



# HEADING HOME: THE RIGHT THING TO DO

10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010 – 2020

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo would like to thank the many individuals and organizations that generously contributed to the development of this ambitious plan to end homelessness. Your thoughtful contributions and relentless commitment to resolving homeless issues have made the vision to end it a realistic and achievable one.

We wish to extend special thanks and appreciation to homeless individuals and those who work with them, whose willingness to disclose personal experiences and ideas have provided important direction to the Plan. It is through these perspectives that we gain unique insights and better understand how to plan our activities to have more relevant and meaningful outcomes. This Plan will serve as a roadmap to guide decisions, activities and resource allocation related to bringing an end to homelessness in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. This report was compiled by the Community Services administration.



This is S.M., he has been a long standing patron at the Centre of Hope. He has been in the Housing First Program for over a month, and is currently waiting to go to treatment.

**Housing First client, Center of Hope**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

In March of 2009, the Provincial Government released A Plan for Alberta, Ending Homelessness in 10 years. The Alberta Plan emphasizes a Housing First model of ending homelessness, a client-centered approach that removes all pre-conditions to being housed. In this model, priority is placed on providing affordable, safe and permanent housing quickly, with minimal requirements for homeless persons beyond signing a standard lease agreement. The Plan for Alberta is described as a comprehensive, “coordinated and sustainable approach to ending homelessness” (Government of Alberta, Housing and Urban Affairs, 2009). All community projects within Alberta requiring provincial funding are required to fit within the outlined parameters of this over arching Plan for the Province. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) Plan to End Homelessness aligns with the Alberta Plan in its emphasis on housing first and the belief that housing is a basic human right.

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Plan entails a fundamental change in how the issue of homelessness is addressed operationally as responders move from managing homelessness to ending homelessness. To achieve this end, the Plan has five goals which outline actions to build community support for Housing First. These goals are as follows, education – to build support to end homelessness using the housing first approach, secondly, change management – to successfully transition local systems to housing first, thirdly, prevention – develop a service system to prevent homelessness, fourthly, re-housing – rapidly re-house the current homeless individuals, and fifthly, provision of supports – to provide supports for housing stability. In addition to presenting these goals, the report articulates outcomes and indicators to monitor and evaluate progress achieved.

Implementing Housing First in the community requires a purposeful strategy. The Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee vision is that our regions collaborative support system will prevent homelessness and provide the necessary supports and resources to end homelessness by 2020.

## INTRODUCTION

This plan is an ambitious endeavor to move the community from managing homelessness to finally ending it. To do this, the plan begins with a brief outline of the philosophy behind the Housing First approach that has been adopted and mandated by the Provincial Government as the chosen method to end homelessness in Alberta. The key structures in this community that not only have the capacity to take on this challenge, but also the passion and desire to see it move forward will be highlighted. Locally, there have been a total of four counts conducted to determine the number of homeless living on the streets on a particular day. This information as well as other research, has been collected and analyzed to present a profile of the homeless population in this area. This too will be emphasized in the plan, as well as a profile of the assets and gaps that currently exist within the Municipality as it relates to homelessness.

Key stakeholders in the community who are also involved with the Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee (HISC) helped facilitate and provided additional input in the public community consultations, focus groups with the homeless and planning sessions with the homeless serving agencies. The feedback received from these engagements have formed the framework for this plan which centers around five goal areas each with specific outcomes and tangible actions directly related to these outcomes. Included also is a section on the social return on investment analysis that is a method for understanding, measuring and reporting on both the social and financial value that is being generated for the community plan relative to its investments.

A plan costing model involves a comparison of the costs of managing homelessness to the costs of ending homelessness. These tables were developed using formulas provided by the Secretariat, and provincial data presented in the Provincial Ten Year Plan where none was available locally. The cost of homelessness is not limited to one department

but a responsibility that to be shared multi jurisdictionally. The expenses related to homelessness outlined in the table reflect this but also highlights that it costs more to manage homelessness than it does to end it.

In the midst of this 'land of opportunity', it is not acceptable to have homeless people living on the streets. Socially, morally and ethically, it is the obligation of this community to do something, to do the right thing. This plan is a guide on how to end homelessness.

## Vision

Our region's collaborative support system will prevent homelessness and provide the necessary supports and resources to end homelessness by 2020.

## Beliefs

We believe access to housing is a basic human right, and homelessness contradicts this right to safe and adequate shelter. We believe acknowledging housing as a human rights issue improves how homeless people are viewed and treated. These beliefs help set the proper context for addressing homelessness through approaches that extend dignity and protection to homeless people and aim to re-establish their rights.

# HOUSING FIRST

To address homelessness, towns and cities across the country and throughout North America have implemented various models and tools to effectively house those living on the streets. One such tool that has been identified to work particularly well in Canada has been the Housing First model. Its success has been proven in areas such as downtown Toronto in their 'Streets to Homes' program.

The Housing First approach to end homelessness is purposeful and no nonsense. To end homelessness requires housing people first, and then giving them supports to sustain housing later. Housing is viewed as a right of everyone within society and not a reward for clinical or programmatic success. A Housing First approach moves homeless individuals immediately from the streets or homeless shelters into their own apartments or homes. While housing is not contingent on compliance with services, it is understood that once settled in a stable living situation, homeless individuals can more successfully engage with the variety of services available to them. Supportive services are available but not mandatory, and treatment is not a condition of housing. Housing First shifts away from "housing readiness" and provides housing rapidly, with supports to come later. This means housing becomes the first step in moving out of homelessness, not the last.

This approach suggests a critical shift in thinking away from a perspective of homelessness as an individual issue to one that frames it as a societal one and a threat to basic human rights. It moves away from the perspective that housing is a privilege. It embraces an understanding that permanent housing allows individuals the ability to address barriers confronting them without struggling with homelessness. In this way, the promise of housing is not an incentive or a leverage factor to secure client compliance or commitment, but recognition that pressing housing needs have to be addressed before a client can expect to be successful.

## Housing First Best Practice Research

The Housing First model was introduced by American non-profit agencies in the early 1990s, and continues to demonstrate continued success and best practice. The City of Toronto was the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement a comprehensive strategy with their 'Streets to Homes' program. This project found 90% of clients still in stable housing one year after being



housed. Of those still in stable accommodation, 85% perceived ongoing tenure to be secure and believed themselves to have a positive future (Toronto Shelter Support & Housing Administration, 2007). Post-occupancy surveys reported clients' quality of life improved. They experienced a reduced use of drugs and alcohol, less interaction with legal system and better and more appropriate access to health care (Streets to Homes, Frontline and Supervisors Training Manual, 2009).

Another example of an initiative consistent with Housing First is the 'Portland Hotel'. Notwithstanding its name, the Portland Hotel provides permanent accommodation for 86 adults with mental illnesses, addictions and other problems. It combines housing with professional supports to assist residents according to their individual needs and desires (Raising the Roof, Case Study, 2009). The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), 2009 Robert Hale Jr. Award winner, 'Buffalo Housing First Program' in Red Deer, Alberta, is another good example of a Housing First success story. The Buffalo Hotel Housing provides Housing First services to 40 individuals with the greatest need who are currently living on the street.

## **Benefits of Housing First to Homeless Person**

The Housing First approach gives the stability of a home, which allows a homeless person to separate housing issues from other life issues, and doesn't make one the prerequisite of the other. In recent years, more research has been conducted and thus it is generally accepted that individuals who have secured a permanent residence are not only more likely to be willing to resolve their 'social deficits', they also achieve a higher level of success (Fort McMurray Housing Needs Count, 2008, 16). The presumption is that once housed, previously homeless persons can more adequately concentrate on improving their life circumstances and/or working through the issues that contributed to their homelessness. Research verifies that serving clients within their own environment helps decrease fear and improve the therapeutic alliance which results in increased reception of treatment.

Post-occupancy surveys conducted on Housing First projects also show significant benefits for previously homeless persons in improving their quality of life. Toronto's 'Streets to Homes' program reported significant improvements to health (70% of those surveyed), personal security (72%), nutrition (65%), stress levels (60%) and mental health (57%). In addition, alcohol and drug use was significantly reduced, less interaction with legal systems, and better access to health care (Cost Savings Analysis of the Enhanced Streets to Homes Program, 2009).

