



YEAR ONE REPORT (May 2022-May 2023)

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Social Development Centre Waterloo Region - City of Kitchener
Presented to Council June 26, 2023

Executive Summary

Overview:

The Lived Expertise Working Group is a two year pilot project hosted by the Social Development Centre in partnership with the City of Kitchener to advise on the implementation and monitoring of the Housing for All Strategy. The working group consists of twelve lived experts who meet twice a month from May 2022 to April 2024. The Working Group is supported by a facilitation team including a lead facilitator, social work support worker, research support worker, digital support worker and staff from the Planning Department. The Working Group has strong community support and interest from media, academia, and other municipalities.

Principles:

Lived Expertise - Working Group members were selected for their lived experience, advocacy experience, and connections to communities. They are provided stipends and supports to compensate them for sharing their expertise.

Co-creation - Every part of this project has been created through ongoing engagement with communities. Decisions are made by the working group members and supported by the facilitation team.

Grace - Working Group is both trauma-informed and diversity informed. Supports and accountability processes focus on creating space to help the group navigate a broad range of experiences, communication styles, and triggers.

Trust - Working Group acts as a bridge between municipalities and communities. Trusting relationships are prioritized to help hold dynamic conversations, evolving community contexts, and complex power relations.

Decolonization - Working Group is self critical and reflective to counter tokenism and ensure all voices are heard. Working Group is identifying new ways of relating to better enable institutional and community transformation.

Priorities for Year 1:

The working group selected the following two priorities for the first year of the pilot.

1. Developing a Housing Charter that helps City of Kitchener overcome jurisdictional barriers (ie. with Region of Waterloo) surrounding housing.
2. Supporting encampments within the City of Kitchener.

Work Completed:

- Reviewed Housing for All Strategy and consulted with City of Kitchener Staff
- Reviewed draft terms of reference and developed Community Space Agreement
- Developed a storytelling map of encampment support ecosystem

- Reviewed Region of Waterloo's Interim Housing Solutions with Leilani Farha
- Completed conflict resolution workshop with Community Justice Initiatives
- Delegated to Region of Waterloo Council and Community Services Committee
- Led a panel at LISPOP Housing Forum on Lived Expertise
- Hosted an Orientation on Lived Expertise for Regional Councilors and senior staff
- Conducted one on one interview series on lived expertise process to inform future engagements at City of Kitchener
- Members co-created an offboarding and accountability procedure/process for the Working Group in case of future conflict
- Hosted a "Speed Dating" with Kitchener City staff to encourage dialogue and a deeper understanding of both the inner workings of the city, and the Working Group.
- Created a working rubric for bylaw based on a human rights approach to encampments and their residents
- Met with academics and activists from British Columbia to mobilize knowledge regarding the mass evictions of encampments and the current disregard of human rights
- Working Group member participated on a panel regarding the recent court case that stopped the encampment evictions in Kitchener
- Participated in a Lunch N Learn on Lived Experience to discuss Systems Planning where Working Group connected with other groups from the Niagara Region
- Participated in a decolonial workshop series hosted by Ekhaya.

Ongoing Projects:

1. Working with City of Kitchener staff on the implementation and review of the Housing for All Strategy.
 - Status: Meeting with Planning Department to review potential year 2 projects
2. Reviewing Bylaw's approach to encampments through a human rights framework.
 - Status: Preparing pilot with Region of Waterloo staff at 100 Victoria and 150 Main encampments as part of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.
3. Leading a team of student researchers from Wilfrid Laurier University in a study comparing perceptions of displacement between unsheltered communities and municipal employees.
 - Status: Photos have been taken and first focus group completed. Focus group with City staff scheduled for July.
4. Participating in communities of practice around Lived Expertise.
 - Status: Representatives attending regular meetings of the Region of Waterloo's Encampment Operations Table, the Unsheltered Campaign and the Shift's National Working Group on Encampments.
5. Participating in the transformation laboratory hosted by the Social Development Centre and the University of Waterloo as part of Region of Waterloo's Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.
 - Status: Some Working Group members are engaging in community based research to identify needs and potential interventions to inform the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.

6. Developing a presentation for the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness 2023 National Conference
 - Status: Presentation proposal submitted and working group is now planning several public events to fundraise for the conference.

Upcoming Projects:

1. Support City of Kitchener staff in developing and implementing tenant protections.
2. Set Year 2 priorities with Planning Department focusing on housing related land use planning matters.

Learnings:

- Lived experience was transformed into lived expertise, incorporating advocacy experience, ongoing relationships, institutional recognition and compensation.
- Applicants preferred to apply as individuals rather than groups to minimize tokenization, recognize broader scope of work, and avoid the additional labour of formally interfacing with groups. Connection to communities was still prioritized in the selection process.
- Working group is distinct from peer support programs as working group members are provided more voice and access to decision making but less therapeutic support than peer support workers. Peer support remains a contrasting model to learn from.
- Formal training process has been transformed into ongoing learning sessions to respond to diverse and ongoing learning needs and goals of the group.
- Individualized supports from the facilitation team, including a social worker, have been introduced to accommodate members diverse and fluctuating needs, as well to ensure a trauma informed process.
- Working group members have empathy for and a desire to learn from each other and municipal staff and councils. They regularly self manage their individual and collective experiences to create space for learning from others.
- Municipalities continue to struggle with fear and perceptions of conflict when entering the space with the working group. This perception appears to be tied to advocacy work happening outside of the working group. The primary fear appears to be the fear of being seen as the spokesperson for all governments and thus the target of all advocacy and criticism.
- More City staff have to be a part of the process in regularly connecting with the working group, to create opportunities for monitoring and supporting of the implementation of the housing strategy, and to create opportunities for staff to learn about this work and interact with the working group to build greater trust and collaboration.
- More opportunities are needed for the Social Development Centre and the working group to directly present and report to City staff, council, and the Corporate Leadership Team to ensure mutual understanding and commitment to the process that is recognized as unique and necessary in engagement of lived experts in municipal decision-making.