



## LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVE - Q&A WITH MOHAMMAD P.

**What is your lived experience of homelessness?**  
I lived in an illegal basement apartment and was evicted.

**Have you found housing? If so, when?**  
I have not been able to find housing and am still looking.

**What do you feel society should know about people with lived experience?**  
I feel society should know that there are a lack of resources for people like me. This includes funding, bus passes and other basic needs.

**What do you think the Region of Peel needs to do to address the homelessness and poverty crisis we are experiencing?**  
The Region should provide shelter, warmer places to go, clothing, food and other necessities.

**What would make your situation better?**  
My situation would improve if I received ODSP.

**Are you part of any groups who are advocating for those experiencing homelessness?**  
Yes, I am a member of the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Lived Experience Round Table.

**Is there anything else you would like to share?**  
I am hoping to access a furniture bank and medical assistance.

# Tough Times

Nothing about Us, Without Us, Is for Us

## Open Window Hub | 2023 Partnerships

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Meadowvale Community Cntr. 6655 Glen Erin Dr 10am - 3pm	Mississauga Valley Gym 1395 Mississauga Valley Blvd 10am - 3pm	Port Credit Memorial Arena 50 Stavebank Rd. 9am - 12pm	Mississauga Valley Gym 1395 Mississauga Valley Blvd 10am - 3pm	Mississauga Valley Gym 1395 Mississauga Valley Blvd 10am - 3pm
Moyo Harm Reduction 10am - 12pm	Homeless Health Peel 10am - 12pm	Burnhamthorpe Library 3650 Dixie Rd 10am - 3pm	Region of Peel Housing Support Worker 10am - 12pm	High Priority Response Team 10am - 12pm
Street Outreach 12 - 1pm	Moyo Health & Community Services 10am - 12pm	Street Outreach 12 - 1pm	Street Outreach 12 - 1pm	Street Outreach 12 - 1pm

### Description of Partners & Services

**Moyo Health & Community Services:** Harm Reduction Worker on-site providing harm reduction supply, distribution/delivery, overdose prevention/naloxone training/distribution and safe sex supply, distributing, information/education available on safer substance use, sexual health and street/prescription drugs.

**Street Outreach Team (CMHA):** Outreach worker available delivering on-site supports to Peel Region individuals, 16 years and over, and families who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

**Homeless Health Peel Team:** Nurse Practitioner on-site providing primary care, health education, mental health & addictions support, prenatal care, chronic disease management, geriatric, smoking cessation and palliative care. Operating in every shelter in Peel. No health card or identification required.

**Region of Peel Housing Services:** Housing Support Worker on-site providing services to individuals who are at risk of losing housing, are actively homeless or need affordable housing.

**High Priority Response Team (CMHA):** Community Health Ambassador providing short term case management. Helps complete an intake assessment identifying needs, provides referrals and assists with system navigation. Also provides assistance with phone calls, applications and follow ups to ensure retention in services.

**Regeneration Identification Clinic (ID Clinic Coordinator):** Assists individuals with getting a Canadian birth certificate and walks the applicant through the process. This service is offered every 2nd and 4th week of the month.

## REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN PEEL

In Peel there are many programs available to support housing, shelter and fundamental needs. Please visit [peelregion.ca/housing](http://peelregion.ca/housing) for more information

### Street Helpline - 1-877-848-8481

- Offering 24/7 support for urgent homelessness needs, food, shelter access, referrals and more. The Street Helpline connects you to our mobile Street Outreach team who can often come to your location to help. If you're in crisis or face an urgent need, call us.

### Shelter Intake Line - 905-450-1996

- We can help you find the best option in any Peel shelter, including in adult, youth and family shelters.

### Mental Health Support

- Distress Centre Peel - 905-278-7208
- Kids Help Phone - 1-800-668-6868
- Mental Health Mobile Crisis Centre of Peel - 905-278-9036
- Youth Mental Health Crisis Response Service - 416-410-8615

### City of Brampton

#### Regeneration Meal Program and Supports - 156 Main St N, Brampton

- Facilities and food for people in need
- Showers and laundry
- Phone and computer
- Staff support
- Clothing
- Breakfast - 8a.m. to 9:30a.m. (9:15 a.m. on Sundays)
- Lunch - 11:30a.m. to 12:30p.m., Monday to Thursday
- Hours - Monday to Friday 7a.m. to 3p.m., Saturdays 7a.m. to 9:30 a.m., Sundays 7a.m. to 9:15 a.m.

