19 per cent said they felt very unsafe.

### Measures to Increase Community Safety:



Four respondents indicated that more police presence would help them feel safer. One stated: “More police patrol and bike patrol.” Still, two respondents want the police to change: to be more “honest” and “more accountable.” One wanted “less police and more crisis intervention.” Five people spoke about the importance of friends, neighbourliness and a sense of community to increase a sense of safety.

Other ideas follow:

“If everybody had a place to live – homeless too!”

“Move out of GTA.”

“Less dispensaries.”

“Parks.”

“Food and housing are expensive. This is causing tensions which leads to more violence. People are using guns more. The city could do a better job of gun control. Stop the guns coming in. Punish those using them.”

“Less drugs, more coffee, access to water in winter.”

“Actual city services that work.”

“One stop location to access and address needs.”

“Get rid of the drug addicts.”

“Friendly staffs, security.”

### **Services to Increase Safety:**

The top most stated safety need was for more funding for supportive housing, mentioned by 80 per cent of respondents. This was followed by more funding for mental health supports identified by 70 per cent of people. More than 43 per cent of respondents favoured funding for non-police interventions when there is a mental health crisis, while 30 per cent want more police.

Other ideas include more addiction help, higher social assistance rates and less taxes, self defence training, “more understanding from the police to the public re addicts”, and “polite police”.

### **Rents in Toronto:**

Just over 71 per cent of respondents said they can’t afford rent in Toronto, while almost 29 per cent said they can afford rent here. We know that some drop in users have stable affordable housing. To make rents more affordable respondents chose from a range of options. Both rent supplements and use of city lands to build affordable housing for people on social assistance tied with almost 71 per cent in favour. Creating more supportive housing for people with mental health issues was favoured by 61 per cent of respondents.

Other ideas follow:

“More senior housing.”

“Raise welfare and ODSP pensions.”

“Affordable housing and subsidy program is needed. Rent must be capped and regulated.”

“With the number of abandoned buildings in Toronto why is there a housing shortage at all.

Wouldn’t owners of these abandoned buildings rather make an income from the properties rather than keep them empty???

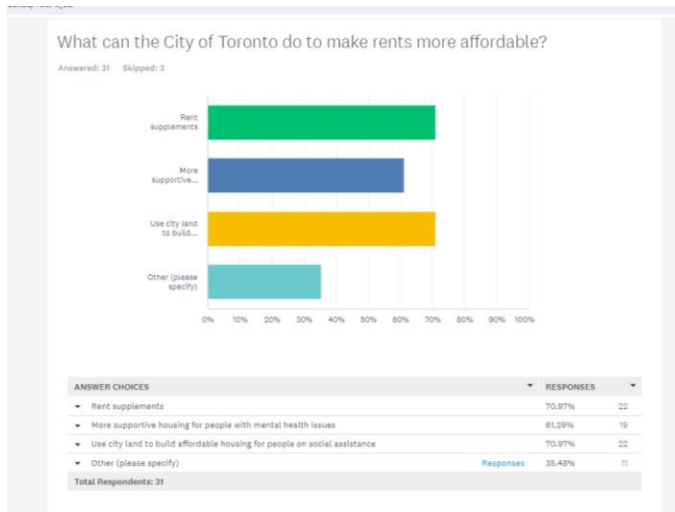
I know renter = problems but there must be a way to manage this!!!”

“Have rent low for people on social assistance.”

“More social housing, more public housing.”

“Capital tax on principle residence. Vacant land tax.”

“Just help the poor and it should fall into place for everyone.”



## Experience with TTC:

The TTC received mixed reviews, with some respondents thankful for the service and the cleanliness and feeling safe on the TTC, while others were negative. Of 28 respondents, more than 46 per cent said they sometimes can afford the TTC fare. Almost 36 per cent said they cannot afford the fare, and 18 per cent said they can afford TTC fare.

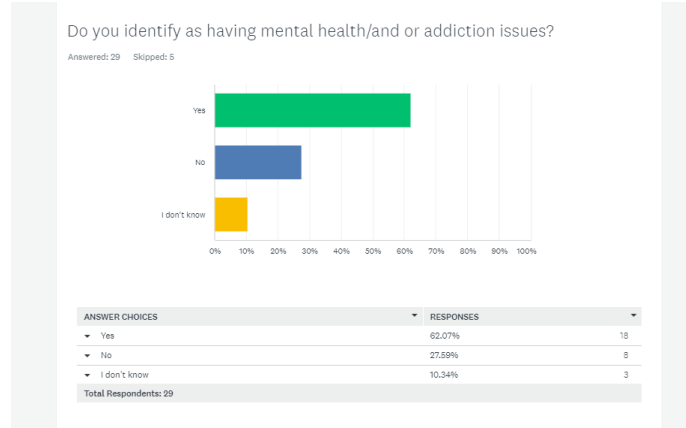
Regarding experiences on the TTC from bad to good on a 1 to 7 scale, respondents shared the following: Almost 18 per cent said they had a very bad experience, just under 12 per cent said they had a rather bad experience, just over 21 per cent had a neutral experience, almost 18 per cent said their experience was fairly good, 11 per cent had a mostly good experience, and another 11 per cent had a very good experience.