Similarly, the Denver Housing First Collaborative reported that 15% of their clients displayed decreases in substance abuse, while 50% reported improved health status. (Cost Savings Analysis of the Enhanced Streets to Homes Program, 2009; Periman & Parvensky, 2006). It has also been proven that the best place for clients to learn the skills necessary for housing stability is while in housing (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006). Housing First approaches help clients move towards greater self-reliance. In some cases, clients pay rent directly to landlords, either through their own income or through social assistance benefits to which they are entitled. In this way, clients become more financially and independently stable.

## **Benefits to Community**

Homelessness has significant economic costs to various health, justice and emergency service systems. A substantial amount of qualitative and quantitative research is available to illustrate this fact (Kern County, 2008, 21; Hirsh et al, 2007; Salit et al, 1998; Diamond et al, 1991). According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness in the United States, the costs of homelessness can be quite high because people who are chronically homeless frequently access health care, mental health, and family support services in their most expensive forms (hospital emergency rooms, law enforcement, mental health services and other crisis intervention venues). Subsequent research from the United States demonstrates that consistently higher cost service systems which are intended to provide a temporary or emergency service response are frequently used by homeless individuals to meet their basic daily needs, while the cost of providing stable, permanent housing is low in comparison (Hirsch et al, 2007).

Studies have been completed that have followed chronically homeless individuals for period of time and found each person consumed a much higher percentage of public services within that time frame than the cost to initiate a Housing First or housing response program. A Plan for Alberta, confirms this finding. If the province were to continue to manage homelessness, it would incur a cost of \$6.56 billion over 10 years compared to \$3.3 billion to end it (A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years, 2008, 11).

Examples of studies that have been conducted in other jurisdictions further illustrate this point:

- 'Streets to Homes', Toronto, indicated that in a year after being housed, there was a "38% reduction in the number of individuals using ambulance services, 40% decrease in individuals using the emergency room, and 25% reduction in individuals requiring a hospital stay (Cost Savings Analysis of the Enhanced Streets to Homes Program, 2009, 5).
- A survey done by the B.C. Government in 2001 found that the average annual cost to taxpayers of leaving someone on the street ranges from \$30,000 to \$40,000. The average annual cost of providing a single supportive-housing unit, including the cost of the unit and supports, ranged from \$22,000 to \$28,000 per year (Wadsworth, 2008). Putting chronically homeless people into permanent housing with access to case management and services will reduce their use of services designed for emergency use.
- The University of California followed 15 chronically homeless individuals for 18 months and found each person consumed \$200, 000 in public services (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, 2008).

These examples further illustrate that it costs more to manage the problem of homelessness than it would take to end it.

Having no fixed address means being excluded from all that is associated with having a home, a surrounding neighbourhood and an established community network. By placing homeless people directly into housing, they are being integrated back into the community. Community integration is essential for formerly homeless people to feel their housing is their home and that the neighbourhood is their community.

## HOUSING FIRST FOR ALBERTA

The Provincial Government of Alberta released "A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 years" in March 2009, and it supports the Housing First model as the approach that communities in Alberta will use to address the issue of homelessness. Within the Provincial Plan, there are definite goals, timelines and financial requirements for the Province of Alberta. The key elements are centered on five priority areas for action: better information, aggressive assistance, coordinated systems, more housing options, and effective policies (A Plan for Alberta, Ending Homelessness in 10 years, 18). In addition, the Alberta Secretariat constructed 'basic criteria' that should be considered and included in community multi-year plans to ensure alignment with the provincial plan.

It's 'basic criteria' includes:

- o Moving people into housing directly from streets and shelters without preconditions of treatment acceptance or compliance.
- o Contracting a service provider to make available robust support services to the client. These services are predicated on assertive engagement, not coercion.
- o Embracing a harm reduction approach to addictions rather than mandating abstinence. At the same time, the provider must be prepared to support client commitments to recovery.
- o Fulfilling landlord-tenant agreements in order for tenancy to continue. Clients have protection under the law.
- o Implementation is either a project-based or scattered site housing model.
- o Moving clients toward the highest level of self-reliance possible. Support services are not intended to continue indefinitely (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2009).

## History of Homelessness Plans and Integration of Housing First

Currently, the community is utilizing a multi-year plan. The 2007-2010 Community Plan on Homelessness and Affordable Housing was drafted as a three year plan to address the assets and gaps as well as set out priorities for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, in consultation with its community partners. It is evident that even though the 2007-2010 Community Plan does not specifically name the Housing First approach as the direction to follow, the provincial priorities for action are very much integrated within its principles and objectives. The focus of the 2007-2010 Homelessness and Affordable Housing Plan was reduction of homelessness using mainly transitional housing. It also addressed improvements to services, quality of services, capacity and coordination, developing an 'inclusive community' and opportunities for a place to live for homeless persons. When the next update for the federal government is required, its direction will be taken from this 10 Year Plan in order to ensure a seamless transition between plans.

## Traditional Approach to Addressing Homelessness

The traditional 'Continuum of Care' approach used in the past, emphasized "housing readiness" which implied that homeless persons were only put into housing once they were "ready" or eligible for specific type of housing (Kern County's Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, 2008, 5)." Homeless individuals were encouraged to move through different "levels", along the 'Continuum of Care', from the streets to emergency shelter, to transitional housing and gradually into an apartment of their own. As part of this continuum, homeless individuals were required to go through drug, alcohol and/or mental health treatment and multiple stages of housing steps, before actually being housed. The 'Continuum of Care' model placed expectations on homeless individuals that limited their ability to achieve success. Many homeless individuals could not receive housing until their situation improved but were often unable to improve their situation until they were housed, resulting in a cyclical and ineffective process.

## Implementing Housing First

To implement a Housing First model in a community that has traditionally used the continuum of care model requires a fundamental shift in thinking and operating, as responders move from managing homelessness to ending homelessness. The approach involves shifting emphasis in system delivery from emergency and transitional housing to permanent housing. A Housing First approach necessitates changes in how services are targeted and offered to homeless who are no longer expected to transition along a set of steps to achieve stable housing. Instead they receive immediate housing assistance and needed service supports. This approach requires enhanced cooperation of agencies to create a seamless response to ensure people are not released into homelessness. It requires providing intensive supports tailored to each homeless individual to ensure they can be successful once housed. It involves new partnerships with private sector landlords to provide housing units and to support people once housed. In addition, it involves an increased emphasis on consistent, coordinated data collection and reporting to ensure the outcomes associated with Housing First are being realized.

Homeless serving organizations will also be impacted by the changes brought about in implementing a Housing First model. Other than the issue of having the physical staff in place, staff must now be skilled in particular areas to be effective at Housing First. Staff will need computer and writing skills to input data, produce reports and navigate the web-based provincial data collection software. They will need to be educated on how to do case management as part of a team with other agencies in the community. As Housing First becomes integrated into the community, organizations will need to partner together to house the homeless and deliver the required services.

# KEY STRUCTURES TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is the designated Community Based Organization (CBO) responsible for coordinating the implementation of the National Homelessness Partnership Strategy via the Community Plan in the region. As the community based organization, it receives funding from both Federal and Provincial governments to address local priorities with respect to facilities that provide support services in cooperation with community stakeholders. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's Neighbourhood and Community Development branch plays a lead role in building community capacity to address homelessness and to manage contractual agreements with local programs.

In the past, the Homelessness Initiative Steering Committee (HISC) played a significant leadership role in the development of all three previous Community Plans on Homelessness and Affordable Housing. Formed in 2000 as a community based committee to oversee the Community Plan on Homelessness and Affordable Housing, it assisted in setting the strategic direction and priorities for action. The committee was instrumental in building partnerships between all levels of Government and with organizations, undertaking a role to help achieve the common vision and objectives within the 2007-2010 plan.

With direction from the group, the Homelessness Initiatives Steering Committee underwent a significant restructuring in early 2009 to streamline its role and redefine its purpose and effectiveness. The Homelessness Initiative Steering Committee was divided into two separate committees, each with its own membership and terms of reference. One committee, the executive group, later renamed Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee (HISC) is made up of representatives from both levels of government as well as other key stakeholders in the community, and takes on the role for stewarding the Community Plan on Homelessness, strategic planning, funding, communication, research and best practice. As part of the strategic planning, this committee also reviews project proposals submitted for funding under the Community Plan to ensure that the identified priorities outlined in the Plan are addressed.

The second committee, the Community Housing Agencies Team (CHAT), is a group composed primarily of front line service providers and government employees who directly interact with homeless individuals and families. The purpose of the Community Housing Agencies Team is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery and to identify and respond to emerging issues. The team focuses on sharing data and project information, educating, creating awareness and identifying emerging homelessness issues. They share a role with the HISC group related to creating public awareness and communication, engaging the public in homelessness planning and implementing processes, as well as with monitoring and evaluating the Plan.