### City of Mississauga

- Services are available to support at-risk individuals and the homeless in Mississauga, including free hot meals and shower access.
- Visit [mississauga.ca/recreation-and-sports/sports-and-activities/assistance-programs/help-for-the-homeless/](http://mississauga.ca/recreation-and-sports/sports-and-activities/assistance-programs/help-for-the-homeless/)



**JOIN US!**

**PEEL POVERTY ACTION GROUP**

**The Peel Poverty Action Group (PPAG) is looking to recruit new members**

Are you looking to get involved in advocacy work?  
Are issues around homelessness and poverty important to you?  
Do you want to see change in your community?

People with lived experience, frontline workers, advocates, students, service providers, and members of diverse community groups are welcomed to join us and share your voices and concerns!

Our mission is to work collaboratively and collectively while informed by diverse voices of experience from all sectors, to take local action and advocate for system and policy change by addressing the root causes of poverty and work to eliminate homelessness.

**TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

If you are interested in learning more, please contact Daphna Nussbaum at [daphna@poeh.ca](mailto:daphna@poeh.ca).

**COVID COLD AND FLU CARE CLINIC**

Symptoms of COVID and the flu are very similar. Knowing when you should go to an Assessment Centre for a COVID test or to a COVID, Cold and Flu Care Clinic to help diagnose your symptoms will help you get the right care, in the right place.

**You should go to a COVID, Cold and Flu Care Clinic if you:**

- have moderate cold, flu or COVID-like symptoms (i.e., new or worsening cough, fever and/or chills, shortness of breath)
- OR
- tested negative for COVID and continue to have cold, flu or COVID-like symptoms
- AND
- need to see a doctor or nurse practitioner for an in-person visit to assess your symptoms

**NEW LOCATION**

**Four Corners Health Centre**  
Located at the back of Westwood Square Mall  
7205 Goreway Dr, Mississauga, ON L4T 2T9

**Bramalea Community Health Centre**  
Located at 40 Finchgate Blvd, Brampton, L4T 3T1  
Suite 300

Hours of operation:  
Monday to Friday: 8 AM to 3 PM  
Thursday: 12 PM to 7 PM  
Saturday and Sunday: 9 AM to 1 PM

Book Online: [www.wellbri.ca/covid-cough-flu](http://www.wellbri.ca/covid-cough-flu)  
Call to Book: (905) 451-4920  
Walk-ins are accepted upon availability!

**Well-Port**

## NATIONAL HOUSING DAY EVENT



By: Susan Moss

What a fabulous event it was!

Over lunch at Regeneration, we heard important voices - those with lived experience of homelessness. It was an open microphone opportunity given to us, and many did step up and speak, sharing their experiences.

Personal stories are powerful for those speaking and listening because they touch our hearts, break the isolation of our suffering, bring greater understanding of the issues, and connect us to one another. Someone shared that he has lost 40 people in the community, so there is much individual and collective grief. He also shared that abuse has brought so much suffering in his life, contributing to problems of homelessness.

Some of the thankful voices were success stories in which housing was attained, goals were being achieved, and things were turning around. These are examples which inspire hope in us that things can get better. Others spoke briefly, bravely and powerfully in one word, "Racism" - challenging us to see the problem. We heard you. We are listening. And we hope to keep on listening, by amplifying your voice, and spreading it wherever we can, to bring change.



Some of the other opportunities included art. We could use paint, markers or pencil crayons to create something on a small card and then place it on a large board with the words: EVERYTHING STARTS AT HOME. Photos of guests and staff at Regeneration were displayed on a screen throughout the event, and there was one more experience that moved many of us.

Everyone stood together in honour of those we've lost, and we were encouraged to say the name of the person. One by one, names were called out, and it was a special time of remembering and cheering for them (or was it clapping we did...I was crying so I'm not totally sure).

One more thing I'd like to say is thank you to the one elected official who attended. We are sincerely thankful you came.

If you want to keep on or start sharing your voice, we want to hear it on the Committee and in the Tough Times publication. You are the experts and the government has put structures in place so that you can collaborate in bringing changes that are actually meaningful, not just token changes.

So let's take this new momentum and keep it going for all of us as we take care of each other, and take care for each other.



### Inside the Issue

#### National Housing Day Event

Call for Action! More Out of the Cold Sites Needed in Peel Region!

