

From  
**TENT** City to  
**Housing**

**An Evaluation of the City of Toronto's  
Emergency Homelessness Pilot Project**

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## From Tent City to Housing: An Evaluation of The City of Toronto's Emergency Homelessness Pilot Project

### HISTORY OF TENT CITY

Over the past decade, the homeless population in Toronto has grown at an alarming rate.

Although the city has an extensive shelter system, an increasing number of people do not use any of the available shelter services. Some find it difficult to adapt to hostel conditions or cope with the basic rules associated with shelter life, often because of mental health or addiction issues. Instead, these people survive outdoors, living in ravines, open spaces, under bridges or in squats.

Tent City was Toronto's first major squatter settlement in recent history. It was formed in 1998 when a group of homeless individuals built shacks and lean-tos on a property on the waterfront owned by Home Depot. The settlement grew slowly as other homeless people heard about the small community. With the help of organizations such as the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC), a few

attention for their efforts to build their own housing and remain self-reliant. However, the community was always under the threat of eviction. Various attempts by Home Depot, the City of Toronto, and social housing providers to find and/or develop alternative housing options were ultimately unsuccessful.

On September 24, 2002, security guards hired by Home Depot forced the squatters to vacate the site. Some of the inhabitants were able to carry out a few belongings that day, or were later escorted in by security to gather their possessions. However, many Tent City residents lost their valuables in addition to their homes. Within a few days, the dwellings were demolished and the site was razed.

Tent City was Toronto's first major squatter settlement in recent history.

portable homes and toilets were provided on site for the inhabitants. Various social service agencies including Street Health, Regent Park Health Centre, Street Patrol and Street Outreach Services offered health care and food.

This new community was the subject of much public debate and study. The settlement was built on land slated for development; land that was also contaminated by former industrial use. The group received considerable media

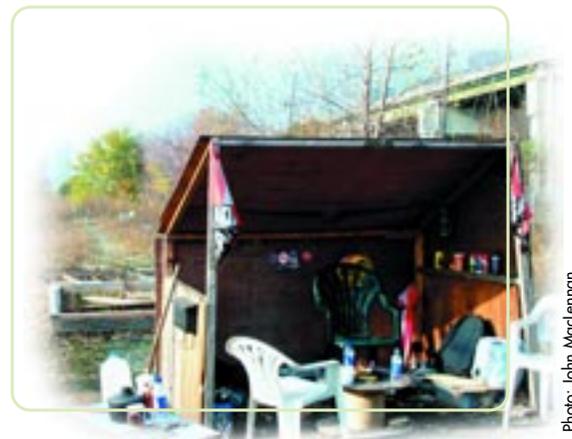


Photo: John MacLennan

In order to address the situation brought on by the eviction of Tent City residents, an emergency response protocol that had been developed for the rooming house sector was implemented.

Working with the City, WoodGreen Community Centre was the primary agency in the response. The Salvation Army, the Red Cross, the TDRC, the Central Neighbourhood House Street Outreach Team and a variety of other agencies also provided assistance. Tent City residents were initially offered emergency accommodation at the Community Centre itself. However, as the need for accommodation continued and WoodGreen required the space for ongoing programs, it became necessary to move people between WoodGreen and the Jimmy Simpson Recreation Centre (across the street from WoodGreen). The City's Seaton House Hostel provided additional staffing at the two centres. Couples were given the option of staying at motels under contract with the City or at a hotel in Parkdale. Tent City pets were initially boarded at WoodGreen and later at the Toronto Humane Society. While many people accepted the temporary lodgings, others chose to remain outside in the ravines, under bridges or wherever shelter could be found. As a result, the community became somewhat fragmented.

#### **THE CREATION OF THE EMERGENCY HOMELESSNESS PILOT PROJECT**

In an effort to address the needs of those evicted from Tent City, the City of Toronto took immediate action initiating the Emergency Homelessness Pilot Project (EHPP) on September 26, 2002. The EHPP provides rent supplements to former occupants of Tent City and assists them in finding and maintaining housing. WoodGreen Community Centre was contracted to assist the participants of the program to access housing and facilitate relationships between landlords and tenants. The Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), already under contract

with the City to deliver rent supplements in Toronto, was asked to deliver the pilot project.

City and TCHC staff worked quickly to develop and implement this new rent supplement program. A Steering Committee made up of representatives from the Shelter Housing and Support Division of the City of Toronto, TCHC, WoodGreen Community Centre, Toronto Social Services (TSS) Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services (MCFCS), the TDRC, and former Tent City residents was established to guide this development and implementation process. Their role was to develop a plan for housing the evicted squatters as quickly as possible, to work with the various housing, income and personal support systems and services to ensure that services were in place and to problem-solve on an as needed basis.

In many instances, members of this Committee facilitated changes to the normal process in the way clients access services. For example, TSS developed an expedited process that included a centralized support system through the Client Services Unit, and TCHC provided a 'Letter of Guarantee' to landlords. TCHC streamlined its eligibility application process (waiving its requirement to verify identification at the outset and providing last months rent). At the Steering Committee meetings, WoodGreen staff provided information on their negotiations with landlords and data on the availability of apartments. The Tent City representatives were able to provide the Committee with information about how the former squatters were coping with the situation. They also conveyed new information from the Committee to other former Tent City residents.

WoodGreen quickly hired three Housing Support Workers to work with the former Tent City residents. The initial challenge was to determine who had actually been living at Tent City and to remain in touch with those who were not staying at one of the emergency shelters.

In order to be eligible for the rent supplement program applicants had to have been recently evicted from Tent City, meet the general eligibility guidelines for subsidized housing (e.g. be over the age of 16 and have legal status in Canada) and complete an application for Social Housing Connections (the co-ordinated access centre administered by TCHC). Those without any source of income were put in touch with TSS, to be assessed for eligibility for the Ontario Works program (OW) or the MCFCS if eligible for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). People without necessary identification were urged to attend identification clinics, which were held at WoodGreen once a week.

By October 2002, most of the former Tent City residents had been deemed eligible for the pilot project and given a 'Letter of Guarantee'. This letter stipulated that TCHC would pay first and last month's rent on an apartment in the private market, guarantee 100% of the rent for the second and third months and subsequently would pay the difference between what the tenant could afford and the monthly market rent. The letter also outlined the role of the WoodGreen

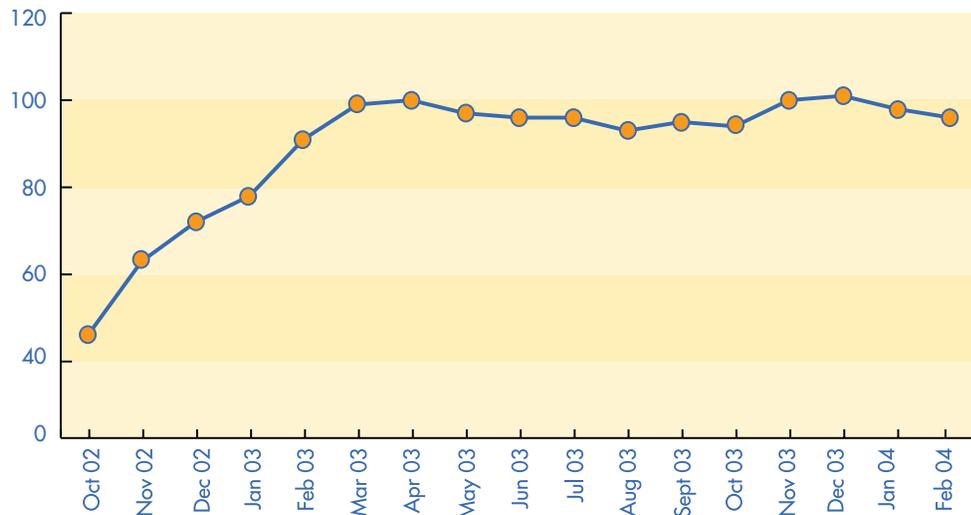
Housing Support Workers in undertaking tasks such as "attending the lease signing, reviewing the tenant's responsibilities under the *Tenant Protection Act*, and assisting the Tenant with budgeting and other related skills."

Although participants in the program had the option of finding their own accommodation, Housing Support Workers identified 94% of the units by contacting and negotiating with landlords throughout the city. A few landlords contacted TCHC directly. Once located, the workers accompanied prospective tenants to view the unit. Once the participant accepted an apartment, Housing Support Workers then assisted the individual or couple to get shelter funds through OW or ODSP. Arrangements were also made for these funds to be paid directly to the landlord.

By December 2002, seventy-two eligible households had obtained housing.

In planning the program, both the City and TCHC anticipated that support staff (Housing Support Workers) would be required during the initial start up phase and first few months of operation of the EHPP. Over time, it became clear that this initial assessment was unrealistic and the contracts of the Housing Support Workers, which were initially for a six-month period, were extended.

## Households Housed by Month



## Households in EHPP

|                         | In housing | Eligible for housing | Households currently in program | No longer in program | Total Households |
|-------------------------|------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Single Men              | 64         | 9                    | 73                              | 4                    | 77               |
| Single Women            | 29         | 2                    | 31                              | 2                    | 33               |
| Couples                 | 3          | 1                    | 4                               | 0                    | 4                |
| <b>Total Households</b> | <b>96</b>  | <b>12</b>            | <b>108</b>                      | <b>6</b>             | <b>114</b>       |
| <b>Total Tenants</b>    | <b>99</b>  | <b>13</b>            | <b>112</b>                      | <b>6</b>             | <b>118</b>       |

As of February 1, 2004, there were a total of 108 eligible households (112 tenants) in the EHPP. Of this group, 96 households were in housing and 12 were eligible but not in housing at the time<sup>1</sup>.