A key structure in the community as well as a vital partner in this journey to end homelessness is Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation (WBHDC). It was incorporated as a subsidiary Part 9 Not-for-Profit Corporation of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo under the Companies Act in 2001. Its mandate is "to provide affordable housing and related services to senior citizens and low and middle income families living within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo". Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation is an important organization and partner in combating homelessness and in making affordable housing a reality for every resident in the region. Through affordable housing developments and the administration of provincial housing subsidy programs, they provide people the opportunity to establish their own secure footing in the community. Moving forward with the Plan to end homelessness will require a continued investment in the partnership to ensure success.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology for developing this ten year plan involved consultations with the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, the public, key stakeholders and the homeless persons themselves. The Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee, the Community Housing Agencies Team and the Community Based organization were also consulted. In addition, a number of public information events were held including a Housing First Conference and a strategic planning session to generate support and to develop a strategy to end homelessness using a Housing First Approach. Appendix I contains a complete review of the feedback generated from participants attending the Housing First Conference.

A public consultation was held on September 15, 2009 where participants, working in small groups, were tasked with identifying how key strategy areas of Housing First would be implemented, considering such issues as lack of affordable housing units and high migration to the region that put extra stress on local agencies. They were also asked to consider root causes of homelessness and potential strategies to address them.

A workshop was held with members of the Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee group to develop a new vision statement to end homelessness. Sample vision statements were provided from other community 10 Year Plans to stimulate discussion and to highlight key areas where a Housing First vision stands apart from other statements. In addition, surveys were conducted with members of the Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee, the Community Housing Agencies Team and the Community Based Organization that posed questions to assess how they anticipated their roles and responsibilities to change as they shifted their focus from managing to ending homelessness. The survey asked how the new system changes could be better managed and coordinated and where opportunities may lie for innovation, new partnerships, new techniques and practices. The survey generated feedback related to their leadership roles and responsibilities in relation to fulfilling the outcomes of the multi-year plan.

The Centre of Hope consulted with homeless persons about Housing First. They asked what patrons wanted in a Housing First approach in terms of location, size, cost etc. of housing units. Appendix II contains a complete review of the data generated in these consultations.

## PROFILE OF HOMELESSNESS

It is important to have a good understanding of the local community in order to ensure an effective local response when implementing a new approach to an old issue. Within the municipality are the communities of Fort McMurray, Anzac, Conklin, Fort Chipewyan, Fort Fitzgerald, Fort McKay, Gregoire Lake Estates, Janvier, Mariana Lake, Saprae Creek Estates, Draper and a large rural area. The region also encompasses the reserves and traditional lands of five First Nations and seven Métis locals. Homeless services and supports are offered only in the urban centre, and data on the issue is also only collected for Fort McMurray.

Persons in rural communities who have exhausted any local extended family or support system for housing drift to the city as homeless and are counted in data collected centrally. The population in 2008 was 72,363 for the urban service area, with a regional total of 103,334. This includes approximately 26,000 workers housed in camps in the region. There is some debate about the inclusion of these workers in a census as permanent residents. This debate exists outside the parameters of this plan; however, a displaced/terminated camp worker is also immediately without housing and places additional stress on the homeless serving agencies in Fort McMurray. This makes the size of the camp worker population relevant for consideration within this plan.



The region has experienced explosive economic and population growth over the last ten years resulting in high housing costs, low rental vacancy rates and other circumstances which drive homelessness. In-migration exists at much higher levels than in economically stable communities. Housing stock cannot be developed fast enough to meet average needs, prices are therefore at a premium rate, and sub-standard living arrangements and overcrowding conditions become part of the continuum of normal and/or acceptable means of shelter. Support services already stressed by dynamic economic factors become even more inadequate. Data on homelessness in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo has been collected since 2003. The data sources available that have been compiled to create this profile include:

- Homeless Counts 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008;
- RMWB Census Reports 2003, 2004, 2006, and 2008;
- Youth Housing Needs Report 2007;
- Housing Needs Survey Analysis 2006;
- 7-Cities on Housing and Homeless Evaluation 2009;
- Synergy Report 2009.

## Totals of Homeless Counts

Homeless Counts per year	Number Of persons
2003	339
2004	355
2006	441
2008	549

- As recorded from 2004 to 2008, an average of 74% sees themselves as being in Fort McMurray six months from now (date of count)
- Gender ratio remains constant from 2003 to 2008: 75% male, 25% female
- It is worth specific mention that while these demographics in general are similar to trends across the province, the increase in the homeless population in Fort McMurray is greater than in other communities. In fact, in 2006, the rate of homelessness per 65,000 in Fort McMurray doubles that of Calgary, Edmonton and Grande Prairie.

## Observed Race

Year of count	2003	2004	2006	2008
Aboriginal	131	128	131	129
Caucasian	107	121	200	256
Other	n/a	14	41	93
Non-identified	101	92	69	71

- Aboriginal homeless remains quite static
- "Other" was counted as 8% of total in 2003 and 19% of total in 2008. This was a very significant increase in a diverse 'immigrant' population within the homeless group.
- Caucasian numbers have also increased significantly.
- During the counts, volunteers only 'observed' race. In the case where the volunteer did not note the race, these were categorized as non-identified.

## Homeless Youth

A youth housing needs study was conducted across junior and senior high schools and selected street locations in 2007.

- 65 youth between ages 12 and 17 self-identified as homeless
- The factors contributing most significantly to family breakdown were recorded as: family conflict including physical/sexual assault (48%) and substance abuse issues for family, youth, or both (42%)
- 61% of homeless youth were male

- More than 1/3 of the total group had been in the care of Alberta's Children's Authority at some point.

The current data on homelessness suggests that there are distinct factors associated with Fort McMurray's homeless population. These characteristics include a homeless population that is, in general, better educated than the homeless profiled in other communities. For example, the Synergy Report of 2009 indicated a provincial average of 25% completed high school; 36% in Fort McMurray. Provincially 11% had completed post-secondary education; 15% in Fort McMurray. Another unique characteristic is a higher than usual rate of employed-homeless which may reflect the extreme cost of housing and an inability of employed persons to access affordable housing.

As recorded in the 2008 Housing Needs Count (only street contacts, not an agency survey) 51% of individuals reported having an income, 68% responded that they were employed and 13% received government support. This suggests the need for permanent, affordable housing options targeted to low income individuals. Across the province it has been established that housing costs and low vacancy rates impact numbers of homeless. It must be recognized that these situations are at the provincial extremes in Fort McMurray.

Agencies serving the homeless across the province express challenges, such as difficulty in staff retention and recruitment, and in accessing relevant training, as barriers to providing adequate service delivery. Again, both the isolation and cost of living factors make these challenges more extreme in the Fort McMurray area.

## POPULATIONS OF HOMELESS

The definitions for homeless categories as described in this plan are the same as those used by the province in A Plan for Alberta. However of note is that local data has not been collected under these categories. Therefore the profiles were developed from compilations of related data from a number of sources, including those documents already cited in this section.

### Chronic Homeless

A person or family is considered chronically homeless if he/she/they have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In order to be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter.

It is likely that approximately 200 of Fort McMurray's homeless population represent chronic homeless individuals, or an estimated 30% of the total group. About 5% of this sub-population is over the age of 55, and beginning to experience the physical deterioration common to age and the 'lifestyle' of the 'street'. Most of this group present with borderline malnutrition, and neglected dental and vision care, as well as other routine health care screening and vaccinations. These characteristics are very visibly highlighted in both the 2006 Housing Needs Survey Analysis and in the Synergy Report.

### Transient Homeless

The term transient refers to an individual who is homeless for less than a year and has experienced fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In Fort McMurray, this is highly descriptive of the youth homeless population (ages 12 to 17). A report conducted in 2007, titled Youth Housing Needs Report detailed a minimum of 65 youth who self-reported transient homeless living conditions. The barriers impacting their housing stability as described in the report included home situations of conflict, family violence, and substance abuse. Youth indicated they found shelter on friends' couches, in parks, tents and in other unsuitable places.