Building Up Our Neighbourhoods Against All Odds... We Must Defy "Code Blue" - January's Blue Monday will last for years under new Tory laws

The Impacts of Bill 23 on the Existing Housing Crisis

Seniors and the Challenge of Homelessness in Canada

Homelessness in Hiding: Our Youth Between the Cracks

Lived Experience Perspective - Q&A with Mohammad P.

## CALL FOR ACTION! MORE OUT OF THE COLD SITES NEEDED IN PEEL REGION!

By: Farrah Khan, Harm Reduction Outreach Worker, Moyo Health & Community Services (formerly Peel HIV/AIDS Network)

There is a serious need for the establishment of more Out of the Cold programs in the Region of Peel. In the Region of Peel there are hundreds of people who are under-housed or unhoused (Everyone Counts Peel, 2021 Community Report). Unfortunately this means there are members of our community who are suffering in the cold without access to safe and comfortable shelter, especially overnight when most public spaces are closed, inaccessible, and/or unsafe.

Currently in the region of Peel there are only two Out of the Cold/In from the Cold facilities, one located at St. Leonard's Place in Brampton and one at Clarkson Christ First United Church in Mississauga. While these programs provide essential services, they are not enough. With shelters at capacity and in some cases overflow, people experiencing homelessness need more respite from the cold than what is currently available. In addition, community members

may have difficulty getting to these locations if they do not have access to reliable and affordable transportation. Hearing from people firsthand, we know what a difference these services can make. These facilities have saved people from freezing to death in the middle of a Canadian winter and given them safety and comfort at a time when they feel most vulnerable and isolated.

The Out of the Cold programs also provide an integral access point for vital resources such as housing, employment, counselling, food bank, and other services. Because of the pandemic, the housing crisis, rising food costs and an impending recession, there is no quick and easy solution for the folks most vulnerable within our community. Until we are able to find housing solutions, we need to take care of each other and Out of the Cold programs are a key part of helping our community through these TOUGH TIMES!

**PEEL REGION IS CALLING FOR PARTNERS TO OPEN AND FACILITATE OUT OF THE COLD DROP-IN PROGRAMS FOR THE HOMELESS**

## Call for Out of the Cold programs

Peel Region is calling for partners to open and facilitate Out of the Cold drop-in programs for the homeless.

We are looking for community centres, faith-based organizations and other facilities to host and oversee an Out of the Cold program.

Peel Region will support host organizations with the funding of these drop-in programs and connect you with community service providers.

- Out of the Cold programs can:**
- Throughout the winter months and more:
  - Offer overnight accommodations
  - Provide snacks and meals
  - Have access to washrooms
- To better serve the population, it would be ideal to have:
- Access to internet
  - Access to laundry and shower facilities
  - Access to social support including employment support, housing referrals, and other information.

To learn more about opening an Out of the Cold program as well as the expectations of host centres, please contact Lisa Marie Middleton at 437-227-0964 or email [Lisamarie.middleton@peelregion.ca](mailto:Lisamarie.middleton@peelregion.ca).

**Out of the Cold Program**

St. Leonard's Place Peel

1105 Queen St. East, Brampton (corner of West Drive and Queen St.)  
In the Gymnasium

Opening date: November 14, 2022

Hours of operation: 6:00 pm to 7:30 am  
Men will be provided with a warm bed, snacks, personal hygiene items, shower and laundry facilities

Call 437-332-0011 for referrals and more information - from 5:30pm to 8pm. Walk-ins also welcome.

Supported by the Region of Peel

**In From the Cold Program**

Hosted by  
Clarkson Community Church

Offering people experiencing homelessness a safe and warm place to sleep during the cold winter months.

**Christ First United Church**  
151 Lakeshore Rd W,  
Mississauga, ON L3H 1G3  
Located in the gymnasium  
Hours of Operation: 9:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m.

Individuals will be provided with:

- A warm bed
- Hot meal in the evening
- Coffee and snack in the morning

Call 647-478-8988, between 9:00 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. for referrals and more information. Walk-ins also welcome.

For more information visit [peelregion.ca/](http://peelregion.ca/)

Region of Peel working with you

Are you a person with lived experience who likes to write? Are you looking for ways to get your voice heard?

Tough Times is looking for content providers for its upcoming editions. PWLE who contribute to Tough Times will receive an honourarium for their contribution.