### OVERVIEW OF THE RENT SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM

The Toronto Community Housing Corporation administers and manages the Rent Supplement Program under contract with the City. The program offers approximately 3,000 supplements to a variety of populations in need, including women who are escaping violence. The EHPP is the latest rent supplement program to be added to TCHC's portfolio.

EHPP Participants pay a portion of the rent based on their income. Contributions from Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) are based on the legislated minimum monthly shelter allowances. TCHC then pays the difference up to a maximum market rent equal to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation established median rent for Toronto.

| Monthly EHPP Rent       |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Size Of Unit            | Maximum Market Rent Allowable |
| Room in house           | \$519                         |
| Bachelor or one bedroom | \$865                         |
| Two bedroom             | \$1020                        |

Under the program, landlords were guaranteed:

- > first and last month's rent in full
- > 100% of the rent for the second and third months
- > monthly rent supplement payments (the difference between what the tenant can afford and the monthly rent up to the Maximum Market Rent Allowable)

The intent of covering the full rent for the first three months was to allow time for program participants to apply for Ontario Works and for 'direct deposit' arrangements to be made with OW and ODSP so that the shelter portion of these allowances could be paid directly to the landlord.

In this program (which differs from most rent supplement models) the rent supplement is attached to the individual rather than to the apartment unit in order to provide flexibility. It was anticipated that individuals who had been living on the street for extended periods of time might not easily fit into rental accommodation and that it might take more than one attempt before they would be successfully housed.

TCHC provided a letter to all tenants outlining the program and their rights and responsibilities. All tenants, prior to occupancy of a unit, signed this letter. A tenant handbook was subsequently developed to provide tenants with additional information<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The pilot allocation was for 105 rent supplement units that could be leased by roommates, couples or as single units for individuals. The number of eligible participants has fluctuated somewhat over time, but the take up of rent supplements units has never exceeded 105 at any point. Initially 103 households were approved to participate in the pilot, and participation was capped at this number. However, some people who had lived at Tent City for extended periods but had not been on site at the time of the eviction were not included in this initial approval, and they were put on an eligibility list. Over time, nine of the thirteen couples have separated, thereby increasing the number of eligible households. At one point, the eligibility list expanded to 114 households (for a total of 118 individuals). This has had an impact on program costs as it has increased the number of persons being supported by WoodGreen Housing Support Workers. Since then, some people have left the program. As of February 1, 2004 there were 108 households eligible to participate in the program, 96 of which were living in rent supplement units.

<sup>2</sup> Under the rent supplement agreement, all tenants have the same responsibilities. These include the responsibility to report changes in household size or income, as well, any new household members must meet the program's eligibility criteria.

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Emergency Homelessness Pilot Project (EHPP) in providing opportunities for homeless people to access private rental housing.

It further assesses the impact of the EHPP on their housing stability, their support needs, and quality of life. Given the extent of homelessness in Toronto, it is critical to understand how such a program can assist people who have been homeless for extended periods of time, including those who are experiencing mental health and/or addiction issues.

In setting up the program, it was anticipated that the support of the Housing Support Workers would be critical in assisting the prospective tenants to both find and maintain their housing. It was, however, unclear how much support tenants would require in the longer term and if their support needs could be provided by other community agencies. Consequently, aspects of the study focus on the supports used by the participants before being housed, during the housing search process, and once housed, as well as undertaking an assessment of their on-going need for support.

The success of rent supplement programs depends to a great extent on the availability of market rental units. It is also contingent on the willingness of landlords to engage in formal arrangements with TCHC. The study therefore examines landlord satisfaction with the program, landlord-tenant relations, and the suitability of the supports offered to both landlord and tenants.

The research process also considers the views of other stakeholders such as service providers who had been working with the Tent City residents and in some cases who are continuing to do so, and those who provide support to other populations of homeless individuals.

In order to determine if the program is cost-effective, it is important to have a clear understanding of the costs in relation to other programs such as shelters. Comparative data on the use of health services, was also gathered from another group of homeless individuals who use the services of the Fred Victor Housing Access and Support Services Program.

This report makes recommendations to improve the pilot model and outlines the need for on-going supports. It also assesses the financial and administrative implications of the recommendations.



Photo: John MacLennan

## METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted between February 2003 and March 31, 2004. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used to assess the impact of the EHPP on the individuals involved in the program. Fifty of the eligible program participants were selected for a series of three interviews. Six couples were included in the group of 50. The selection of fifty people was seen as a representative sample of the total group. The researchers assumed that some of the 50 would decide they did not want to participate in all three interviews and/or that it might not be possible to reach all 50 people for each interview (given lack of telephones, mobility of some of the participants, ongoing willingness to participate, etc.).

The purpose of conducting three interviews was to measure the degree to which the housing met the needs of the participants<sup>3</sup>, changes in the participants' satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their housing, and their ability to maintain it over time. Working with WoodGreen staff, the researchers attempted to obtain a representative sample of the geographic areas in which the tenants were housed as well as a variety in the size and type of building. The sample also reflects the age and gender mix of the larger EHPP group.

Involvement in the evaluation process was entirely voluntary and participants in the sample were paid an honorarium of \$25 for each interview. The researchers endeavored to conduct the interviews at venues that would be convenient for the participants – at the WoodGreen

Community Centre at local drop-ins, coffee shops and the homes of some of the tenants. Where possible, interviews were scheduled during the latter part of the month when it was anticipated that people would be most in need of money.

The first set of interviews was conducted in April and May 2003. Second interviews took place in November and December 2003. Final interviews were carried out in February and March 2004.

The Housing Support Workers met with the prospective participants first and asked if they were willing to take part in the study. Interested participants were then introduced to the researchers. Contact with the participants was at times difficult as few of the former Tent City residents could afford telephones. For the second and third interviews, flyers were sent out to invite participants to an interview session at the Open Door Centre or at WoodGreen. For those unable to attend, follow-up was attempted and where possible arrangements were made to interview the tenants at a time that was convenient, either at WoodGreen or in the tenant's home. The Housing Support Workers frequently provided assistance with the follow-up arrangements.

<sup>3</sup> The term participants is used to describe the 50 people included in the sample, unless there is specific reference to the total number of EHPP participants.

Forty-one people were re-interviewed during the second stage of the research. Of the nine people not re-interviewed, one was not interested in participating, two were in jail, one was said to be in the hostel system but could not be located, and five could not be reached for an interview after repeated attempts.

Forty-one people were included in the third set of interviews. Three people who missed the second set of interviews (because they were in jail, on the street or otherwise unreachable) were included in the final session while three others who participated in the first and second interviews could not be reached for the third session.



Photo: John MacLennan

factors that were impacting on them, whether or not the result of the program. Whenever possible, the researchers followed the same participants throughout the process. This built up a relationship between the interviewer and the respondent. Many of the respondents noted that the interviews offered them an opportunity to reflect on the

## Respondents were encouraged to discuss their impressions of the program and how it affected their lives.

Interviews typically lasted up to one hour. During the initial interview, questions were asked about housing history, the length of time the participants had been homeless, the events that triggered the initial episode of homelessness, household composition, satisfaction with the new housing, relations with the landlord and other tenants, physical and mental health, changes in diet or eating habits, source of income, and quality of life issues.

Subsequent interviews tracked changes in participants' lives and additional questions (such as documenting changes in drug and alcohol use) were introduced. Although there were a number of specific questions, the interviews were open-ended. Respondents were encouraged to discuss their impressions of the program and how it affected their lives as well as any other

changes that had occurred in their lives after being housed and they expressed disappointment when the process was completed.

In order to determine if the health characteristics of the former residents of Tent City were comparable to other homeless people, interviews were conducted with an additional twenty hard-to-house homeless individuals, who were using shelters and support services. The twenty were contacted through staff at the Fred Victor Housing Access and Support Services program. Attempts were made to gather a sample that reflected the age and gender mix of the Tent City respondents. Staff at the Fred Victor Housing Access and Support Services program set up the interviews at the Keith Whitney drop-in, the Adelaide Women's Resource Centre, and the Meeting Place Drop-In.

Interviews were conducted with nine landlords to discuss their experience with the program, including their relationship with TCHC staff, EHPP tenants and the Housing Support Workers.

Representatives of social service agencies and community groups involved in the provision of services to the EHPP participants (during and after Tent City was in operation) and other populations of homeless people were also contacted. The service providers were asked to give their perspective on the program, in terms of access to appropriate housing and changes in quality of life for the former Tent City residents. Staff from Fred Victor Housing Access and Support Services and the Hostel Outreach Program provided general information and data on their clients.

The researchers met with the Steering Committee for the EHPP on five occasions: to discuss the scope of the research, to attend a de-briefing session on the start-up phase of the project, to receive an up-date on the work of the Committee in mid 2003 and early 2004, and

finally to present the initial findings and receive feedback from the Committee. Individual members of the Steering Committee were also interviewed to obtain specific information on the TCHC, ODSP and OW systems as they related to the EHPP.

Data from TCHC was reviewed to verify the number of people in the program, tenant turnover and ongoing costs. For purposes of comparison, financial data was also gathered from the City of Toronto Hostel Services and a supportive housing provider.



Photo: John MacLennan

## OBSERVATIONS REGARDING HOUSING

During the course of the evaluation, the researchers visited approximately 15 of the former Tent City residents in their housing. The visits were made predominantly in the suburban areas as tenants there found it difficult to make the journey downtown. Overall, it appeared that the apartment units were relatively spacious, and that the buildings were, with a few exceptions, in good condition and well maintained. Most of these buildings were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s. There were some problems with maintenance in one suburban site and many tenants ultimately left this complex. In contrast, a well-managed high-rise complex in another suburban area experienced far less turnover. One of the most popular buildings (with little turnover) is situated in an area midway between downtown and the suburbs.