Others who fit this category are only slightly older, generally in their mid-to-late 20s. They migrate from other parts of the province or the country, and arrive mostly in the spring/summer months when the weather is more suitable to outdoor living. They are often attracted by the 'gold-in-the – streets' myths of the Oil Sands, and by the myths perpetrated in the

media that depict Fort McMurray as a “party town”. Generally they have had sporadic unskilled employment, and possess a marginal set of life skills. They sustain temporary housing through networks of ‘peers’ often pooling resources to obtain accommodation until job loss or inter-group dynamics destabilize the housing unit. These characteristics are highlighted in the 2006 Housing Needs Survey Analysis. Seasonal trends are indicated in reviewing occupancy statistics of shelters. This is further validated when seasonal data was compared between homeless counts.



## Employable Homeless

The employable homeless are those who do not suffer from any major barriers to employment (such as serious psychiatric, medical, or substance abuse problems, criminal behaviors, limited education, or lack of work experience), but who require assistance to find permanent housing and move to self-reliance. In Fort McMurray, a good portion of the homeless are, in fact, the employed homeless. In other communities it is unlikely that these people would be homeless. They have both sufficient life skills and work skills to be successful. However, they likely have been among the working poor or at least have been underemployed.

Also represented in this group are those who have been successfully employed in the region, and for any number of reasons become unexpectedly unemployed. With the high monthly cost of living, it is easy to lose one’s accommodation. Additionally, this group would include camp workers. Lay offs or termination of camp workers employment also contribute to homelessness when individuals suddenly find themselves without the benefit of employer housing and are facing high rental costs. Another group in this category is the immigrant worker who shares most of the characteristics of the profile above, but has issues further complicated by cultural and language barriers.

## Homeless Families

Homeless families refer to those who are homeless and are parents with minor children; adults with legal custody of children; a couple in which one person is pregnant; or multi-generational families. Many members of this group are women fleeing abusive domestic situations and struggling to re-establish independent homes for themselves and their children. It also includes families who move to the region and find themselves confronted with high housing and rental costs. The family unit has often been broken apart prior to being reflected in homeless statistics. The children might be in care, with relatives, or with a single mother head-of-household. A mother, a father, or a couch-surfing youth may in actuality represent a homeless family statistic.

# PROFILE OF ASSETS AND GAPS

There are many existing physical and system assets that can be restructured and enhanced to apply toward the effort of ending homelessness. In the implementation of this Plan, consideration also needs to be given to the predominant assets and gaps that may impact the effectiveness of Housing First activities.

One of the most promising ‘assets’ across the community is a pre-existing value that ‘homelessness’ is, in and of itself, a social issue that the community needs to be responsible for addressing. Having this cultural value present in the local community is a pre-existing support for this kind of model that will be an asset throughout implementation. Given the community profiles, it is likely that shelter space will continue to be needed, for sheltering victims of domestic violence, youth and other homeless persons in the short term. It is believed sufficient shelter resources exist for these purposes.

Casework management and coordination is a specific methodology that has developed historically in the field of professional social work education. It is essentially the best-to-date system for operating wrap-around supports. Agencies

that have leadership roles in the new Housing First projects have already undertaken processes to develop skills in using this kind of model rather than a triage one. Gaps currently exist where agencies lack the physical and financial capacity to support the coordination, information sharing, and proactive planning required for a seamless community implementation. This has been documented in various studies of social needs in Wood Buffalo, including the Social Needs Assessment completed in 2002 by the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Perhaps the most predominant and visible gap is the lack of a permanent, affordable housing stock. Older apartment buildings, hotels, and other stock which may be renovation material in other communities, are not readily available here. The demand for market-rate housing exceeds supply and with the vulnerable populations, it has had an odd effect of impacting transitional housing programs in the community. With nothing to transition to, there has been a trend to extend parameters of transition to something close to permanent in some cases. Nonetheless, housing stock is obviously necessary for implementation of any kind of Housing First. Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation (WBHADC) is a key partner in creating new stock that is suitable and affordable.

## **10 YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS**

Feedback from the individual and agency consultations in the community has been summarized and forms the basic framework necessary to move from managing homelessness to ending homelessness. This Plan to end homelessness has five goals that outline actions to build community support for Housing First, manage the transition to a Housing First approach and relate to preventing homelessness, rapidly re-housing those in need and supporting their activities.

Each of the five goal areas has one or more desired outcomes as well as tangible, relevant actions to achieve those outcomes. Indicators of success and established timelines have also been included in order to track progress. These actions and timelines will determine the direction of the annual service delivery plan prepared for the Provincial government.

### **GOAL I: EDUCATION**

#### **BUILD SUPPORT TO END HOMELESSNESS USING HOUSING FIRST APPROACH**

Implementing the Housing First approach in the community requires a strategic method to build support and understanding. A number of initiatives were conducted in 2009 to support the goal of building awareness for ending homelessness locally using Housing First. These activities promoted Housing First best practice research, engaged and educated a broad sector of the community on Housing First successes, and secured community buy-in and commitment from key stakeholders.

These preliminary initiatives included a 2009 training session in Toronto related to Housing First attended by the municipal homelessness coordinator and a local agency representative. The training session introduced the concept and practice of the Housing First philosophy and its potential for this community. A Housing First Conference was instrumental in igniting local interest and in securing initial community support for ending homelessness with Housing First.

A strategic planning session was held after the Housing First Conference to determine local requirements for implementing Housing First in the region. It involved a discussion of Housing First elements to consider and framed a review of the existing system of service. The session helped the community to consider Housing First in light of the outcomes it would bring about. It also showed the impact it would generate as the community shifted its focus on emergency services and a continuum of housing to focus on providing immediate permanent housing and supports.

## Outcome 1: Increase community interest and support for ending homelessness

### Timeline: pre-planning (immediate)

#### ACTIONS:

##### 1.1 Promote best practice research

- Host a local Housing First Conference to educate the general public and service providers on benefits of ending homelessness with a Housing First approach.
- Look at best practices related to policies that would allow agencies more authority to make decisions and move forward, i.e. longer term contracts.
- Create communication avenues to share important planning information, implementation issues and or discuss promising practices. (i.e. Develop a local community web resource or calendar).

##### 1.2 Engage and educate the community

- Develop a communications plan to generate broad support for Housing First and cross sector participation as well as private and public support (i.e. Educate landlords about the client benefits and cost savings).
- Encourage the homelessness service providers to tour Housing First programs firsthand and provide education opportunities to enhance knowledge of the Housing First approach (i.e. Conferences).

##### 1.3 Secure commitment and engagement from key stakeholders

- Invite the Provincial Secretariat for Action on Homelessness to deliver presentations to Mayor and elected officials as well as to local community leaders on opportunities for ending homelessness with a Housing First approach.
- Host a strategic planning session to review and assess the existing system of service and task agencies to consider where each would “fit” in a different system of service delivery using the Housing First approach.

##### 1.4 Identify and engage a local champion

- Identify a local person with a passion for community or a special talent or ability to generate broad public appeal for the Plan to End Homelessness. Rather than target a public official, identify a local “hero” or champion.

#### SUPPORTING ACTION:

**None identified**

#### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- Stakeholders engaged in local activities express interest/support for ending homelessness using the Housing First approach.
- Groups normally not involved in addressing homelessness show support for Housing First (i.e. local landlords).
- Related media is positive. No “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) issues arise. The public reports ongoing support for ending homelessness and agencies prepare to re-arrange services to fit with delivering a Housing First approach.

## GOAL II: CHANGE MANAGEMENT

### SUCCESSFULLY TRANSITION LOCAL SYSTEMS TO HOUSING FIRST

Adopting a Housing First approach requires a shift in the way homeless people are served in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. This shift has begun to occur in many municipalities across Canada and can involve a transformation of the entire service delivery approach to integrate and purposefully coordinate the Housing First programs. A change in approach to end homelessness is necessary to ensure better housing outcomes for clients, to save costs and to better coordinate services and programs. In light of the barriers and challenges our unique community faces, with regards to high housing costs and low vacancy rates, the plan seeks to address the obstacles to implementation, identify existing gaps, and examine how these barriers can be overcome. The focus of the plan will continue to be on-going, regular evaluation ensuring resources, skills, and effective partnerships are in place to meet the desired outcome of ending homelessness.

#### Outcome 2: Improved coordination of services and systems toward ending homelessness (using Housing First approach)

##### Timeline: 1-3 YEARS and ongoing (Short term)

##### ACTIONS:

##### 2.1 Plan for shift from "managing" to "ending" homelessness

- Identify a leadership group to oversee and manage the overall change related to shifting to a plan to end homelessness.
- Invite a facilitator to do a workshop/seminar with the senior management of local organizations to move beyond the managing homelessness mentality to a framework of ending homelessness.