Please contact [daphna@poeh.ca](mailto:daphna@poeh.ca) or 647-461-1383 if you are interested.

## BUILDING UP OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS AGAINST ALL ODDS... WE MUST DEFY "CODE BLUE"- JANUARY'S BLUE MONDAY WILL LAST FOR YEARS UNDER NEW TORY LAWS

By: Catherine Soplet, PPAG and Peel Region Community Member

"Where's the poop?" is literally a question needing an answer in Tough Times.

On New Year's Eve, the Ontario government's perverse fiction "More Homes Built Faster Act" (aka "Bill 23") took effect.

Development Charges (DCs), typically collected from builders, will no longer pay for sewage pipes, drinking water, roads and flood control parklands for new housing units. Peel Region's ten-year forecast of \$2.04 billion cashflow is cancelled.

However, the Region is still on the hook to install both hard and social infrastructure to keep housing livable and people healthy.

Where will the money come from?

Rate hikes of 50% or more for utilities and property taxes were discussed at the December 8th, 2022 Peel Region Council meeting.

The opposite of housing affordability will be the result, for all housing units, not just new ones. Businesses, healthcare and education facilities will not be exempted.

Even worse, for people in Peel Poverty Reduction Committee's (PPAG) orbit, Peel Region will be forced to cancel 934 affordable units already approved in Inclusionary Zoning and supportive housing projects now underway.

Bill 23 was bundled with updates to other laws.

The legislation bundle defies logic, defies the jurisprudence of duly elected local governments, and will defy residents to

experience what is "billed" – affordable housing with access to amenities where people and business can thrive. The impact of new laws will make even more trouble for the 20% of Peel households who currently live in rental housing.

Peel Region knows the majority of these tenant families who experience core-housing need – about 91,000 households – are more likely to be racialized and can face other social difficulties as compared to homeowners.

Currently 28,000 people residing in Peel receive housing supports; however, the supportive housing demand is not even halfway met. In 2021, nearly 4,000 people relied upon the emergency shelter system.

The new laws create Code Blue emergency for Peel families, who could face a wholesale renovation. The precious, precarious and in-demand rental units will be lost without notice, with a decision of the Minister of Municipal affairs to impose conditions that regulate demolition and conversion of residential rental properties, and bypass the Official Plan.

At the December Council meeting, Peel Region joined with more than 400 Ontario municipalities to request that the Province of Ontario create a compensation fund to replace development charges foregone, and restore the hole in their budgets arising from the impacts of Bill 23.

Code Blue for PPAG is this: We must defy the threats to our housing by contacting lawmakers at every level. We will keep you posted.



Bonnie Crombie, Mayor, City of Mississauga (left) and Janice Baker, Chief Administrative Officer, Region of Peel (right) at the December 8th, 2022 Peel Region Council meeting.



Data Source: Bill 23 "More Homes Built Faster Act" and Implications for the Region of Peel

PEEL REGION KNOWS THE MAJORITY OF THESE TENANT FAMILIES WHO EXPERIENCE CORE-HOUSING NEED - ABOUT 91,000 HOUSEHOLDS - ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE RACIALIZED AND CAN FACE OTHER SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES AS COMPARED TO HOMEOWNERS.

## THE IMPACTS OF BILL 23 ON THE EXISTING HOUSING CRISIS

By: Sean Meagher, Coordinator, Ontario for All

*The Province's Build More Homes Built Faster Act Raises Concerns about the Future of Affordable Housing.*

Last fall, just one day after the municipal elections, the Government of Ontario passed Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act, a lengthy and complex housing bill. Although this Bill does offer some potential gains for affordable housing, it also includes areas of considerable concern that will clearly have a major disruptive impact here in Peel Region. While many organizations have voiced concerns about how this bill will have harmful effects in terms of environmental impact, city planning and infrastructure, among the most distressing aspects of the bill is the impact it has on the affordable housing crisis.

The bill has three very negative impacts that will worsen the region's affordable housing challenges.

1. **The bill undermines Peel's Housing Master Plan and disrupts other municipal programs that create affordable housing.**

Bill 23 eliminates charges that developers currently pay toward building affordable housing and other critical infrastructure. Based on a preliminary analysis, Region of Peel staff estimate that the development charge (DC) revenue shortfall in Peel resulting from Bill 23 could amount to approximately \$2 billion over a 10-year period[1].