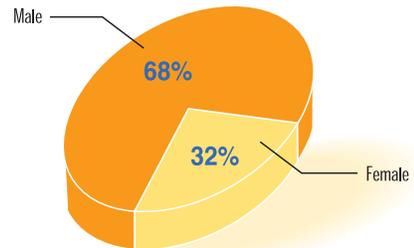
A few of the program participants obtained rooming house accommodation in the downtown core. According to reports from both participants and Housing Support Workers, these units tended to be in poor repair.

## INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS

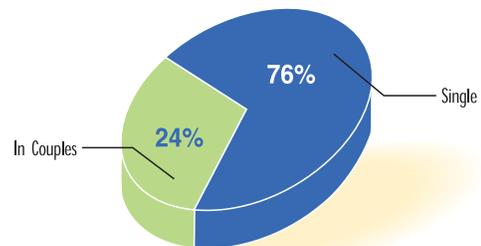
### Demographics

Interviews with 50 of the former Tent City residents were conducted during April and May 2003. Of the 50 people interviewed during the first session, 34 were male and 16 female. There were six couples in the sample and 38 singles. Ages ranged between 17 and 62. The average age of the participants was 42. On average, men were older (45) than women (32). Over 90% of the group were born in Canada and nearly 40% were born in Toronto. Less than 10% of the group were visible minorities.

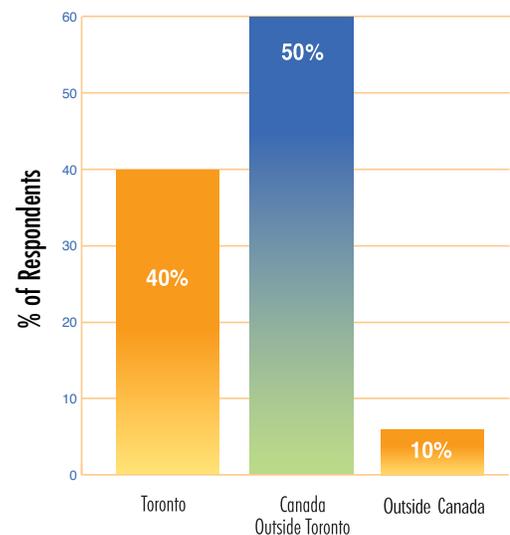
### Gender



### Single or in Couples



### Birthplace



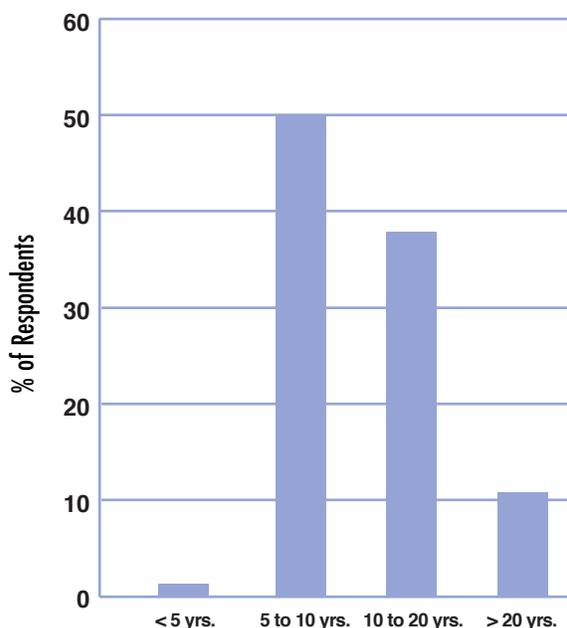
Although it was known that the majority of Tent City residents had been homeless for many years, the statistics related to length of time on the street were still startling. The average length of time that people reported being homeless was 8.5 years. 50% of the respondents indicated that they had been homeless for between 5 and 10 years, 36% had been homeless between 10 and 20 years, while 12% had been homeless for over 20 years.

Thirty eight percent of the respondents reported initially becoming homeless because of major trauma in their lives such as the death of a spouse or parent, physical abuse or divorce. 20% became homeless as a result of drug or alcohol abuse. 14% lost their housing and could not find new accommodation, while 28% lost their jobs, which in turn led to the loss of housing.

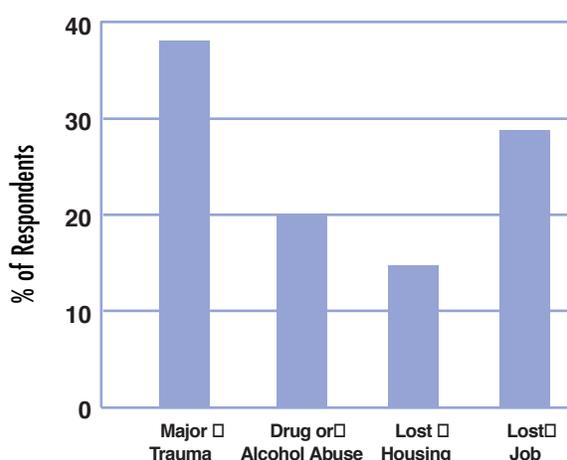
Prior to living at Tent City, over 54% of the respondents reported living on the street. 20% were in hostels and an additional 20% were in rooming houses or private accommodation. Six percent moved to Tent City after being released from jail. Most people were already homeless and came to Tent City after hearing about it from friends or acquaintances on the street. Many people said that they didn't like going to shelters. A significant number of the participants had pets, a factor which made it difficult for them to use the shelter system.

Several people spoke about the sense of community at Tent City. When asked what if anything they missed about Tent City, people typically said the bonfires, the friends and the freedom.

## Length of Time Homeless



## Initial Reason for Homelessness



## HOUSING SATISFACTION

According to the results from all three interviews, over 90% of the respondents reported that their housing met their needs more appropriately than did their former dwellings at Tent City.

Tenants listed a number of aspects of their new housing that had a significant impact on their lives. Perhaps not surprisingly, they were things that people with housing typically take for granted. Listed in declining order of frequency they included:

- › privacy
- › a kitchen
- › safety or security
- › quiet or peaceful space
- › having one's own space
- › electricity
- › the location
- › a bathroom
- › having a home
- › heat or warmth
- › cleanliness
- › being away from downtown
- › a beautiful building
- › comfort
- › running water
- › laundry
- › the backyard
- › TV
- › stability

### Size of Housing Unit

Nearly all the respondents felt that their apartment offered adequate space. At the time of the first interviews, 66% of the tenants had one-bedroom apartments, 26% had bachelor units and 8% were sharing two bedroom apartments<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps a contributing factor to the high level of satisfaction is the fact that the rent supplement allows people to obtain one and two bedroom accommodations. In contrast, the level of shelter allowances on OW or ODSP imposes a financial restriction that often limits the selection to rooming house or bachelor units. People living out of the downtown area tended to be in apartments that were more spacious than those downtown.

By the time of the second and third interviews one of the men had moved into rooming house accommodation. He was very satisfied with this arrangement. A woman who was evicted from her initial apartment also spent some time in a rooming house situation before becoming homeless again.

<sup>4</sup> Under the City's occupancy standards for Rent Geared to Income (RGI) housing, single persons are entitled to bachelor or one-bedroom units. Couples must share a bedroom but roommates are entitled to their own rooms.

## Issues in Buildings

During the initial interview, 50% of the respondents reported that there were no problems in their buildings. A few complained of maintenance issues while others identified issues with their superintendents. One high-rise complex has been fraught with problems. There have been difficulties with the building management, with drug dealing in the area and with violent incidents on the property. In some instances, former Tent City residents contributed to the problems in the complex. As a result, the community as a whole was labeled and in some cases individuals faced discrimination from tenants who were not part of the Tent City group. The vast majority of pilot participants housed at this particular location have chosen to move elsewhere.

By the second interview, when several people had moved, 75% reported that there were no issues in their buildings. In the final interview 71% reported that there were no issues.

## Housing with other Participants

Most of the people in the EHPP program are in buildings that accommodate other former Tent City residents. This arrangement appears to work well where the population of former Tent City residents is relatively small. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not want to be in buildings that house a large number of their old neighbours. Some people commented that they try to remain aloof from their neighbours so as not to revert to their former habits of drug and alcohol use. However, in one building, a few of the tenants banded together to look after an older man from Tent City and used harm

reduction methods to lessen his use of damaging substances. In some of the downtown buildings, there were small groups of men who 'hung out' together and checked on each other every day.

## Satisfaction with Neighbourhood

During the first interview, 56% of the tenants reported that they were very satisfied with their neighbourhoods, i.e. met their needs for safety, access to services, etc. Sixteen percent were very dissatisfied. This statistic changed considerably by the time of the second interview when approximately 65% were very satisfied and only one person was very dissatisfied. This change is primarily due to the fact that a number of tenants moved to locations that they felt to be more appropriate. At the third interview, 61% were very satisfied with their neighbourhood, 21% reported that they were somewhat satisfied, and 18% reported they were very dissatisfied.



Photo: Gloria Gallant

The majority of respondents indicated a preference for living outside the downtown area, although it was important that there be access to transportation, stores and services, including food banks.

The desire to live away from the inner city depended to some degree upon age and family composition. Couples expressed more satisfaction when housed outside the downtown area, while some older single men (45 to 55) preferred accommodation that was near drop-ins and health services in the downtown core. In the third and final interview 64% of the respondents were living outside of the downtown area. Of these respondents, 86% reported the location to be an advantage, largely because of the quiet and the separation from 'influences' in the downtown area.

### **Moves and Reasons for Moving**

At the time of the first interview, 22% of those interviewed indicated that they wanted to move to another apartment. Many said that their building was too far from downtown and/or that there were drug problems in the building.

