

YEAR 6 UPDATE



**HEADING
HOME**

**Progress Report on the Regional
Municipality of Wood Buffalo's 10 Year
Plan to End Homelessness 2010-2020**

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REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF **WOOD BUFFALO**

A BETTER TOMORROW

In the six years since the launch of “Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do – 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010-2020,” we have seen a strong commitment and collective effort to provide better outcomes for those who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

This update provides a snapshot of the advances made toward achieving the five goals set out in the 10 Year Plan:

1. Education
2. Change management
3. Prevention
4. Re-housing
5. Providing supports

The impact of the services working together is nowhere more evident than in the biennial Point in Time Homeless Count, which shows a steady decrease in the number of people living on the streets - 46% decline since 2008.

Through the coordinated efforts of the service providers and clients we are working towards the collective goal of ending homelessness.

*Linda Thompson-Brown, Manager
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2016 WILDFIRE

During the development of this Year 6 report, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo experienced the largest natural disaster in Canadian history, a massive wildfire in May 2016 that forced the mandatory evacuation for a month of 88,000 people and destroyed approximately 2,400 structures.

As this report only includes findings from March 2010 to March 2016, the impact of that catastrophe is not reflected in the data. However, in the 2016 Point in Time (PIT) Homeless Count, conducted Oct. 19-20, 25% of participants responded that they were homeless due to the fire.

The effects that the disaster has had on residents and housing has yet to be fully understood and will be reviewed in the Year 7 update.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ending homelessness is a collaborative effort and it takes the dedication and perseverance of community partners to deliver and improve services provided to the socially vulnerable. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo would like to thank all the community members, organizations and service providers that support its 2010-2020 plan, including:

Centre of Hope, CHOICES, Rehoboth Alliance, Salvation Army, Waypoints, Wood Buffalo Food Bank, Wood Buffalo Wellness Society, Woods Homes, YMCA

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YEAR 6 HIGHLIGHTS

During the six-year period from March 2010 to March 2016, the Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing program, which is central to the Plan on Homelessness, saw a total of:



835
INDIVIDUALS
HOUSED



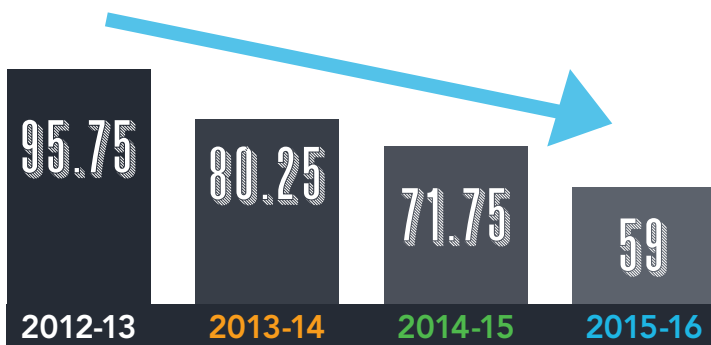
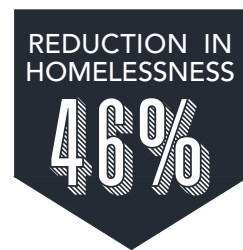
246
PROGRAM
GRADUATES

IN
YEAR
SIX:



POINT IN TIME COUNT OF INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS BY YEAR

Between Fall 2008 and Fall 2014, 255 fewer individuals experienced homelessness, a 46% decline.



AVERAGE
USING
SHELTERS

A PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

In March 2009, the Province released “A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years,” which recognized the growing challenge of homelessness and the need to move towards a Housing First philosophy. The Housing First model is a client-centred approach that deems housing a basic right in society and removes all pre-conditions to being housed (such as addiction or mental health status). The concept is that the first and primary need for a homeless individual is to obtain stable housing and then other issues can be addressed.

THREE AREAS ARE PRIORITIZED:

1. Rapid re-housing - moving homeless Albertans from streets and shelters into permanent housing.
2. Providing client-centred supports - helping re-housed clients obtain the assistance they need to restore stability and maintain their housing.
3. Preventing homelessness - emergency assistance and providing adequate and accessible government programs and services to Albertans.

WHAT WE MEAN BY ENDING HOMELESSNESS

Ending homelessness is a complex problem that requires collaboration and long-term commitment. Individuals may still need to use emergency shelters at times, and the plan to eliminate homelessness by 2020 must be understood in this context.

That means that while emergency shelters will still be available in the Municipality, those who become homeless will be moved to permanent housing within 21 days of accessing the homeless-serving system.

Lucy moved to Fort McMurray 26 years ago, enjoying a good life until her mental health deteriorated. She suffers from schizophrenia, which eventually led her to a life of homelessness.