Those revenues were a central source of funds for the Region's Housing Master Plan (peelregion.ca/housing/master-plan.asp) that was on track to build over 5,000 affordable rental homes in Peel over the next 10 years. Staff indicate that, with the changes in Bill 23, the Master Plan could fall short by almost 1,000 homes, which amounts to approximately 20% of the total, and over half of the share to be funded by Region of Peel revenues.

In 2020, Minister Sarkaria, the Member for Brampton South, attended the first major announcement of the Housing Master Plan, saying "We are proud to be working with our partners in Peel Region to create solutions that provide much-needed affordable housing for low-income families." [2] Now, according to Regional staff, the cuts in Bill 23 "directly threaten the Region's Housing Master Plan." [3]

Bill 23 also makes deep cuts to the Inclusionary Zoning policies that allow municipalities in Peel to require developers to include affordable homes in new projects. These are policies that municipalities in Peel are beginning to implement, but since Bill 23 tightly limits the number of affordable homes cities can ask for



Image from the City of Mississauga

and allows developers to count homes that cost as much as \$1 million as "affordable", there will likely be little benefit from continuing those efforts. [4]

It is worth underscoring that Inclusionary Zoning is one of the only tools available to municipalities to create much-needed affordable housing without burdening taxpayers with added costs.

These aspects of the bill will cut hundreds of millions of dollars from municipal investments in affordable housing and cancel plans that would have built thousands of new, permanently affordable homes.

2. **The bill could speed up the loss of existing affordable homes.**

Bill 23 gives the Minister the power to cancel rental housing replacement programs. These programs ensure that when apartment buildings are redeveloped, the affordable units are replaced at affordable prices. Peel is one of the areas in Ontario where steps have been taken to maintain affordable rental homes through rental housing protection bylaws. While estimates are not available for Peel alone, rental housing replacement programs have saved over 5,000 affordable homes across the province. Their loss will, according to the Region's staff, "lead to the loss of existing affordable rental units, disproportionately impacting marginalized households." [5]

3. **The bill risks undermining affordability for families.**

Bill 23 cuts taxes and fees on developers, eliminating millions in funding that is used to build roads and sewers, as well as parks and other amenities. Eliminating this source of funding for these vital infrastructure improvements will put significant pressure on the property tax base in an economic environment where tax increases would be particularly difficult for families to afford. Estimates for the Region of Peel indicate that Bill 23 could lead to an additional one-time increase in property taxes of 7% and a one-time increase in utility rates (water and wastewater) of as much as 26%. In these difficult times, ordinary families cannot afford these steep increases.

This is especially concerning as there is nothing in the bill that requires developers to build more affordable units or to pass any of their savings on to renters or homebuyers.

If we are going to avoid making the affordable housing crisis far worse, the Province needs to reconsider this legislation. With the bill only freshly passed, and most of it has not been implemented, now is the time to make badly needed changes.

If you are concerned about affordable housing, take a moment to write to your local MPP and let them know why the issues raised in this article are compelling reasons to re-examine Bill 23. You can find contact information for your local MPP at [www.ola.org/en/members](http://www.ola.org/en/members).

- <https://pub-peelregion.escrimemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=25379>
- <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/historic-investment-to-build-more-affordable-housing-in-peel-region-821540632.html>
- <https://pub-peelregion.escrimemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=25379>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-passes-housing-bill-23-1.6666657>
- <https://pub-peelregion.escrimemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=25379>

WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL MPP AND LET THEM KNOW WHY THE ISSUES RAISED IN THIS ARTICLE ARE COMPELLING REASONS TO RE-EXAMINE BILL 23

AT LEAST 235,000 CANADIANS EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS IN A GIVEN YEAR



## SENIORS AND THE CHALLENGE OF HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

By: Folashade Okomayin, Housing Support Worker, Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre

An 81-year-old woman sat in my office and put a question to me: 'What fate awaits me, if in few weeks or months, my landlord decides to increase the rent?' While struggling to get the words out of her mouth, the tears began to roll down her cheeks because, staring at her was the grim prospect of ending up homeless. Her story is that of a Canadian senior who, despite starting out as a teenager who had dedicated all her life to her country of Canada, today, as a senior, accessing subsidized housing is an impossibility.