Between the first and second interviews, 34% (14) of the 41 people who were re-interviewed did move, including two who relocated to larger units in the same building. Twelve of the 14 moved into new accommodation and ten were

Access to a warm and dry environment, electricity, running water, cooking and washroom facilities was reported to have had a positive impact on general health and hygiene.

happy with this new housing. People left their apartments for a variety of reasons. Several moved from a suburban high-rise with reported drug issues. One woman left her partner, one person was evicted, and one went to jail.

## HEALTH IMPACT

### The immediate impact of housing on the health of the former Tent City residents was considerable.

At the time of the first interview, nearly half of the respondents indicated that their health had improved since becoming housed. Access to a warm and dry environment, electricity, running water, cooking and washroom facilities was reported to have had a positive impact on general health and hygiene. A number of people noted that they experienced fewer colds and flu, and those suffering from chronic conditions such as arthritis observed that being indoors improved their health.

Surprisingly by the time of the second interviews, 24% of people indicated that some health problems had worsened in the period between interviews. In many instances, this was related to an increase in the severity of chronic conditions such as arthritis, heart problems, gallstones and kidney conditions. Those between the ages of 40 and 55 experienced the greatest decline in health status. This may in part be due to the accumulated physical stress of years of homelessness coupled in some cases with addictions. A number of people also stated that for the first time in years they were attending to their health. They were going to doctors' appointments, following up on medical tests, and taking prescription medication for a variety of conditions. Thus, some medical conditions that had previously been unidentified or ignored were now being treated.

While Tent City was in existence, the majority of residents were connected to Street Health and/or Regent Park Health Centre. These services were rated highly by the former Tent City residents and in many cases the connections to these two health services have been maintained. Even among residents who moved to suburban areas, several travel downtown to see the nurses at the street outreach service and the health centres.

Twenty homeless individuals were interviewed through the Fred Victor Housing Access and Support Services program (a service that assists people who have been homeless for extended periods to obtain and maintain housing) to compare the use of health services with the EHPP sample group.

Interestingly, the participants in the EHPP group were more likely to have health cards and have seen a doctor in the past year than those in the comparison group, but at the same time they were less likely to have used emergency wards and less likely to have been hospitalized for medical or psychiatric services. This would suggest that EHPP participants might have been able to seek medical intervention before their health issues reach a critical stage. This is supported by reports from the Housing Support Workers who noted that the tenants were beginning to attend to health issues that had been long neglected.

## Use of Health Services by EHPP Participants and Comparison Group Participants

|   | <b>EHPP Group<br/>(50 people)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>Group (20 people)</b> |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Had a Health Card                                   | 84%                               | 70%                                     |
| Saw a doctor in the past year                       | 33%                               | 5%                                      |
| Used community health clinics in the past year      | 48%                               | 95%                                     |
| Hospitalized in past year for medical reason        | 30%                               | 40%                                     |
| Hospitalized in past year in a psychiatric facility | 5%                                | 10%                                     |
| Hospitalized more than once in the past year        | 14%                               | 20%                                     |
| Used hospital emergency ward in the past year       | 12%                               | 45%                                     |
| Received no medical care                            | 19%                               | Nil                                     |

### Mental Health

During the first interview, 50% of respondents indicated an improvement in their mental health. They suggested that this was due in large part to a lessening of their stress levels as they no longer had to worry about security issues, where they would sleep at night, or if there would be tensions with other Tent City residents.

During the second and third interviews, the majority of respondents said that their mental health had been stable during the preceding months and that they had settled into their housing and their new lifestyles. Twenty percent

### Changes in Substance Use

One person noted, *“The best method of harm reduction is housing”*. During the initial interview, when people were asked how their lives had changed since moving into their housing, over 20% volunteered that part of the change involved a reduction or cessation in drug or alcohol use. At the second interview, people were asked directly if they were using more, less, or the same amount of drugs or alcohol as they had at Tent City. Nearly 50% of the respondents said that they were using less, one person was using more and two had never used either substance. By the third interview, 70% of

One man reported: **“Now I know people in the Variety Store, not the crack dealers.”**

of the respondents indicated a continued improvement in their mental health, while 20% felt that they were more depressed or stressed. For some of the latter group, depression was reported to be due to a traumatic event, such as the death of a spouse, death of a grandchild, death of a pet or serious illness (events that had occurred since the previous interview).

the respondents reported that they were using less. 21% of this group were or had been in drug rehabilitation programs. Many people attributed the decrease in drug or alcohol use to the fact that their housing was stable. They also indicated that living a distance from downtown helped them to break former patterns of substance use.

## Access to Food

One of the major determinants of health is a nutritious diet. At the time of the first interview, 80% of the respondents stated that their eating habits had improved. At Tent City, most people ate prepared donated food or cooked outdoors over campfires. In their new homes, respondents were able to cook more (because they had an electric stove rather than a campfire), store fruits and vegetables (because they had refrigerators and storage space), and freeze food. As well, they did not have to worry about food disappearing. Many thought that they had

Even though people utilized food banks, nearly half of the respondents experienced times when they did not have access to food, usually near the end of the month when their money was running low or on weekends when many food banks and drop-ins were closed. Ironically, this contrasted with their experience at Tent City, when most people said that they had access to sufficient quantities of food through donations brought to the site or meal programs in the area. However, at Tent City there had been little variety in the donated food available.

Although most people said that their diets had improved, they still experienced difficulties in obtaining enough food, citing their low incomes as the reason.

gained weight because of their improved diet and because they did not have the same degree of exercise, carrying water and gathering firewood.

Although most people said that their diets had improved, they still experienced difficulties in obtaining enough food, citing their low incomes as the reason. Only 10% of the respondents obtained all of their food from grocery stores. In addition to purchasing food, 90% relied on food banks and/or drop-ins to supplement their diet. Access to food banks was an important factor in rating satisfaction with building location.

Approximately 75% of respondents spent between \$20 and \$50 per week on food. Those on ODSP tended to spend more money on food and to experience fewer times without food. This may be related to the higher benefit levels of the program.

## SUPPORT NEEDS

The EHPP participants reported accessing a variety of support services while they were living at Tent City. Those mentioned most frequently included Street Health, Regent Park Health Centre, Central Neighbourhood House Street Outreach Services, Street Patrol, the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, as well as churches and health providers who made periodic visits to the site. Many of the tenants have continued to utilize the health services. Although they are no longer eligible for the Street Outreach Services and Street Patrol, staff at both services report that some of the former Tent City Residents do keep in touch with them. Ninety-three percent of the tenants stressed the importance of the support provided by the Housing Support Workers that they received through the program. 54% of

Once housed, most respondents reported accessing additional support from food banks and health care services. Some also mentioned accessing employment services (Youth Employment Services), drop-ins (the Scott Mission, Evangel Hall, the Sanctuary, 416, and Youthlink), and drug and alcohol treatment programs such as Evergreen, Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Nearly everyone indicated that the services they did access were adequate for their needs and that they did not want additional supports. They identified support on an “as needed” basis to be both appropriate and critical.

**Ninety-three percent of the tenants stressed the importance of the support provided by the Housing Workers that they received through the program.**

respondents indicated that their support needs had decreased over time, however most continued to rely on the workers for some degree of support. As one woman stated, “I couldn’t do it without them”. Thirty percent indicated that they felt more secure because they knew that they could contact the WoodGreen workers if and when problems arose. The comment, “They are there when I need them” was repeated on several occasions. Three people noted that it took some time for them to trust the program (and hence the workers) but as these individuals continued to retain their housing, they began to explore other possibilities such as going to school, getting health problems addressed, and applying for work, whereupon they would contact the WoodGreen staff for assistance.

Much of the “as needed” support related to interactions with landlords, TCHC, OW or ODSP. Some clients said that they did not have the ability to understand the letters sent by TCHC, OW, or ODSP, that they were intimidated by these systems, and that they had some difficulties with front-line staff. Nearly all of the EHPP tenants indicated that it was difficult for them to negotiate their way through these systems. Both the systems and the EHPP tenants relied heavily on the Housing Support Workers to help address administrative difficulties with tenancy arrangements.

## QUALITY OF LIFE

The move from Tent City into housing has had a profound impact on people's general quality of life. Apart from improvements in health, people identified a variety of changes in their lives:

"I'm cleaner, I eat properly (not just sandwiches and soup), I look more presentable when looking for a job, I can organize my time, buy things and keep them. No more squeegee-ing. I can structure my day. There are no cockroaches. It's quiet. No crack-heads."

"I'm not on the street. I love it. I'm healthy, putting on weight, warm. I have a TV and space to walk the dog."

"I've come a long way and my health is better, I have more respect for myself, I like it inside. It's not a life on the streets. This woke me up."

"I'm involved in the community and in the church next door."

"I love it; I know where to come home instead of going to shelters and moving around."

"Moving here was like a new start on life. I'll be going into a drug program. I'm not out fighting every day."

"I feel much more secure."

"I'm more self-reliant; I don't have to deal with soup kitchens. It's good for your mental health. In shelters your bed may change from day to day. Now I have a feeling of security."

"I get my kids on the weekends now."

"I can shower; do you know how that feels?"

"I'm going to school, eating better and housed."

"I feel smarter. Don't feel bummed out about where I'm going to eat and sleep. I am hopeful and can concentrate. Big difference."

Some people noted that in spite of the program, they still face problems.

"I really wanted land to be able to build my own place. Ownership is important. I'm now working full time, highly stressed and still poor."

A few realized the value of the program, after they had lost their initial units.

"I'm back to the same place. Got evicted, lost everything. Really need to get back in the program."

Many people indicated there had been an increase in their self-esteem since being part of the EHPP. They said they had more self-respect, they felt less stressed, were less depressed and they were proud of themselves.