##### 2.2 Task a lead group to mobilize a coordinated, collaborative service system response as necessitated by Housing First

- Establish a community interagency structure with links to existing homelessness groups to improve coordination of services and to direct local systems toward a Housing First service focus.
- Engage homeless and those at risk to find out how to improve services. Utilize relationships that service providers have with near homeless and homeless to receive their ongoing feedback.
- Create a Housing First events calendar and assign a coordinator to promote opportunities for homeless to attend activities.

##### 2.3. Articulate Housing First coordination processes

- Clarify how newly coordinated processes will function (i.e. Discharge planning to prevent institutional homelessness of youth, mentally ill).

##### 2.4 Shift and expand existing referral systems to move toward a case management model

- Shift and expand existing referral systems to move toward a case management, wrap-around model of service provision to ensure coordinated and holistic agency approach to addressing multiple barriers to housing.

##### 2.5 Identify community resources available to be applied, leveraged and/or directed toward Housing First activities

- Identify existing community resources and processes to support Housing First.

## 2.6 Increase housing resources for Housing First

- Initiate a formal campaign to advocate for funding and infrastructure to support the development of affordable permanent housing.
- Work with Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation to identify/dedicate resources to maximize available affordable housing units.

### **SUPPORTING ACTION:**

- Partner with Northern Aboriginal Business Association (NABA) and organizations such as Athabasca Tribal Council (ATC) to deliver/support Housing First activities.

### **INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:**

- Agencies report working together to coordinate systems of services to end homelessness with Housing First.
- Clients report referrals and connections to supports are appropriate.
- Community resources available are clearly defined.
- Clearly defined processes that articulate new system of Housing First.
- Social Return on Investment (SROI) data sources identified and collection of this information is activated (i.e. Costs of hospital stays, shelter use, ambulance usage, police arrests, etc.)

## **Outcome 3: Improved data management system to support client data, trend analysis and progress reporting**

### **Timeline: 1-3 YEARS and ongoing (short term)**

#### **ACTIONS:**

#### 3.1 Identify individuals within homeless-serving agencies to help implement a coordinated data collection system

- Identify individuals within each homeless-serving agency that will work with both the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and the Province to support the integration of a local data collection system to better coordinate and analyze homelessness data.
- Support provincial efforts to develop a coordinated database.

#### 3.2 Significantly increase resources directed to data collection and evaluation activities

- Identify and access resources for data collection and reporting purposes including financial, administrative, staff, training, etc.
- Develop a website for ongoing public information sharing and reporting purposes - a place to share success stories and client testimonials.

#### **SUPPORTING ACTION:**

None identified

#### **INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:**

- There is a system of inputting and managing the data collected from homelessness statistics.
- Sufficient data collection resources are identified and accessed.

## Outcome 4: Improved relationships with mainstream service providers and private sector landlords to deliver Housing First

**Timeline: 1-3 YEARS and ongoing (short term)**

### **ACTIONS:**

4.1 Develop and enhance relationships with mainstream service providers and private sector landlords

- Community support workers must build new partnerships with mainstream service providers, including but not limited to, health, small business, employers and local developers to support infrastructure needs.
- Encourage support of Housing First approach from bylaw, law enforcement and other municipal departments and branches as necessary.

4.2 Establish long term commitment from mainstream service providers to participate in Housing First activities

- Solicit support in writing from key stakeholders outlining how they anticipate supporting the 10 Year Plan (i.e. Through in-kind support, funding contributions, participation in joint planning and coordination initiatives).

4.3 Market program to landlords

- Engage the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Landlord and Tenant advisor to solicit and educate local private market landlords on the benefits of Housing First.
- Develop a marketing campaign to target landlords with messages related to benefits for and supports provided to participating landlords.

### **SUPPORTING ACTION:**

- Include industries at points they could provide services (i.e. Habitat for Humanity project).

### **INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:**

- Mainstream service providers report they are interested in participating in Housing First locally.
- Local landlords are interested in participating in Housing First.
- New partnerships/agreements are developed to deliver Housing First. Mainstream service providers and landlords participate in ongoing planning and consultation.



T.B. has been in the Housing First Program at the Centre of Hope for 10 months!!! She is volunteering for community agencies such as the Salvation Army as well as she recently graduated from The Paudash Group's, Empowerment and Life Enhancement Program. She is truly a role model!

**Housing First client, Center of Hope**

## GOAL III: PREVENTION

### DEVELOP A SERVICE SYSTEM TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

Developing a service system that prevents homelessness requires a much more strategic and purposeful approach to addressing homelessness than has been used in the past. It requires focusing and coordinating all new and existing services and resources toward preventing homelessness from occurring. Using the Housing First approach, emergency and transitional housing is utilized to move a person to housing stability. It also involves developing a system to quickly identify at risk households and provide the assistance required to sustain their existing housing or where that is not possible, to promptly identify permanent housing options. Actions have been developed and included in the plan to ensure that, as far as possible, homelessness is prevented.

#### Outcome 5: Homelessness is prevented for those individuals at risk

##### Timeline: 3-5 YEARS and ongoing (mid term)

##### ACTIONS:

5.1 Advocate for the establishment of financial assistance programs for the homeless and the low income individuals/families

- Advocate for the establishment of an emergency rent eviction prevention fund and a rent supplement program for Housing First clients.
- Advocate for the provision of prompt financial housing assistance in the form of short term rent assistance, rent subsidies, utility assistance, and provide assistance paying security deposits and rent arrears.

5.2 Identify persons at risk of homelessness and resources to intervene when housing security is threatened

- Intervene when problems threaten a housing placement and identify alternate housing arrangements.
- Build relationships with landlords and offer support to them prior to the crisis situation.
- Ensure connections to resources to provide access to legal help and to landlord and tenant assistance when required.

5.3 Partner with other agencies to advocate for the establishment of a local treatment facility

5.4 Educate potential newcomers on the cost of living and availability of affordable housing

- Prepare persons moving to the region for current economic situation cost of housing.
- Encourage human resources departments and media outfits to provide more realistic reports to rest of the world about Fort McMurray's economy and cost of living.

##### SUPPORTING ACTION:

- Provide English as a Second Language (ESL) representation when communicating information externally about region's housing situation.
- Advertise common facts vs. myths about living in Fort Mc Murray to educate about realities of area
- Provide prevention education/training to youths in school creating more opportunities to learn and utilize essential life skills

##### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- Persons discharged from institutions are not released into homelessness

## Outcome 6: Service system is coordinated to prevent homelessness

**Timeline: 1-3 YEARS and ongoing (short term)**

### ACTIONS:

6.1 Advocate for existing emergency shelter systems to support prevention and Housing First outcomes

- Work with existing emergency shelter providers and with the Province to re-orient shelter services to reduce length of time people reside in emergency shelters

6.2 Advocate for improved coordination of services so persons are not released into homelessness

- Make connections with key stakeholders locally and create a strategy to improve coordination of services from, but not limited to, health care facilities and justice, to ensure homeless people are identified and are not released into homelessness

- Advocate to develop a local zero tolerance policy for discharging people into homelessness

6.3 Improve coordination of existing outreach support services to ensure at risk persons are promptly offered opportunities for assessment and housing assistance

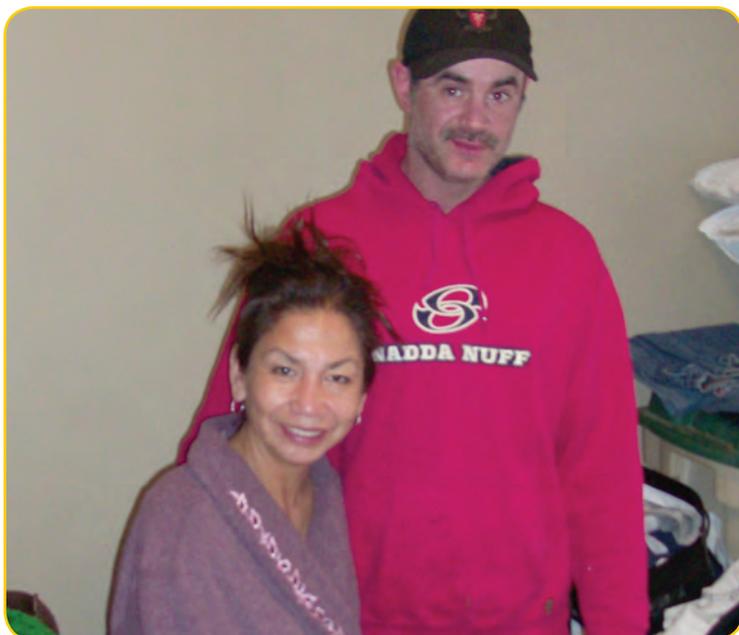
- Work to ensure at risk persons are promptly assessed and given housing assistance

### SUPPORTING ACTION:

None identified

### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- A reduction in the number of people released from institutions into homelessness
- Emergency shelters become places where people stay at a maximum of 21 days before they are housed permanently
- Zero tolerance policy is developed



D.P. and E.C. have been in the Housing First Program at the Centre of Hope for the past 5 months. They also recently graduated from the Empowerment and Life Enhancement training, facilitated by The Paudash Group. D.P is back with the union and looking for work, while E.C. will soon be starting her new job. They are planning to take the employment training through the Paudash Group as well.