Mine is the soul wrenching job of consoling seniors. But while at it, so many questions come to the fore in mind. And as I watch this senior cry like a little baby in my office, morbid fear rose from the pit of my stomach, worked its way up through my throat, and then remained trapped in my mouth. This senior was not the first to break down in tears in my office; I have encountered a lot of them while working at the shelter, on the streets and elsewhere.

Statistics shows that 8.3% of seniors in Canada are practically living in the homeless shelter, this percentage is actually discounting the unaccountable numbers not registered in any shelters. Most seniors I have encountered in my line of duty cannot be described as lazy, as a matter of fact, some of them, even though 80+, would still ask if I would be so kind as to connect them to any employer that can offer them a job.

## HOMELESSNESS IN HIDING: OUR YOUTH BETWEEN THE CRACKS

By: Mya Moniz, Podcast Coordinator, REST Centres

Homelessness in Hiding: Our Youth Between the Cracks is a podcast that discusses youth homelessness in Peel Region by elevating the voices of people with lived experience and highlighting the frontline workers that help them. Homelessness in Hiding is produced by the Restoration and Empowerment for Social Transition (REST Centres), an organization that combats housing insecurity among BIPOC youth in Peel. Host and producer Mya Moniz is joined by REST youth client, Zach, who shares his deep-cut survival story about his battles with domestic abuse, his mental health, and homophobia to provide an honest portrayal of what one youth's experience with homelessness might look like. This is an edited and condensed excerpt of Homelessness in Hiding, episode 11: "NIMBYism and Society, from a Formerly Homeless Youth," first released July 30th, 2022.

*Content disclaimer: This conversation mentions verbal, emotional, physical and sexual abuse, prostitution, mental health disorders, and suicide. Audience discretion is advised.*

**Mya Moniz (MM):** What was your life like before falling into homelessness?

Zach (Z): My life wasn't really that great. My biological parents were not really around. I moved a lot from city to city. I could never really make any friends because as soon as I make new friends, the relatives that I lived with said "we have to move," so it was kind of difficult to have this feeling of belonging—you know, home. Because I was moving so much, I never got attached to anything.

Z: My parents were very neglectful in that they stopped caring about me altogether after I was outed to them. There was this houseboy—he was 16—who was taking advantage of me, but I didn't know what was happening. I was too young; I was 11, at the time. I guess he thought he could get a reward to keep quiet if he told my parents that I liked boys. I live in a world where rapists and murderers are treated better than homosexuals or Queer people who aren't harming anyone just by existing. I never understood why being romantically or sexually attracted to another person of the same sex is considered a crime. I grew up with very religious, very abusive, and homophobic parents, so it wasn't really a good time to be "out of the closet." I never felt like I had a home. It felt more like a temporary shelter, or something. I felt like I was always homeless.

The challenge of homelessness among seniors is a clear and present danger. So much so that the Simon Fraser University as of June last year, began leading a research project examining how to support older people experiencing homelessness in major Canadian cities. Even the government subsidized housing program is now looking like a mirage, with a waitlist that is consistently looking like an unrealizable dream with each passing sun, making applicants, especially seniors on the list, more vulnerable to homelessness.

Shelter is a necessity and everyone deserves a roof over their head. Yet seniors are not the only ones experiencing homelessness; teenagers, youth, and even middle-aged people, regardless of their social location, fall victim of this challenge. According to The Homeless Hub, "The number of Canadians who experience homelessness on any given night in Canada is estimated to be minimally 35,000." And this is not taking into cognizance the hidden numbers that are not included in the above figure, which I believe could blow one's mind should all the figures be captured. According to Simon Fraser university gerontology professor Sarah Canham, researchers in Calgary, Montreal and Vancouver are working with housing providers and stakeholders to bring a partnered, community-based approach to measuring "what works, why it works, and for whom it works," but when this approach and effort would extend throughout the entire country remains a question begging answers!

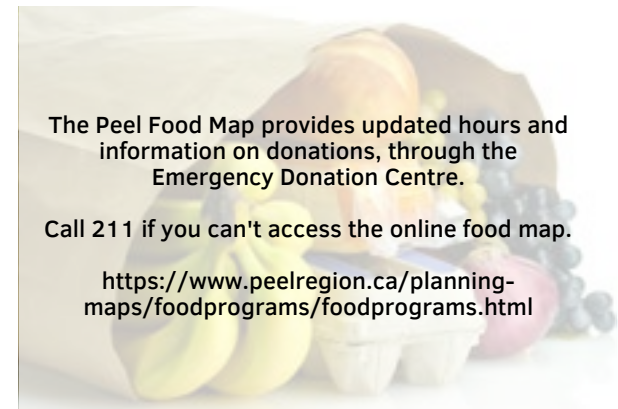
As the tree of questions began to form a forest of questions in my mind, as the question "why are people at the risk of becoming homeless or even homeless?" continues to throw itself up in my mind, I realized quickly too, that the answers were always there. Answers that I have gathered from interactions with clients who are victims of houses that are no longer affordable, unavailable social housing, loss of jobs, debt, mental health, addiction, pandemic, family crisis and breakdown, to mention a few.