At the time of the first interview many people said that they spent their time at drop-ins, visiting friends, watching TV or just staying in their apartments. 18% were volunteering and 12% were working or looking for work. Only a few acknowledged that they were still panhandling, although 20% reportedly panhandled while at Tent City. Of this group, many commented that their income had gone down because they no longer panhandled.

Among the participants in the third and final interview, 23% were volunteering, 16% had returned to school, 11% were trying to find employment, 21% were attending drug treatment, drug rehabilitation, NA or AA meetings, 2% were working full time and 11% had been employed for short periods on a part-time basis. Some of the respondents undertook these activities on their own and some used referrals from WoodGreen or other community agencies.<sup>5</sup>

In the first interview, nearly 40% of the participants stated that they were spending more money on food and a number indicated that they were spending less on drugs or alcohol. During the second interview, 22% indicated that their budgeting abilities had improved after they obtained housing. By the third and final interview, 40% of respondents reported a change in how they were spending their income. Most were concerned about having enough money for food.

The responses of the tenants indicate that they have taken greater responsibility in many areas of their lives. Having adequate housing has enabled people to make positive changes and assume more responsibility. Support from the Housing Support Workers has facilitated these changes through informal counselling, crisis intervention and systems brokering.

Since the program's inception, seven people have been transferred from OW to ODSP, one has an application pending and three are in the process of preparing their applications with the help of the Housing Support Workers. Once people are on ODSP, their income increases by approximately \$400 per month. This contributes to an increase in their quality of life and to an enhanced sense of stability since ODSP supports are considered to be long-term.

During the first interview, people were asked if they felt they now had more opportunities in their life. 50% suggested they might be able to get a job, go back to school or enter a rehabilitation program. Others were unsure or felt that they might have new opportunities but that it was too early to tell.

By the time of the final interviews, 16% of respondents were in school and 12% wanted to go back to school, 10% felt they had more job opportunities, one person hoped to go to university, and one woman was seeing her children for weekend visits (reportedly an impossibility at Tent City).

<sup>5</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive. Some tenants participated in more than one activity while others did not engage in any of these pursuits.

## TENANT TURNOVER

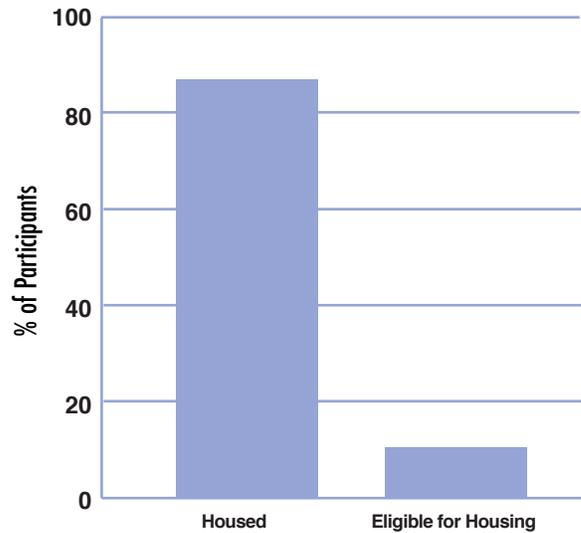
In the research sample, a number of people moved from unsatisfactory buildings or units. In one complex, there were complaints from EHPP tenants of drug trafficking, insecurity and difficulties with the management. Some participants lost or left their housing after coming into conflict with the landlord or other tenants, for noise infractions, for inappropriate behaviour such as having unruly visitors or for drug or alcohol related activity. In many instances, WoodGreen staff negotiated a leaving date with the landlord in order to avoid an eviction and new housing was found.

There has been some concern with the extent of tenant turnover in the EHPP program, particularly as there are a variety of costs associated with each move. TCHC estimates the average cost to be \$484 per move. A few tenants have been particularly hard-to-house, especially those with major addictions. For some, relocation has been beneficial. Some tenants have been more successful in buildings where there are few if any other tenants from Tent City. Others have found landlords that are more tolerant of substance use and/or difficult behaviour. It may be that those who have been housed two and three times are not ready for independent housing in the private market, even with supports. Some people may be better served in transitional housing.

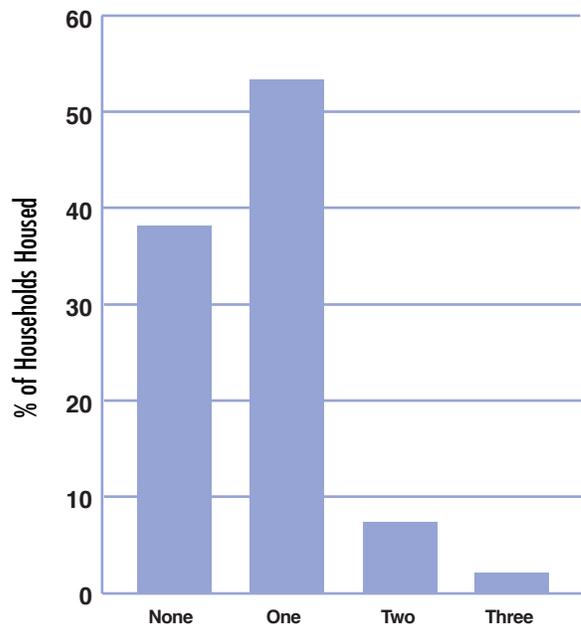
Over time, it is anticipated that the number of moves will decline as tenants who wanted to move from their original unit have had the opportunity to do so and their lives have become more stabilized. Moving to a new unit may have a positive impact on program participants because it may enable them to move from a difficult living situation where they may be experiencing conflicts with landlords or neighbours to an environment that better meets their needs, preferences or lifestyle. However, this must be balanced by attention to the added support, administrative and moving related costs. The Steering Committee has now introduced a policy that requires EHPP participants to remain in a unit for a year, unless there are compelling circumstances that necessitate an earlier move.

As of February 1, 2004, there were 96 households housed in the program and another 12 eligible for housing. Among those households housed, 38% remained in their original accommodation. The majority of the group (53%) had moved only once, although 9% had relocated more than once. Some of these moves were the result of couple separating.

**Housing Status of Eligible Participants, February, 2004**



**Households Housed by Number of Moves, February, 2004**



## ELIGIBILITY REVIEW POLICY

While major efforts have been made to assist all of the former Tent City residents in obtaining and maintaining housing, it became evident over the course of the EHPP that a few of the participants were not ready to be housed. Among this relatively small group (less than 10% of the total EHPP participants) some have had major difficulties in maintaining their housing, do not appear to be interested in participating in the program and/or are behaving in such a manner that it is extremely difficult to locate appropriate housing. In order to address such issues, TCHC staff and WoodGreen, with input from the Steering Committee, developed an Eligibility Review Policy. The policy may be applied to tenants who:

- › are in arrears
- › have acted in a manner to impair the safety of the community, caused substantial interference to the community or committed an illegal act
- › have been absent from their unit for a period of 120 days
- › have broken a policy set by TCHC (such as failing to give 60 days notice)
- › have made more than one move within a year

Such tenants may be called before an Eligibility Review Committee to discuss their situation and put forward plans for rectifying any problems. The review is based on the principles of hope and an understanding that transition to housing can be challenging. Committee members from TCHC and WoodGreen Community Centre (but not Housing Support Workers) assess the situation and the applicant's plan to address problem areas and make a decision as to whether or not to readmit the participant to the program.

Twenty-nine people have been scheduled to appear before the Eligibility Review Committee. Not all of the individuals choose to attend but the Committee does hold a discussion on their circumstances. In some cases, the review provides an opportunity to reinforce the requirements of the program. To date none of the former Tent City residents have been permanently ejected from the program. However, one person in the sample group has not been in contact with WoodGreen staff and is currently considered to have left the program.

### Those Who Left the Program

Over the course of the evaluation, out of the total number of participants, four people left the program (moved or obtained employment) and two people died. In the sample group, none left the program, although some members of the sample group were untraceable for periods of time, or temporarily suspended (some did attend the Eligibility Review Committee to be re-admitted).

Of the six people who are no longer in the program:

| Reason Provided                              | Number   |
|--|----------|
| Out of town                                  | 2        |
| Working and chose not continue to in program | 2        |
| Deceased                                     | 2        |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>6</b> |

## INTERVIEWS WITH HOUSING SUPPORT WORKERS

The three WoodGreen Housing Support Workers provided individual support to approximately 108 tenant households and assisted them in navigating housing and income support systems. At a de-briefing session of the Steering Committee, the Housing Support Workers spoke of the hectic pace of the first few months of the project and the pressure to find landlords very quickly. During the initial few months of the program, they reported that they did not have a thorough sense of the individuals they were housing and their specific needs or habits. When large landlords offered to rent several units, this was readily accepted. As a result, a number of program participants found themselves living far from the downtown in areas unfamiliar to them. Some were housed in north Etobicoke, while others moved to north Scarborough.

When the research project began in February 2003, the Housing Support Workers were dealing with a number of issues related to the move-in process, which included ensuring that landlords were receiving the correct rental payments, mediating difficulties between tenants and landlords, assisting tenants in obtaining furniture, and generally providing support to people who had not had housing in years.

During the late spring and summer of 2003, a number of tenants relocated, particularly those located in one of the more problematic suburban apartment complexes. The moves occurred in part because the former Tent City residents were eager to take any housing at the beginning of the program, however, after a few months, many realized that their units did not fit with their needs because of the location or problems in particular buildings. Again, the Housing Support Workers indicated that they were very busy in finding new landlords and assisting with the relocations.

Eighteen months after the initiation of the program, staff reported that while they were spending less time locating landlords much of their work remained crisis oriented. There continue to be difficulties between landlords and tenants (an issue that staff indicate is under-reported in the tenant interviews), medical and mental health crises that people need help in addressing and issues with TCHC, ODSP and/or OW. When there was turnover in the housing worker staff in late 2003, it was anticipated that the new worker would focus on landlord outreach and transitional planning (seeking alternative supports for clients). The Steering Committee approved this change in direction and noted the need for both activities. However, it has been difficult to make this shift in activities due to the crisis nature of the work.