Some respondents shared positive feedback: “I never had bad issue.” Another said, “Streetcars are clean. Service is quite good.” One person said: “I interact with people. I haven’t seen anything bad happening. Another summed up: “Good service. Clean. It’s expensive. It’s affordable when you have a job.”

Some people said TTC is too expensive, there are difficult patrons and there are service disruptions. One person said: “Addicts flood the TTC and public spaces. Crack smokers are on streetcars. It is a terrible experience.” Another person said, “They harass you on TTC.” One person summed up: “Delays, crowding, unstable people.” Another said, “I get bad anxiety.”



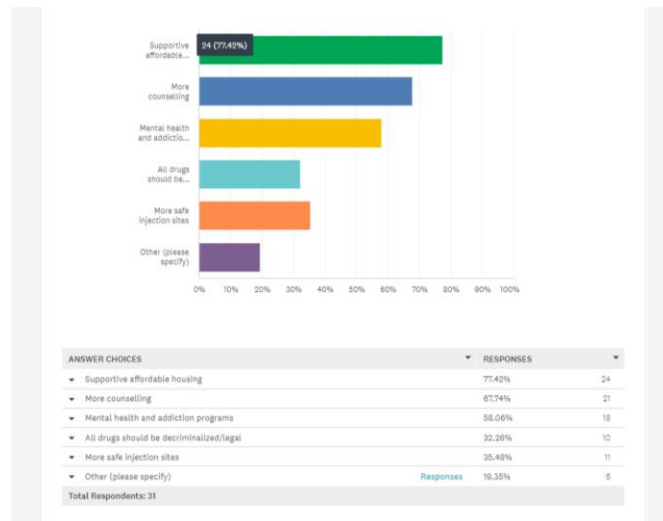
## Mental Health and Addiction Issues:



The above chart shows that 62 per cent of our drop in users identify as having mental health and addictions issues while 26 per cent do not. 10 per cent are unsure.

Regarding supports for mental health and addictions, almost 11 per cent said their needs had not been met at all, while 14 per cent said their needs had been met a little, just over 21 per cent had their needs met somewhat, and 7 per cent had their needs met moderately. Another 14 per cent had their needs met more than moderately, another 14 per cent had their needs met fairly well, and just one respondent had their needs met very well (4 per cent).

What supports are needed for people with mental health and addiction issues:



The chart shows the top need for people in these situations is supportive affordable housing, chosen by more than 77 per cent of people. This finding is consistent with other surveys and focus groups we have held for the past 15 years at TNG. A large percentage, almost 68 per cent, want more available counselling, while 58 per cent want mental health and addiction programs,

and over 35 per cent want more safe injection sites, followed by drug decriminalization chosen by 32 per cent.

Suggestions included: “Community programming via community service providers”. One person disagreed with overdose prevention sites, claiming: “They give addicts the tools to use....These centres should redirect addicts to recovery centres to get well.”

### **Drug Overdoses:**

The city got mixed results regarding drug overdose response. Almost 43 per cent gave the city a very bad review in this regard. One person said they were doing quite badly, while almost 11 per cent said the city response is fairly bad, while 14 per cent said the city is in the middle but could do better, while almost 18 per cent said the city is doing an ok job, almost 11 per cent said the city is doing a fairly good job, and 2 people or 7 per cent said the city is doing a very good job.

### **Issues of Drop In Users:**

A third or 32 per cent of respondents who answered this question said the City is doing a very bad job addressing the issues of drop in users, with a further 22 plus per cent saying they are doing quite poorly. This totals more than half of respondents who have a very poor opinion of how the city addresses these issues. One person said the city is doing a rather bad job, while just under 11 per cent said the city is middling in their response. Sixteen per cent think the city is doing a somewhat good job, while almost 10 per cent are quite satisfied, and one person said the city is doing a very good job. Clearly there is room for improvement for the city to understand and respond to the issues of drop in users.

### **Ways for City to Address Community Needs Better:**

A total of 22 people wrote personal answers. Some want more drop ins with enhanced funding, others want action on mental health and more shelters and housing. One person stated: “Leave encampment people alone.” Another captured what a few people said: “Host frequent discussions, panel discussions”, while another said “Accessible structured conversation.” Another respondent urged city politicians and staff: “Come to (the) drop in more and community centres to see what it’s like.” Another said: “Talk to the people who live there, not business associations.” There was an emphasis on the City listening more to people, from at least six respondents. Summing up, one person said: “Bring more people from the city to interact with community. Listen to people that don’t wear suits.” One person urged the city to hire more people from the community. One respondent stated: “More funding for Black youth in Toronto.”

Clearly there is a yearning for engagement with city officials and people want that to happen in settings like drop ins where they feel more comfortable.

### **Next Steps:**

A number of respondents showed interest in learning more about the City budget process. People want city officials to attend spaces where they congregate and share materials that are easy to

understand and in paper form. We welcome city officials and staff to attend our Corner Drop In for such a meeting and can easily set up such a gathering. It is important to emphasize that respondents are aware of the issues that impact them and have practical advice for City officials to act on to make positive change.