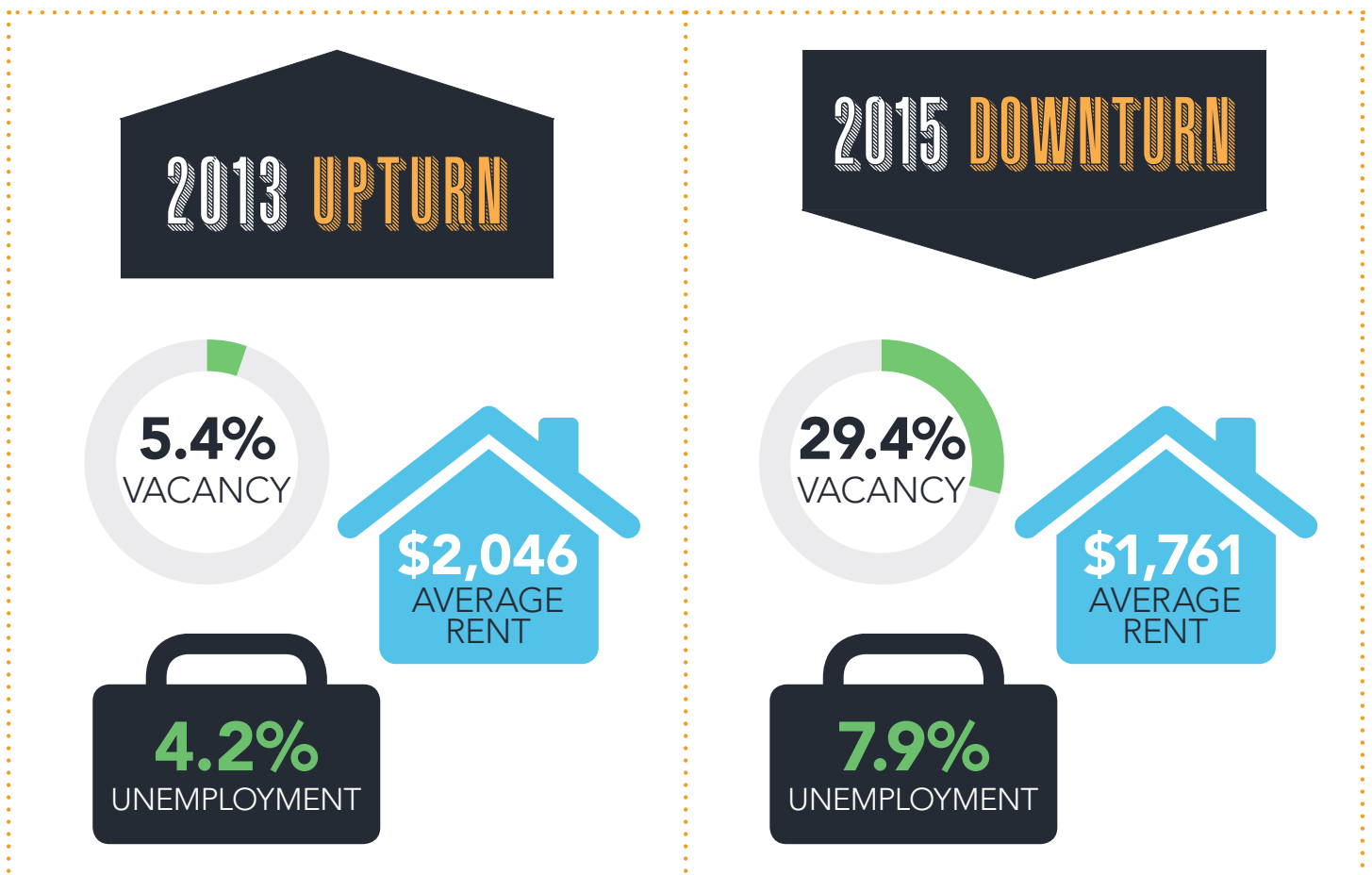
The Waypoints Housing First program helped her establish goals that she diligently worked on and quickly achieved. She was accepted into an affordable housing program, reconnected with family, and developed a mental health treatment plan.

Lucy has made incredible progress and is a true inspiration.

ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN WOOD BUFFALO

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo released its plan on homelessness, "Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do – 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010-2020," in March 2010. The Housing First strategy is at its core, emphasizing a collaborative, multi-support system.

The Municipality's particular challenges include its economic cycle (rapid growth followed by periods of relative stability or downturn), remote location and high cost of living. In fact, affordable housing is one of the most difficult issues that the Housing First initiative must deal with in the region. During times of economic prosperity, vacancy rates decline and rental prices skyrocket. Conversely, during economic downturns, vacancy rates increase and rental prices drop; however, unemployment also rises significantly.



Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Rental Market Report: Alberta Highlights
Statistics Canada. Labour Force Survey. CANSIM Table 282-0123

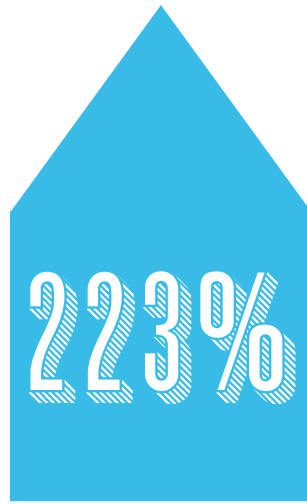
THE IMPACT

GOAL 1: EDUCATION

Build support to end homelessness using the Housing First approach.

- In 2015-2016, 142 landlords and property managers participated in the program by renting to Housing First clients.
- Homeless Connect is a one-day event that provides an opportunity for individuals experiencing homelessness to receive basic essential items and learn about available supports.
- Campaigns such as "Ride for Hope" and the "I am a person first" Stigma Reduction Program, as well as events such as the Network Exchange and Homeless Memorial, receive positive media coverage and public support.

Since 2013-2014, the number of landlords and property managers participating increased **223%**.



Homeless Connect, held in October 2016, served **107 homeless individuals**, with **41 service providers collaborating**.



Centralized intake completed **219 INTAKES** IN **2015-2016**, assessing eligibility and need.

There were **131 TRANSFERS**, connecting individuals to Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing agencies.

GOAL 2: CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Successfully transition local systems to Housing First.

- Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) provides a standardized platform for data collection relative to the individuals and families entering the Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing programs.
- Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing agencies receive training, including ETO, Service Prioritization Data Assessment Tool (SPDAT), orientation, financial reporting, and Indigenous awareness.
- PIT counts are conducted every two years. In 2016, the 7 Cities on Housing and Homeless provincial team and 7 Cities group (Calgary, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Medicine Hat, Red Deer and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo) collaborated to streamline the PIT count process to collect provincially comparable data



"LIFE IS MUCH BETTER NOW THAT I HAVE A PLACE TO CALL HOME!"

When the YMCA Housing First staff first met Dave, he was living in his truck with nowhere to go and suffering from addiction.

Since entering the program in 2013, he has overcome some of his addictions, does odd construction jobs in the community, and receives income support. He is now living in social housing, loves the help of the Housing First team, and is very happy to have a place to call his own.

GOAL 3: PREVENTION

Develop a service system to prevent homelessness.

- The number of clients entering the program from an institution increased 133% in 2015-2016 from 2013-2014. This helps prevent individuals from being released from institutions into homelessness.
- The Housing First program includes rent subsidies and short-term rent, security deposit and utility assistance to help prevent individuals from returning to homelessness. Further, in order to keep them housed agency outreach workers help individuals facing eviction.
- Ongoing initiatives to increase awareness of the cost of living in the region in order to prevent homelessness include a Government of Alberta Wood Buffalo labour market website, Municipal Welcome magazine, and a Welcome Centre that provides a one-stop shop for referrals and information services for those new to the region.



25% of employable clients **accessed job training or educational opportunities** in 2015-2016 compared to 16% in 2013-14.



Individuals were assessed **25% faster after triage** in 2015-2016 compared to 2014-2015.



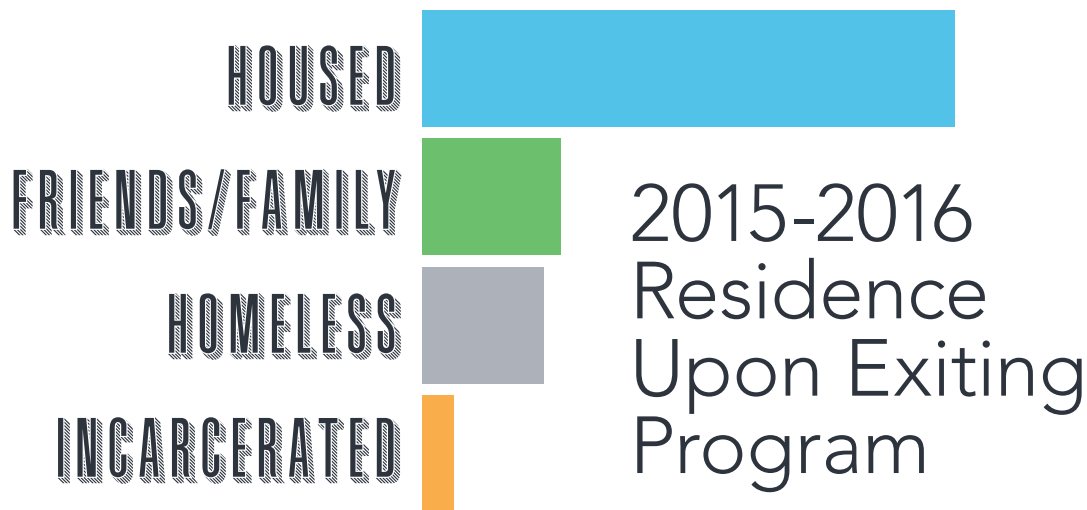
89% of clients had **income support or were employed** at exit in 2015-2016 versus 40% at entry.