Although the Housing Support Workers have made efforts to access other support services for their clients, this has proven to be difficult. They reported that many services are not open to new clients (or only to a very few), that other services do not have experience with rent supplement programs, that few services have housing/landlord support as part of their mandate, and that most agencies have geographical restrictions that would limit their ability to follow a client if he or she should move. In order to provide consistency of support in a program with portable rent supplements, the geographic mobility of the workers was seen to be key. Referrals have been successfully made for specific services (drug rehabilitation, crisis services, etc.) but it is challenging to find service providers that provide a holistic approach.

In spite of the considerable efforts of the Steering Committee to modify systems to meet tenant needs, Housing Support Workers estimated in March 2004 that approximately 50% of their work involved brokering between clients and/or landlords and TCHC, ODSP and OW.

In order to have a greater understanding of the time spent resolving these issues, two of the Housing Support Workers tracked the number of problems that arose for 75 of their clients during a one month period in November 2003 and the number of in-person or telephone interventions it took to resolve each problem. The following chart indicates issues and interventions, but not time spent on each. Housing Support Workers reported that system issues required substantially more interventions to resolve and took up the majority of their time.

## INTERVIEWS WITH LANDLORDS

There are currently 52 landlords participating in the EHPP. Nine landlords (five owners and four property managers) who were initially or are still part of the EHPP were surveyed. At one point, the nine housed a total of 63 tenants from the program. However, at the time of the survey only 28 tenants remained. Much of the reduction occurred with one landlord who had housed 30 people at the beginning of the program, but now rents to only four of the original group.

All of the landlords stated that increasing vacancy rates and the guarantee of rent were an incentive to becoming involved in the program. Seven of the nine landlords reported that Housing Support Workers initiated their involvement in the program. One landlord inherited tenants when she purchased the property in June 2003.

### Staff Activities for 75 clients, November 2003

|                                     | Issues*    | Interventions** | Ratio of # of Interventions to Issue |
|-------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ontario Works                       | 27         | 77              | 2.8                                  |
| ODSP                                | 9          | 23              | 2.5                                  |
| TCHC                                | 19         | 48              | 2.5                                  |
| Landlord                            | 6          | 10              | 1.7                                  |
| <b>Sub Total</b>                    | <b>61</b>  | <b>158</b>      | <b>2.6</b>                           |
| Landlord/Tenant Support             | 53         | 92              | 1.7                                  |
| Other tenant support activities *** | 95         | N/A             | N/A                                  |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>209</b> | <b>250</b>      | <b>N/A</b>                           |

\* Issues – problems to be addressed, general support activities

\*\* Interventions – phone calls, office visits, home visits

\*\*\* Other tenant support activities – informal counselling, crisis intervention, landlord search, referrals

One landlord had a for rent sign and the tenant came to the building and left a WoodGreen Staff calling card. All reported that the WoodGreen staff had provided them with adequate information on the program and that they were generally aware of who they would be housing because of the extensive media coverage.

Most reported that the program got off to a slow start and the rent payments were inconsistent. Small property owners revealed that this was particularly problematic for them.

Landlord satisfaction with the program:

- › 2 Very satisfied
- › 3 Satisfied
- › 1 Somewhat satisfied
- › 1 Unsatisfied
- › 2 Very unsatisfied

Landlords satisfaction with tenants:

- › 2 Very satisfied
- › 2 Satisfied
- › 2 Somewhat satisfied
- › 3 unsatisfied

Five landlords indicated a willingness to stay in the program, two were unsure, and two said they would not remain involved.

All of the landlords surveyed had used Housing Support Workers extensively to resolve payment issues, conflicts, and to support tenants. One landlord said he had learned to communicate

with WoodGreen as soon as there was an indication of a potential support need or problem, in order to ensure that there was a resolution that was positive both for himself as a landlord and for the tenant.

Most of the surveyed landlords indicated that it should not be difficult to attract new landlords into the program because of the relatively high vacancy rates that currently exist in Toronto. In addition they suggested that the program:

- › assess tenants to ensure that they can maintain their housing with the right support (33%)
- › ensure there is system in place for landlords to get their rent on the first of the month (22%)
- › have continuous (ongoing rather than a one-year limit) direct payment systems for income portion of rent (33%)
- › limit the number of rent-supplement tenants in a building. ("Tenants who are attempting to change their life style don't need to be challenged by friends who have not made the same decision")
- › consider location. ("When you have limited income you need to be within walking distance to all services")
- › increase accountability on the part of the tenant

## INPUT FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Five service providers, who were involved in the provision of services to Tent City residents while they were living at the site, offered their perspective on the EHPP.

All of those interviewed supported the expansion of the rent supplement program and most considered it to be the best housing program in the City.

A few respondents highlighted the importance of support for the homeless population and suggested that the success of the EHPP depended in large part upon the support services available to the participants.

One health care worker reported that a few of the former Tent City residents have continued to take leadership roles in advocating for housing and services for the homeless and some are participating in the work of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee.

Another respondent suggested that additional rent supplement programs should be targeted to older homeless people and those who have chronic health problems.

Staff at Fred Victor Housing and Access Support Services, and the Community Resources Consultants of Toronto Hostel Outreach Program (services that provide somewhat comparable supports to the long-term homeless population) were consulted regarding the levels of support they provide. Client/staff ratios for the Hostel Outreach Program and the Fred Victor program are 1/15 and 1/25 respectively; in contrast, the WoodGreen Housing Support Workers have caseloads that average 1/35. Over the past several years, the Fred Victor program has only been able to reduce their caseload by 10% because there are few other services to transfer people to and because the issues are very complex. Of the people who are housed, 90% continue to require support. Both programs indicated that their staff also spend considerable time in negotiating issues with ODSP.

## INPUT FROM STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Steering Committee played a pivotal role in ensuring that the EHPP was underway quickly and that income and rent supplements were available when housing was located.

The program presented new administrative challenges to TCHC, OW and ODSP because it did not fit within their existing systems. For example, computer systems lacked the flexibility necessary to handle the idiosyncrasies of the pilot. New systems and processes had to be designed, developed and implemented quickly to address these inconsistencies and gaps. In its first year of operation, the EHPP was a time consuming program to administer, particularly for TCHC as processes were being developed during the initial few months when there was a flurry of move-in activity. Ultimately, TCHC provided an additional position to work on the program to facilitate the service delivery.

In other TCHC rent supplement agreements, when housing is being offered, the tenant has a confirmed source of income from which their rental portion can be determined, units are inspected by TCHC, a formal contract is signed with the landlord and accounts are set up. With the EHPP, it was not possible to follow the usual sequence because of the emergency nature of the program. For example, former Tent City residents often had no income, and units were not inspected by TCHC prior to occupancy.

Agreements regarding the various contacts and processes of TCHC, ODSP and OW were developed by the Steering Committee. Several Committee members pointed out that it was critical to have senior people from each of the organizational partners at the table so that systemic issues could be addressed, processes could be streamlined and important decisions made. For example, when some tenants were in arrears because of errors in the system, managers were involved in ensuring that these issues were resolved.

Creative methods of problem solving were developed by the Steering Committee. For example, in order to complete the annual review of tenant income and eligibility required by the Social Housing Reform Act, tenants were invited to come to WoodGreen and fill out the forms with TCHC staff. The Housing Support Workers then followed up with people who did not attend the session. Operational working groups met before the official Steering Committee meetings so that specific issues could be dealt with and individual cases discussed.

The Committee addressed numerous details regarding the operation of the Rent Supplement program. In the early stages of development there were debates around issues such as the system of paying landlords directly and whether or not this compromised the ability of tenants to manage their own funds. As the program evolves, new issues will emerge. Now that program operations have become more stable, the group is in the process of further developing policies including the Eligibility Review process.

TCHC staff reported that TCHC has a community management plan that focuses on making housing communities safe and good places to live and engaging tenants and tenant leaders in meaningful decisions and projects. They view the EHPP as an example of such a meaningful project and an indication of their commitment to the community management plan.

### Brokering TCHC, ODSP and OW Systems

The EHPP is made possible through the coordination of a number of programs focused on one client group. These programs are mandated by different legislation, have specific accountabilities, are administered using complex rules and regulations, and can be difficult to negotiate. The membership and level of involvement of the EHPP Steering Committee made it possible for system administrators to communicate and coordinate with each other and with Housing Support Workers directly supporting EHPP participants. On an ongoing basis, Committee members worked to coordinate agreements and payments to landlords for rent, and to manage individual cases experiencing system-related problems. In many cases, these programs were administered in new ways to accommodate the needs of the clients involved.

These, however, are complicated programs, and it is not surprising that the Housing Support Workers spent considerable time assisting their clients to navigate the systems throughout the pilot. As well, all of the tenants in the program have 'pay direct' agreements with TCHC, OW and ODSP. This means that the TCHC rent supplement and the shelter portion of the OW or ODSP is sent directly to the landlord.

Although they are not responsible for rent payment, tenants are advised when there are problems. In some cases, landlords issued "Notices to Vacate" to the EHPP tenants as a result of those problems although no participants were actually evicted. EHPP tenants interviewed reported experiencing considerable stress when there were rent payment problems, as they were fearful of losing their new found housing.

Although the files of the former Tent City residents were to be flagged, and the pay

direct agreements renewed, the renewal did not occur in all the OW cases. The OW computer system automatically suspended the 'pay direct' agreements for some recipients after one year. Once the electronic flag for the pay direct of the shelter portion had dropped off, the tenants were sent the shelter portion of the allowance directly (along with the rest of their benefit) with very limited 'payment stub' information and no detailed explanation of the increase in the amount of the OW payment. Housing Support Workers and OW staff worked to address these issues and to resolve the 'rental arrears' for those affected EHPP participants.