**Housing First client, Center of Hope**

## Outcome 7: Community has an adequate supply of permanent supportive housing to meet the needs of low income people and those at risk of homelessness

**Timeline: 3-5 YEARS and ongoing (mid term)**

### ACTIONS:

7.1 Advocate for the implementation of local by-laws that require new housing developments to have a percentage of social housing designations

7.2 Advocate for the development of affordable, permanent housing resources

- Develop alternative housing models to meet the affordable housing needs of low income such as small self-contained units
- Utilize media to advocate to Provincial government to provide land for Housing First at affordable rates
- Continue ongoing campaign to advocate for affordable social housing

7.3. Build new partnerships to support the development of affordable housing

- Establish a leadership group to work with local housing providers, government and advocates to access land and affordable permanent housing units

### SUPPORTING ACTION:

- Target industry and Aboriginal business as building partners and provide them with specific roles and specific projects related to their involvement with housing initiatives

### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- Demand for shelters as affordable rental space for employed people is reduced
- Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation wait-lists for affordable housing are reduced

## Outcome 8: Housing First Initiatives and mainstream support services are sustainably funded and resourced

**Timeline: 1-3 YEARS and ongoing (short term)**

### ACTIONS:

8.1 Advocate for multi-year funding that allows long-term planning and agency support and training

- Develop strategies to advocate for and/or acquire sustainable funding through local, provincial and federal governments and private sources

8.2 Educate service providers to understand local housing resources available

- Educate service providers to ensure they have a firm understanding of the local housing and rental market and knowledge of relationships with local landlords

### SUPPORTING ACTION:

None identified

### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- Agencies have sufficient funding available for long term planning and training
- An increase in the number of training programs as well as the number of trained qualified staff working in Housing First
- The number of supportive agencies working together as a team has increased

## GOAL IV: RE HOUSING

### RAPIDLY RE-HOUSE THE CURRENT HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

The goal of rapidly re-housing current homeless people is the most critical component of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. Without a commitment and solid plan to rapidly re-house homeless persons into safe, affordable permanent housing, Housing First outcomes cannot be realized. This goal area involves a number of strategies to ensure the community has adequate physical capacity to identify and rapidly re-house its homeless, to engage homeless persons to capture their perspectives and feedback related to Housing First projects, to reduce chronic homelessness, to reduce the length of time persons are homeless and to improve self-sufficiency so they may stay housed longer. A critical part of rapidly re-housing homeless persons is to ensure they are assessed quickly to determine housing need and the supports required. Therefore activities will be undertaken to ensure thorough assessments of clients are taken. Housing Assistance involves identifying housing options, discussing challenges and negotiating with landlords, but it also entails providing financial assistance for security deposits, first month rent and housing applications.

Given Fort McMurray's lack of affordable housing, it may be necessary to provide interim housing until a permanent housing infrastructure for Housing First is available. Supports will involve providing case management at the level of intensity dictated by the clients needs. Typically the supports offered to the homeless are in place for one year at which time it is expected that the individual will have re-established themselves into the community. Support workers are encouraged to move clients away from case management supports as their situation progresses and to instead connect them to critical ongoing supports in the community.

#### Outcome 9: Community has adequate physical capacity to identify and rapidly re-house its homeless using Housing First Approach

**Timeline: 3-5 YEARS and ongoing (mid term)**

##### ACTIONS:

9.1 Housing assessment

- Individuals are assessed for rapid housing/rehousing within 48 hours of presenting at an agency serving the homeless.

9.2 Housing assistance and placement

- Identify local units and landlords who provide choice, affordability and housing permanence to homeless persons

9.3 Case management support and follow up provided

- Aim to provide access to outreach and housing assistance services to all Housing First clients 24/7
- Case management support and follow up provided with a focus on overcoming barriers to housing stability and securing appropriate, affordable housing

9.4 Provide resources to support re-housing

- Provide interim housing assistance to Housing First clients where urban service area lacks affordable, permanent units for immediate housing purposes

**SUPPORTING ACTION:**

- Establish a leadership group to work with local housing providers, government and advocates to access land and affordable permanent housing units
- Explore relevance of cultural homelessness to current situation

**INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:**

- Increase in the number of units available for rapid re-housing. Housing options are provided to homeless prior to placement
- Agencies delivering Housing First report having sufficient resources to support re-housing efforts

**Outcome 10: Homeless and at risk persons are meaningfully engaged**

**Timeline: 1-3 years (short term)**

**ACTIONS:**

10.1 Host discussion forums with the homeless

- Support a lead organization to coordinate opportunities for homeless engagement that allows for two way dialogue between homeless persons and service providers, allows for opportunities for feedback on Housing First activities and considers root problems of homelessness

**SUPPORTING ACTION:**

None identified

**INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:**

- Homeless clients report having opportunities for meaningful engagement with those delivering services to them

**Outcome 11: Reduction in the length of time persons are homeless**

**Timeline: 1-3 YEARS and ongoing (short term)**

**ACTIONS:**

11.1 Reduce time homeless are waiting to access needed supports, housing or financial assistance

- Improve coordination of existing street outreach to ensure homeless persons are promptly offered opportunities for assessment and housing assistance

**SUPPORTING ACTION:**

None identified

**INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:**

- A reduction in the time (days) a person spends in emergency shelter or in transitional housing as reported by agency statistics
- A decline in the number of shelter beds utilized and needed
- Incidents of homelessness are less than 21 days per episode
- An increase in the number of permanent housing options obtained by the clients

## Outcome 12: Chronic homelessness is reduced

**Timeline: 6-10 years and ongoing (long term)**

### ACTIONS:

12.1 Connect homeless persons to critical community supports to increase their chance of success once housed

- Continue to provide outreach and housing assistance services to chronically homeless and re-housed individuals for one year or as agreed upon with the individual and support worker

12.2 Increase access to employment/training opportunities that provide adequate wages, job internship and apprenticeship opportunities

- Engage industry/business in workforce development opportunities to support transition of previously homeless to employable status

### SUPPORTING ACTION:

None identified

### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- The number of people assessed as chronically homeless is reduced
- The number of chronic homeless who find employment or internship opportunities is increased

## GOAL V: PROVISION OF SUPPORTS

### PROVIDE SUPPORTS FOR HOUSING STABILITY

The final goal relates to providing ongoing case management and supports until they are no longer needed. They are gradually phased out as the homeless person's housing situation stabilizes and they are re-integrated into the community. Outreach will also need to be coordinated to reduce the length of time homeless persons are waiting to access needed supports, housing or financial assistance. Previously homeless people will need support to effectively utilize employment and training opportunities as well as the options of apprenticeship and internship programs.



This goal area also includes activities directed to improving the self-sufficiency of formerly homeless persons by ensuring that they are connected to the community resources. This will be important to help address the root cause of homelessness and will impact future housing stability. Key activities from this goal area include communicating and reporting to the community on successes of Housing First, reporting on progress to the community and celebrating successes. These important activities must be conducted on a regular basis.

J.D. has been in the Housing First Program with the Centre of Hope for nine months!! He recently moved into Rotary House and he is very pleased to be there. He says he feels like a King in his new living situation. He has been enjoying life much more at Rotary House.

**Housing First client, Center of Hope**

## Outcome 13: Formerly homeless individuals demonstrate improved self-sufficiency

**Timeline: 1-3 YEARS and ongoing (short term)**

### ACTIONS:

13.1 Continue to connect previously homeless people with resources to sustain housing stability

- Evaluate outcomes to ensure outreach and case management services are working effectively to connect previously homeless people with resources to sustain housing

13.2 Identify and collect client relevant data related to measuring improvements in self-sufficiency

- Continue ongoing data collection to evaluate whether services are contributing to self-sufficiency.