In 2015-2016, the Hospital Justice Liaison Program completed 78 intakes, helping to **ensure that people were not released from institutions into homelessness.**

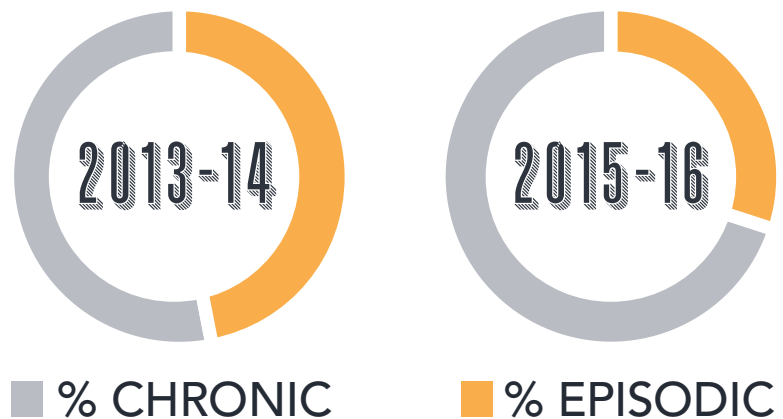
GOAL 4: RE-HOUSING

Rapidly re-house homeless individuals.

- Triage assessment of individuals takes place immediately and potential housing options are presented to them prior to placement. There is case management support for all CPH agencies to provide assistance and follow-up.
- Clients are required to show that they are engaged in the program through regularly scheduled meetings with their case coordinator, and together they set goals for meaningful daily activities.
- The program has improved tremendously in transitioning to the Housing First model where the most vulnerable are served first. This is evidenced by an increased percentage of clients who are chronically versus episodically homeless. In time, the number of chronically homeless will decrease as they are housed through the program.



Type of Homelessness Experienced by Clients Served



GOAL 5: PROVIDING SUPPORTS

Provide supports for housing stability.

- The percentage of individuals in absolute homelessness exiting the program is much lower than upon entry. In 2015-2016, 22% entered the program in absolute homelessness while only 6% exited in absolute homelessness; in 2013-2014, 13% exited the program in absolute homelessness.
- In 2015-2016, the percentage of individuals exiting the program into market housing or subsidized housing was 59% over only 3% entering the program.
- The number of people exiting the program in 2015-2016 and returning to homelessness (18.5%) or living with family/friends (16.7%) may indicate a need for more available supports, such as permanent supportive housing, for these individuals to successfully transition out of homelessness.
- Clients are connected with additional resources to support them in sustaining housing, including help with: Debt reduction; rent subsidy and arrears; clothing; childcare; security deposits; utility arrears; transportation; identification; food; furniture; medication, and tenant insurance,

After losing his wife and daughter, Todd and his two teenage sons became homeless. He rarely used emergency shelters and often slept rough. When he entered the Centre of Hope Housing First program in 2012, he had been chronically homeless for more than 10 years, and had become an alcoholic with extensive medical issues.

The Centre of Hope Housing First program secured him a place to live and supported him in participating in a 45-day treatment plan for his alcohol addiction, as well as finding him help for his medical challenges.

Todd is doing well in recovery and has regular mental health therapy for grief and loss and to cope with his past trauma. He still requires support with administration and gaining an Assured Income for Severely Handicapped. However, he received a social housing number in 2015 and can now financially support himself. His sons have both accessed Housing First and are working towards independent living.

Todd continues to have a positive relationship with his sons and enjoys being called Poppy. He has been able to maintain his tenancy and has moved to the graduate program. Although Todd is not free of life's struggles or the effect that homelessness has had, he continues to strive to regain security for him and his family.

MOVING FORWARD



With no permanent supportive housing in the region, those with complex long-term needs cannot be supported and may return to homelessness or resort to couch surfing. Permanent housing support refers to housing assistance combined with support services for those with high needs – e.g., dealing with mental health issues, disabilities or substance abuse. There is a need for permanent supportive housing to help these most vulnerable individuals.



Consistent data management practices must be established and maintained to improve reporting, streamline program delivery and make meaningful improvements, so a data and evaluation analyst is needed. The analyst would develop an evaluation framework and data management structure, which would enhance data collection and analysis of the success of the program and where the gaps and needs remain.



It is also important to improve platforms for sharing information with the public to increase community interest in and support for ending homelessness and to provide progress updates.



It is important to continue to work with institutions to ensure that discharged people are diverted to Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing programs if needed, including re-establishing the Hospital Justice Liaison program.