It is expected that the Housing Support Workers bring these types of issues to the attention of Steering Committee members or system administrators. In the example given above, Steering Committee members from Toronto Social Services and WoodGreen Housing Support Workers spent considerable time rectifying the situation. Overall, these problems were addressed and/or strategies were put in place to prevent them from repeating.

However, systemic problems may be ongoing and difficult to resolve. For example, most EHPP participants cannot afford telephones and they are, therefore, not in a position to make or receive calls. This can make it difficult for them to inform people of problems they are experiencing and to advocate for themselves with front-line staff who typically contact clients by phone. As well, many participants reported feeling intimidated by these organizational systems. Often the expertise of an experienced Housing Support Worker is needed to advocate on their behalf. While this may change over time, participants will likely continue to need assistance from the Housing Support Workers and the Steering Committee members to address system-related problems.

## EHPP PROGRAM COSTS

TCHC supplied extensive data on program costs. For purposes of comparison, financial data was also gathered from the City of Toronto Hostel Services and Habitat Services (a mental health agency that provides transfer payments to accredited rooming houses).

The cost of the EHPP between October 1, 2002 and March 31, 2004 includes the rent supplement payments that are paid directly to private landlords by TCHC, administrative costs incurred by TCHC including start up costs and tenant support services provided by WoodGreen Housing Support Workers. An estimate of the OW or ODSP basic shelter allowances, which are paid directly to the landlords, has also been added to the overall program cost.

It is expected that the program will become more cost effective within the next year of operation.

70 transfers occurred within the first 18 months of operation, and this tenant turnover has had an impact on the cost of the program. Most of these expenses were incurred because tenants vacated without providing 60 days notice to the landlord. TCHC has estimated this cost to be \$33,919 or \$484 per move. Although some turnover can be expected, the Eligibility Review Committee has now restricted the number of moves per tenant per year and tenants must meet basic requirements such as the provision of 60 days notice to the landlord in order to break the lease agreement.

The administrative cost of TCHC includes program start-up costs which will not apply to future years.

The WoodGreen Housing Support Costs are currently 13% of the total program costs and are considered a key component of the EHPP program.

|                                      |                     | % of Total  |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| <b>Rent Subsidy Payments</b>         |                     |             |
| Rent supplement payments             | \$ 1,069,809        | 70%         |
| Rent Portion (OW/ODSP)               | \$ 182,045          | 12%         |
| Cost of transfers within the program | \$ 33,919           | 2%          |
| <b>Subtotal</b>                      | <b>\$ 1,285,773</b> | <b>84%</b>  |
| <b>Administration (TCHC)</b>         | <b>\$ 40,800</b>    | <b>3%</b>   |
| <b>Supports (WoodGreen)</b>          | <b>\$ 200,000</b>   | <b>13%</b>  |
| <b>Total Costs</b>                   | <b>\$ 1,526,573</b> | <b>100%</b> |

### Cost comparisons with other programs

The Emergency Homelessness Pilot Project was compared to two other programs. Each program provides shelter and subsidies to similar populations:

- The EHPP costs are based on 1,583 tenant supplement months. The tenant supplement months equals the number of tenants in a unit multiplied by the length of time they resided within the unit. The 1,583 tenant supplement months are based on the actual occupancy level of the EHPP program. The tenant supplement months were then divided by the total cost of each of the components of the EHPP program, and then multiplied by 12 (calendar months) to determine the EHPP annual per capita cost calculation.
- Shelters operating in the City of Toronto provide shelter and support services to the homeless population. In the chart, the shelter and support components of the per diem represent funding to City-managed and purchase service shelters from Provincial and City sources. These costs have been calculated to reflect a mix of gender specific hostels such that they compare to the gender ratio of the tenants currently housed in the EHPP. The costs reflect a bed in a shared room. Support costs shown for shelters are those provided in-house and do not include food services or supports provided by outside agencies working in shelters.
- The Habitat Program is a transfer payment agency that provides funding to house individuals with severe mental health histories. Habitat enters into contractual agreements with private rooming house operators who agree to a set of building standards. Habitat monitors those standards. The 'Rent Costs' are based on the cost of single rooms in rooming houses. Tenants pay the maximum shelter allowance of their ODSP/OW to the landlord. Habitat tenants are often connected to Assertive Community Treatment Teams or other support services. The cost of such services could not be estimated. The table only includes the cost of Habitat's in-house Site Support program. It can be concluded that the support costs are underestimated for this program.

### Annual per capita cost

|                               | <b>EHPP</b>      | <b>Shelters</b>  | <b>Habitat</b>   |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Rent or Shelter Only</b>   |                  |                  |                  |
| Rent Supplement/Shelter Costs | \$ 8,415         | \$ 12,528        | \$ 3,876         |
| OW/ODSP Shelter Component     | 1,380            |                  | 5,100            |
| <b>Subtotal</b>               | <b>9,795</b>     | <b>12,528</b>    | <b>8,976</b>     |
| <b>Administration</b>         | <b>311</b>       |                  | <b>1,148</b>     |
| <b>Support Services</b>       | <b>1,525</b>     | <b>3,628</b>     | <b>3,333</b>     |
| <b>Total per capita costs</b> | <b>\$ 11,631</b> | <b>\$ 16,156</b> | <b>\$ 13,457</b> |

The combined total cost of each of the programs includes:

- › **Rent Supplement/Shelter Cost:** This cost includes rent subsidies paid to landlords (EHPP and Habitat programs) or subsidies to shelter operators used for basic shelter services.
- › **OW/ODSP shelter component:** This includes the OW or ODSP shelter allowance paid to landlords. (Under the EHPP, tenants are charged the minimum shelter allowance. Under the Habitat program, tenants are charged the maximum shelter allowance).
- › **Administration:** This is the administrative cost incurred by the transfer payment agency (EHPP (TCHC) and Habitat programs). Administrative costs for Shelters are included in the lines for Shelter Costs and Support Services.
- › **Support Services:** Each of the programs provides support services to individuals. (All programs).

As the chart on the previous page indicates, the EHPP appears cost effective relative to other programs. It currently costs \$11,631 per person per year for housing, administration of the EHPP program and supports. This is 28% less than shelter and support costs for a person in the shelter system. Support services in the EHPP also appear much less expensive than in other programs, although it is difficult to compare the types and depth of service provided by each program. Over time, the EHPP program costs should decrease slightly as it is anticipated that there will be fewer moves, which will result in a reduction in administration costs. As the

challenges with the TCHC, OW and ODSP systems are addressed, the need for system brokerage should decline. Finally, as tenants become stabilized in the program, the need for supports should also decline, although it is not anticipated that they will be entirely eliminated.

Other populations of homeless people (women leaving abusive situations, refugees) may require fewer supports and consequently the cost of such specific programs would be reduced accordingly.

The Habitat program, although the most financially comparable, houses individuals (not couples) in single room rooming house accommodations whereas tenants in the EHPP program have bachelor or one-bedroom units. However, some external support costs are not factored into the Habitat figures.

For people who have been homeless for extended periods and who use services for the homeless, the EHPP costs of \$11,631 per person (including the OW/ODSP shelter component) per annum offer a very cost effective alternative to accommodation in the shelter system, estimated at \$16,156 per year. In addition, the benefits to the program participants are enormous. Housing has created a ripple effect in people's lives. It was not possible to factor into this study the likely cost benefits to the system of EHPP participants who returned to school, sought work and entered rehabilitation programs.

The EHPP has provided housing in the private market for a group of people deemed 'hard-to-house', people who had been homeless for extended periods and who struggle with addictions, mental health issues and among whose lives are often chaotic.

Eighty-nine percent of the households remain housed (and another 11% are likely to be re-housed) eighteen months after the initiation of the program. Among those housed, 38% of households continue to reside in their original accommodation while 55% have moved once. Observation of the researchers as well as feedback from tenants and Housing Supports Workers indicates that much of the housing stock that was accessed for the EHPP is adequate or above average in quality.

The former Tent City residents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their individual units and with their neighbourhoods. In addition to addressing the housing needs of the participants, the program had an impact in other areas of their lives. Many people experienced a sense of stability for the first time in years. As a result of this, some individuals have been able to return to school, obtain employment or enter drug or alcohol rehabilitation programs. Others have begun to address chronic health problems, undertaken volunteer activities and stabilized their lives. Overall, there has been a marked change in the quality of life of almost everyone in the sample who remains housed.

Data from the interviews indicates that over half of the participants experienced an improvement in their mental and physical health during the first six months that they were housed.

Surprisingly, nearly 25% experienced an increase in health problems by the time of the second interview. In part, this may be due to the fact that several of the respondents were attending to chronic health problems for the first time in years. Hence, they were becoming aware of the complexities of their health issues. Eighty percent reported that their eating habits had improved as they began to cook more and spend additional money on food, but because of their low incomes, 90% were still forced to use food banks and half did not have access to food at least once a month. By the third interview, 70% of respondents reported that their drug and alcohol use had declined. The sample participants also used hospital and emergency services less than those in a comparison group. The tenants attributed these and other positive changes to the fact that they had adequate and stable housing. This is a key finding of the research. Having stable housing enabled many individuals to improve their lives in a number of ways and to take advantage of new opportunities.

# Conclusion

The ability to choose the location that best fit peoples' needs contributed to their housing satisfaction. In many instances, tenants indicated that living outside the downtown area, far from street activity, assisted them in reducing drug and alcohol use. All of the couples in the sample preferred to live outside of the downtown area, although some of the single men chose to be in the central core, close to services and drop-ins. Most people indicated that it was problematic to live in a building that housed several other former Tent City residents. This resulted in labeling from other tenants. As well, people noted that it was easier to stay away from street life if they limited their contact with other former Tent City residents.