### SUPPORTING ACTION:

None identified

### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- The client's testimony to the improved quality of life as a result of being housed

## Outcome 14: People placed in permanent housing with supports remain stably housed

**Timeline: 6-10 YEARS and ongoing (long term)**

### ACTIONS:

14.1 Case management support and follow up provided

- Focus case management services on assisting after housing is provided to support housing stability. Landlord and tenant issues may be highlighted; therefore, access to tenant and household management support information is essential

14.2 Link homeless persons to ongoing support to sustain their housing stability

- Consider long-term community economic development strategies to support sustainable employment opportunities

14.3 Communicate and report on housing first successes

- Provide progress reports to community including positive reports that promote success stories of homelessness to housing self-sufficiency

### SUPPORTING ACTION:

None identified

### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- Permanent housing is sustained continuously for 9 months or more

## Outcome 15: Rates of recidivism into homelessness are reduced

**Timeline: 6-10 YEARS and ongoing (long term)**

### ACTIONS:

15.1 Continue to track, through analysis of data collected, that there is a reduction in the number of incidents of homelessness

### SUPPORTING ACTION:

None identified

### INDICATOR(S) OF PROGRESS:

- Homeless persons/shelter providers report reduced rates of recidivism through the Provincial tracking and reporting process

## SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT (SROI)

Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis, also known as social benefit cost ratio, is a method for understanding, measuring, and reporting on both the social and financial value being generated by an organization, program, or community plan, relative to investments. Most SROI analysis consists of stories not numbers and displays how to understand the value created by activities you engage in, how you demonstrate the value of efforts, and how you manage the value created. Thus, SROI is a framework for measuring and accounting for a much broader concept of value (Nichollus et al. Cabinet Office, Office of the Third Sector, 2008).

### Plan Costing (Based on Costing Model Provided by Secretariat)

Table 1: Comparative Cost of Managing versus Ending Homelessness

Groups of Homeless	Number per group	Average annual cost per person or family	Total Cost to Manage homelessness over 10 years
Chronic	150	137,820	206,730,000
Transient	275	47,616	130,944,000
Employable	75	25,920	19,440,000
Families	49	83,520	40,924,800
	549		\$ 398,038,800

**Number per group** – These groups of homeless have not been tracked in our homeless counts in the past. The numbers were obtained by taking the total of our homeless population at the last count in 2008 (549) which is 5% of the provincial total, then taking 5% of each category of the provincial data.

**Average annual cost per person or family** – The Provincial modeling assumptions for these categories were inflated by 20% to accommodate the higher rental support rates, the higher cost of wages and northern allowance allocations.

Table 2: Cost to End Homelessness

Groups of Homeless	Number per group	Cost to provide housing and services	Total Cost to provide support program	Capital to build 500 new housing units	Investment to END homelessness over 10 years
Chronic	150	40,800	61,200,000	24,900,000	
Transient	275	16,800	46,200,000	45,650,000	
Employable	75	7,200	5,400,000	12,450,000	
Families	49	21,360	10,466,400	8,134,000	
	549	86,160	123,266,400	91,134,000	214,400,400

Cost savings achieved by implementing 10 year plan to end homelessness based on the homeless population of 2008.

\$183,638,400

Table 3: Projected Costs and Savings

Homeless population	Homeless population in 2020	Status-Quo approach (Managing)	10 year savings by by implementing Housing First (locally)
549	1424*	\$1.03 billion	\$ 476 million

\* Estimates based on 10% annual growth rate in homeless population over 10 years. (Census data 2008 indicates 10.5% increase in population, homeless count data indicates approximately 9.6% increase per year. 10% increase was chosen to use for the projections.)

Formulas used for these tables were based on the provincial costing model assumptions with local data where it was available. This is included in Appendix III. The numbers represented in the tables above are based on best estimates with the information available at the time.

## CONCLUSION

The Provincial Government's release of A Plan for Alberta, Ending Homelessness in 10 years, is the direction to move forward for the Province and congruent municipalities. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's Plan to End Homelessness embraces a Housing First Approach and entails a fundamental change in how homelessness is addressed in the community as homeless serving agencies shift their focus from merely managing homelessness to the task of ending it once and for all. To implement the Plan, goals have been outlined and actions highlighted to move forward using the approach of Housing First.

It is important to understand the local context in order to ensure an effective local response when implementing a new approach. Current data and research collected in the community over the past two years support that in many ways our homeless population is distinct and unique. Moving forward with Housing First and keeping the homeless in stable housing will require much persistence on the part of the support workers and strategic thinking outside of the box at the management level. But inherent in every challenge and obstacle lies opportunities if one has the tenacity to uncover it. It is those such opportunities that will ensure the success of this Plan.

Our regions collaborative support system will prevent homelessness and provide the necessary supports and resources to end homelessness by 2020. The benefits of Housing First have been recognized world-wide and with the help of our committed stakeholders, community and service providers, this vision will become a reality. We will be *Heading Home: It's the right thing to do.*

# APPENDIX I

## Data from Housing First Conference Evaluations

The Housing First Conference evaluations indicated that the event was successful. A participant survey was distributed to attendees asking them a series of questions about knowledge levels regarding Housing First, their support for the applicability of this model and any advantages, and the barriers to implementing such a model here. Survey findings reported that for the most part, participants who filled out the survey evaluated the Housing First Conference very positively and indicated the conference had met their expectations. Participants were asked questions regarding their knowledge level of Housing First and their support for the applicability of this model within Fort Mc Murray and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Increases in knowledge levels were indicated for all participants but one. Knowledge levels were significantly low before the conference, with the most participants indicating their knowledge level was at 1 (lowest ranking), or 2 on the ranking scale. This number significantly changed after the conference, with 46% respondents indicating that their knowledge level was now at 5 (the highest).

Similarly, participants support for the applicability of this model for Fort Mc Murray also increased in ranking after the conference. These changes indicate the conference was successful in changing people's support for the applicability within this region, from 3 (moderate support), to 5 (high support). Although respondents knowledge levels and thoughts of applicability increased, they did express some barriers or challenges identified to implementing a Housing First model overall.

The three most prominent challenges or barriers reported in this survey were in housing, changing mind sets, partnerships and co-ordination. Changing the mind sets of people towards a Housing First approach included people in the industry, attitudes, opinions of public and service providers and changing the investment mindset (theology) of people within the field as well. In relation to partnerships and coordination, getting agencies to work together, being equal partners, and not having power struggles were all barriers identified by participants to implementing this model here. In addition, a third of participants reported that this model would highly impact their program delivery at the individual organization. In summary, the barriers mentioned tended to be more Fort Mc Murray specific, and related to housing, than any real dislike for, or resistance to, the Housing First model.

Coincidentally, during March the Secretariat for Action on Homelessness released its 10 Year Plan which publicized the Housing First model as its preferred approach to end homelessness. Because of the conference, members of the community were now better educated on the model and could see its potential in this area.



K has been in the Housing First Program at the Centre of Hope for 7 months!! K recently moved into her own apartment with a roommate as well as securing a job at McDonalds. She is dedicated to working towards all of the goals that she has set for herself!

**Housing First client, Center of Hope**

# APPENDIX II

## Data from Centre of Hope Consultations with Homeless Patrons

Consultations were conducted by the Centre of Hope organization with homeless persons related to Housing First. The engagements specifically asked what they wanted and needed in terms of housing size and location. The following feedback was provided.

**Question:** *If we said that today you were going to be housed, what would it look like to you?*

- One bedroom apartments
- Shared room accommodations
- Shared apartment (2 bedrooms)
- Single room with shared cooking and laundry facilities. Privacy locks on doors
- Scattered sites throughout the city that take into account where we are working and the transit schedule
- Housed throughout the community and not just in one specific place
- Housed away from drugs and temptation
- Housing/accommodation cannot be regulated by so many rules that we do not have the freedom to come and go as we please and have guests in, ability to smoke in accommodation
- Need accommodation that accepts pets
- Location and choice is very important
- Availability to access detox prior to going into housing was also identified as important.

The Centre of Hope also provided results from a one week survey conducted from August 24-30 as part of their weekly snapshots of homeless accessing Centre of Hope services. The intent of the weekly snapshot is to determine a brief profile of the homeless patrons utilizing the services of the drop in center.

### Questions asked:

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Aboriginal Heritage
5. How long have you lived in Ft. McMurray?
6. Which province do you call home?
7. Where are you living now?
8. How long have you been homeless?
9. Daily attendances.

### 1. Name:

190 patrons accessed the Centre of Hope during this one week (7 day) time period

### 2. Age:

The average age for males was 43 to 54.

The average age for females was 38 to 92.

12 patrons were between 18 and 25 years of age: (7 males and 5 females)

52 patrons were over 50 years of age (44 males and 8 females)

### 3. Gender:

150 patrons were male

40 patrons were female

### 4. Aboriginal Heritage

53 patrons identified themselves as having Treaty status

28 patrons identified themselves as Métis

### 5. How long have you been living in Ft. McMurray?

05 patrons arrived in Ft. McMurray the day the survey started.

09 patrons had been in Ft. McMurray for 1 day to 1 week

14 patrons had been in Ft. McMurray from 1 week to 1 month

08 patrons stated that they had been in Ft. McMurray for over 1 month to 3 months.

21 patrons stated they had been in Ft. McMurray for over 3 months to 1 year.

30 patrons stated that they had been in Ft. McMurray for over 1 year to 3 years.

24 patrons stated that they had been in Ft. McMurray for over 3 years to 5 years.

11 patrons stated that they had been in Ft. McMurray for over 5 years to 10 years.

22 patrons stated that they had been in Ft. McMurray for over 10 years to 15 years 05 patrons stated that they had been in Ft. McMurray for over 15 years to 20 years.

41 patrons stated that they had been in Ft. McMurray for over 20 years to life.

### 6. Which province do you call home?

BC 19

AB 102

SASK 11

MAN 04

ONT 21

QUE 05

NB 09

NS 06

PEI 00

NFLD 11

NWT 01

USA 01

### 7. Where are you living now?

08 patrons reported living in rural area but living on the streets while in town

53 patrons reported that they were living on the street

22 patrons reported that they were living in tents

04 patrons reported living in the bush

06 patrons reported living in a car/truck

04 patrons reported staying in a camper/trailer

TOTAL: 97 patrons were sleeping rough  
 13 patrons reported couch surfing with friends or relatives  
 05 patrons reported that they were housed.  
 52 patrons reported staying at Marshall House  
 01 patron reported living on the second floor of Marshall House  
 02 patrons reported living on the third floor of Marshall House  
 12 patrons reported staying at the Salvation Army Shelter program  
 05 patrons reported living in camp  
 01 patron reported living in Captain's Place  
 02 patrons reported staying at Unity House

**8. How long have you been homeless?**

08 patrons reported being homeless for 1 day  
 08 patrons reported being homeless for 1 day to 1 week  
 17 patrons reported being homeless for 1 week to 1 month  
 20 patrons reported being homeless for 1 month to 3 months  
 19 patrons reported being homeless for 3 months to 6 months  
 20 patrons reported being homeless for 6 months to 1 year  
 40 patrons reported being homeless for 1 year to 3 years  
 21 patrons reported being homeless for 3 years to 5 years  
 15 patrons reported being homeless for 5 years to 10 years  
 06 patrons reported being homeless for 10 years to 15 years  
 06 patron reported being homeless for 15 years to 20 years  
 06 patrons reported being homeless for over 20 years  
 04 patrons reported being housed

**9. Daily Attendances (COUNTING EACH INDIVIDUAL ONLY ONCE)**

Staff believes that the numbers are much higher; however it is difficult to ensure all patrons sign in due to many different factors:

Monday:	110
Tuesday:	77
Wednesday:	78
Thursday:	71
Friday:	58
Saturday:	70
Sunday:	53
TOTAL WEEKLY ATTENDANCE: 517	

# APPENDIX III

## Modeling Assumptions

Modeling estimates are based on costs of homeless groups as follows:

### Chronic Homeless

- Total: 3000 spaces
- Per-client estimate: \$34,000 per person per year
- (adjusted for Fort McMurray: \$40,800 per person per year)
- Comprised of:
  - Apartment rental supports: \$6,000.00
  - Case Worker: \$9,600.00 (Case Worker Ratio = 10)
  - Other Services: \$18,400.00 (based on a monthly cost of \$1533)

### Transient Homeless

- Singles: 5500 spaces
- Per person estimate: \$14,000 per person per year
- (adjusted for Fort McMurray: \$16,800 per person per year)
- Comprised of:
  - Apartment rental supports: \$6,000.00
  - Case Worker: \$2,666.00 (Case Worker Ratio = 36)
  - Other Services: \$5,334.00 (Monthly \$444.50)

### Employable

- Total: 1500
- Per Client estimate: \$6,000 per person per year
- (adjusted for Fort McMurray: \$7,200 per person per year)
- Based on providing primarily rent subsidies:
  - Rent subsidies: \$3000 per year (based on \$333.33 per month)
  - Case Worker - \$2,000/year (Case worker ratio = 36)
  - Other Services - \$1,000 (Monthly - \$83)

### Families

- Total: 1000
- Per family estimate: \$17,800 per family per year
- (adjusted for Fort McMurray: \$21,360 per person per year)
- Based on providing support for all members of the family
  - Housing rental support: \$7,800
  - Case workers - \$4,000/year (Case worker Ratio = 36)
  - Other services - \$6,000 (Monthly spend - \$500)

These were the provincial guidelines that were supplied by the Secretariat to develop the local costing model. The rates for each of the categories above were adjusted by an additional 20% to accommodate and reflect the higher rental rates, wages and living allowances paid out to employees. According to CMHC Fall 2009 AB Rental Market Report (p5), in October 2009, the average rental rate for bachelor, 1,2 and 3 bedroom units in Wood Buffalo was 41% higher for similar size units in the other six major centers in Alberta.

The costs to manage include multi jurisdictional costs through numerous provincial departments including, but not limited to, health, justice, social and housing. Expenses related to homelessness would also include case management, counseling and treatment services.

Assumptions used to determine direct and indirect costs:

- 1) Direct cost estimates in the model include all kinds of targeted spending (e.g. prevention, rental subsidies, etc.) For the street/shelter population, direct spending estimates are only comprised of shelter costs, estimated at \$48 per day per homeless person (or \$1460 per month/\$17,520 annually).
- 2) Direct costs for families are based on research that indicates an average cost of \$250 per day for women with or without children in shelters catering to domestic violence victims and as low as \$40 per day for families housed in motels. The average used is \$112 per day or \$41,000 per year. Families are more complex in their needs as children of these families are often involved in other government systems that are very costly.
- 3) Indirect costs estimates in the model are represented as \$2000 per month per transient homeless person, and \$8000 per month per chronic homeless. Indirect costs estimates are based on the higher use by homeless persons of the health, emergency, justice, social services and community based services. The research indicates that a chronic homeless person can use the emergency services of the health system up to 3 times per month at an average cost of over \$600 per visit. Homeless persons with mental health issues often spend several months per year hospitalized at over \$1,500 per day. The costs for Chronic can range from \$80,000 to \$150,000 per year while the transient and employable use these services to a lesser degree averaging as low as a few thousand per year to over \$40,000 per year.

Groups of homeless	Direct spending	Indirect spending	Estimated annual cost
Chronic	\$ 17,520	\$ 97,330	\$114,850
Transient	\$ 17,520	\$ 22,160	\$ 39,680
Employable	\$ 17,520	\$ 4,080	\$ 21,600
Families	\$ 41,000	\$ 28,600	\$ 69,600

These are based on the Provincial guidelines provided by the Secretariat.

The above breakdown of costs is an estimate based on studies that focused on Calgary and is not to be used as representative of the current costs. Further data analysis will be conducted as the HMIS system is implemented to gather province-wide information.

Capital cost estimate – The basic formula used to arrive at the capital cost was based on average of 650 sq ft per unit that was used in the provincial formulas. However, the data used for the costs per unit was obtained from Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corp.

To build locally the average costs per square foot is

Townhouse/single family dwelling	\$250 sq ft
Townhouse/single family dwelling - rural	\$300 sq ft
Apartment	\$210 sq ft
Apartment – rural	\$260 sq ft

The average cost was \$255 sq ft to reflect the capital required for the various types of units required for singles, specialized groups, and families. Based on 650 sq ft unit the average cost per unit would be (650 sq ft @ \$255/sq ft) not including land, \$166,000

It is anticipated that to achieve the construction of the units support will be needed in the form of free or cheap land, municipal contributions, tax credits, private developer involvement and community donations.

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