Much of the success of the EHPP is due to the support services provided by WoodGreen Housing Support Workers. Ninety-three percent of the tenants stressed the importance of the support provided by the Housing Support Workers. This support was usually accessed on an as-needed basis.

The Housing Support Workers located nearly all of the housing units in the program, both in the start-up phase and as people moved. They have also provided crisis intervention, ongoing support and informal counselling, mediation with landlords, referrals to a variety of services, and addressed issues related to the administration of the rent supplement program and income supports. Over time their role has changed. The early focus on recruitment of landlords has now shifted to the provision of personal supports, crisis intervention, landlord supports and brokering services with TCHC, OW and ODSP. Because they are not confined to a particular geographic area (as are many other services), they are able

to provide service to both tenants and landlords in communities in Etobicoke, North York and Scarborough. This mobility is a key feature of the support service.

The role of landlords cannot be overlooked in the EHPP and it is important to ensure that there is a good fit between prospective tenants and landlords. Although most of the landlords interviewed indicated a willingness to continue in the EHPP, some had experienced difficulties with their tenants. In many instances, the Housing Support Workers played a role in resolving landlord/tenant conflicts or rectifying payment problems. Thirty-three percent of landlords consulted suggested that tenants should be assessed to determine if they could maintain their housing with adequate supports.

The portability of the program permits individuals to move (with certain limitations) if they are unhappy in their accommodation or the accommodation does not meet their needs. Although portability was costly at the beginning of the program because of the high number of moves, this feature appears to have enabled people to remain housed.

The quick response of the City of Toronto and Toronto Community Housing Corporation to the Tent City emergency, their commitment and creativity in developing the program, and the ongoing role of the Steering Committee in addressing administrative issues have been essential in ensuring the effectiveness of the program. Management representatives from TCHC, OW and ODSP made decisions to facilitate the operation of the program and ensure its continuation.

## Challenges

Because the EHPP program was a response to an emergency situation, there were particular challenges involved in its rapid implementation.

The TCHC, OW and ODSP systems were not designed for this type of program, and both management and front-line staff had to make many adaptations to existing structures and processes as well as devote a significant amount of time to operationalizing the new program.

Since there was considerable pressure to house people quickly, landlords could not be screened adequately and not all of the sites have been appropriate for this population. The resulting moves have added to the workloads of the TCHC staff and increased program costs. Finally, the fact that the program was being developed on a daily basis resulted in uncertainty and stress for the former Tent City residents.

A few tenants have made remarkable changes over the past 18 months, however, the majority of participants still remain vulnerable to crisis and are in need of support. Some have been extremely anxious about the program requirements and are too intimidated to address system-related problems (such as late payment issues or arrears) on their own. They need support to navigate the TCHC, OW and ODSP systems. While it is anticipated that some

tenants will be able to live independently in the community without support, information from service providers who work with similar populations indicates that people who have been homeless for long periods and who cope with addiction and/or mental health issues often need long-term support.

After years of homelessness, a few of the EHPP participants were not ready to assume the responsibilities of being a tenant. The Eligibility Review Committee may conclude that there are some tenants who cannot benefit from the program but, to date, no one has been excluded. Of those who have left the program, four people obtained employment or left town, while two others died. The Eligibility Review Committee and the Steering Committee are in the process of developing policies to address problematic situations in which people have major difficulties in maintaining their housing, do not appear to be interested in participating in the program and/or are behaving in such a manner that it is extremely difficult to locate appropriate landlords.

## The Cost Benefit

For people who have been homeless for extended periods, the EHPP costs of \$11,631 per person (including the OW/ODSP shelter component) per annum offer a cost effective alternative to accommodation and supports in the shelter system, estimated at \$16,156 per year. In addition, the benefits to the program participants are enormous. Housing has created a ripple effect in people's lives. It was not possible to factor into this study the likely cost benefits to the system of EHPP participants who returned to school, sought work and entered rehabilitation programs.

## The Way Forward

Rent supplements should be one important component of an affordable housing strategy. The program is particularly viable at this juncture because of the high vacancy rates in Toronto. In this market, housing can be located quickly and the rent supplement program offers the possibility of reducing homelessness. Should the vacancy rates decline over the next few years, it would likely be much more difficult to find appropriate landlords.

This is an opportune time to expand rent supplements in Toronto, should additional funding from senior levels of government be made available for this purpose.

Based on the lessons learned in this evaluation, new programs should be designed to offer housing to people in need.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- An effective Rent Supplement program requires integrated and coordinated services and administration. The Steering Committee should continue to oversee the EHPP program, address problems arising in the program, develop processes to improve communications and create new methods for working in a collaborative manner.
- Coordination and communication structures should be strengthened between TCHC, participating landlords, OW and ODSP to ensure the provision of rental payments which are accurate and timely.
- Based on current demand from tenants, projections from the Housing Support Workers, and the experiences of other support agencies working with 'hard-to-house' clients, supports are required for the long-term homeless population. The WoodGreen Housing Support Workers should continue to provide support to the EHPP tenants for the next two years and the ratios of tenants to workers should be maintained at their current rates. After the two year period, an evaluation should be undertaken to determine the level of on-going support needs of the tenants.
- Additional rent supplement programs should be considered for other populations of homeless people taking into account their support needs and taking into consideration the following:
  - A selection process be developed to screen landlords.
  - A Steering Committee be appointed in the initial phase of the project.
  - Sufficient lead-time be allowed for the development of new programs.
  - Portability be considered as a component for some new rent supplement programs.
  - Consideration be given to limiting the number of rent supplement tenants in any one building.

All the names used in these personal stories are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of those who shared this information with us.

## **Annie's Story**

Before she ended up on the street, teen-aged Annie was going to school and living with her parents in Richmond Hill. When she began using drugs, her relationship with her parents became strained so she moved downtown and began 'hanging out' on Yonge Street with her boyfriend. At times they stayed up all night in Internet cafes and slept in Grange Park during the day. "At first it seemed like fun – partying and going to squats."

Later, Annie moved in with a friend who had a trailer at Tent City. Although at first she felt safe living in a trailer, she found that the atmosphere at Tent City began to deteriorate as drug dealers began to come into the settlement and there were more fights among the residents. After Tent City was demolished, Annie ended up back at Grange Park for a period. She later moved in with her boyfriend but in March of 2003 decided that she was ready to make more changes in her life and with the help of WoodGreen Housing Support staff, Annie obtained her own apartment and returned to school.

Annie has been back at school for the past year and has been routinely getting marks in the 80% to 90% range. She no longer uses drugs and has reconnected with her family. She says she has learned that you have to make your own decisions in life and not follow others. One day she hopes to attend university.

## **William's Story**

William, who is in his mid-50s, became homeless after the death of his mother, with whom he had been sharing an apartment. Not able to pay the rent, he ended up living under a bridge in the Don Valley for two years. He heard about Tent City from friends and moved in. He says that in some ways he liked the settlement because although he lived alone, there were always people around. He frequented the drop-ins to eat and stay warm and at times earned a little money painting or doing odd jobs.

Three days before the demolition of Tent City, William moved out, nervous that something would happen to the settlement. He relocated under a bridge near the waterfront then connected with a WoodGreen worker after the Tent City residents were evicted. He first moved to an apartment in the downtown core but found that too many people (most were homeless) were coming over to his place. He began to have problems with the landlord because of his many visitors. The WoodGreen Housing Support Workers helped him find a new apartment a little further from downtown and he now feels this location suits him well. Since this recent move, he reports that he is eating better and attending to his health through the Regent Park Health Centre. He is now receiving ODSP because of health related issues.

William still obtains occasional painting jobs. When not working he spends time at the drop-ins or rides his bicycle. He continues to see his friends from Tent City on a regular basis.

## Lilly and Burt's Story

When Lilly's mother died of cancer in February 2000, Lilly who had been the caregiver for some time ended up on the street, sleeping in parks. She made friends with other homeless people and eventually met Burt.

Burt had been on the street since he was 12. After being kicked out by his parents, he spent time in group homes, on the street and in jail. He traveled between Ottawa and Vancouver doing odd jobs and staying in rooming houses, cheap hotels and hostels. He stayed three years at Seaton House and two years at a Salvation Army hostel in Toronto. This cycle of homelessness continued for 22 years. For a time he lived under bridges and outside City Hall, where he met Lilly.

Burt and Lilly heard about Tent City through friends and decided to move in. They described their shelter at Tent City as a nice little place (with a bedroom, living room, stove, makeshift shower and yard) where they lived with their four cats. For the first few years their life was peaceful, but then the dealers began to move into the area.

After the demolition of Tent City, Lilly and Burt moved to WoodGreen Community Centre for emergency accommodation. They were one of the first couples to obtain an apartment, where they still reside. "It was scary at the beginning. Everything was freshly done. There was a fresh paint job, a newly sanded floor and a balcony. We were amazed and giddy about the toilet. It was the best sound I'd heard in ten years." They quickly obtained furniture from Goodwill and managed to furnish their new place.

Burt started school in September 2003 at Centennial College to do basic upgrading including English, math and computer skills. Over the next three years he hopes to complete his Grade Ten. Needing to keep busy, he plans to attend summer school and do odd jobs for his brother-in-law. Burt continues to enjoy decorating the apartment and does most of the cooking.

Lilly, who suffers from serious arthritis, has been doing volunteer work and spending more time at home.

While saying that the apartment is the best thing that ever happened to them, both Burt and Lilly admit there are challenges. It has taken a while to get used to the responsibility of having a place and being with each other for long periods in an enclosed space.