While working in shelter services and outreach, I observed that the challenges homeless seniors face come with each break of day. Some of these challenges are so much that they prevent them from performing daily activities, make them vulnerable to those who rob them of their money and valuables, make them appear older than their real age, make them look so unkempt and also put them in a place where they suffer so much trauma from all the negative life experiences they have had to go through in the streets or at the shelter.

It is the very fear of experiencing the above conditions that sends strong signals to the seniors who are served eviction notices, a fear I am very familiar with, having seen it in their eyes many times, as they sit in front of me narrating the ordeal of seniors who experience homelessness.

While driving down to the office this morning, a doctor (not sure of the name) was interviewed on a CBC radio program and she was appealing to the government not to close temporary shelters, because if they do, the numbers of people sleeping on the streets will multiply. She also stated that the high rate of patients in the emergency these days are from the homeless population. Some of these unfortunately includes seniors, she says.

Listening to this lady, more questions begging for answers began to well up in my mind. Is there hope for the homeless? Will homelessness become a thing of the past, or is it something we have to live with all our lives? May the coming days and the concerted efforts of stakeholders supply the answers that will bring hope to seniors!



RENTING IN ONTARIO KNOW YOUR RIGHTS  
There are laws in Ontario to protect renters. Protect yourself from wrongful evictions.  
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/renting-ontario-your-rights>



Z: I tried to run away before, around [age] 13, but the police found me and brought me back home. My father was not happy. He bruised me quite a lot. My school asked me if they should call and report to the police because I was obviously being abused, but I told them "no" because in the situation where you're getting abused, what people don't understand is that they think they're helping you by trying to report your abuser, but in the mind of the abused, they think it's going to get worse. I didn't want my father to hurt me more than he was already doing.

**MM:** What were the series of events that led to you experiencing homelessness?

Z: So, around [age] 17, after my father had brutally beaten me, I realized I had no reason to stay—he hated me more than anything. I remember writing a heartfelt letter telling him how much I was sorry for being such a disappointment and unworthy of his love. After that, I packed up a suitcase with some clothes—it was raining, actually—and I remember walking in the rain to the nearest shelter. I was soaked, really cold, but I was kind of hopeless. I didn't have anything else to lose.

Z: As I was walking in the rain, I looked up to the sky and said, "my life is in the hands of fate, now." I didn't have any will to live, anymore. I didn't care if a car ran over me or if I got hypothermia. I wasn't going to give up that easily, but if it were to come to that, I would not fight for my life.

Z: All I know is that I've always been resilient. I've endured things that I know would have pushed most people over the edge. In my mind, the parent is supposed to love the child, to be there for them, support them—make sure they know how to overcome hardship, not cause them pain and harm. I was actually crying when I was writing that letter because, for most people, their parents are their biggest idols. You always want to please your parents, always want to make them proud. Your parents are the first people who are supposed to make you feel like you are worth something. If they did not, then it's gonna haunt you for the rest of your life.

**MM:** What was your experience like in the shelter system?

Z: I remember waking up very early and walking to the shelter. I didn't have enough money to catch a bus or get an Uber. I was walking for hours under the rain, and as soon as I arrived at the shelter, it was already night. I didn't feel comfortable having to sleep on a bed near strangers. It's uneasy to lay down next to somebody you don't know—you don't know what they can do, so I didn't sleep that night. I was worried somebody might do something; I am a victim of sexual abuse, so it kind of gives me that paranoia. You always have to keep your eyes open to make sure nothing out of the ordinary is going to happen.

Z: It was quite the experience, I'm glad I lived it because, now, I understand what homeless people go through. No one should have to go through something like that. In my own philosophy, even if you are told something, you have to experience it yourself to understand the ramifications, the consequences, the affect that thing has on somebody. Before, I never thought homelessness was that bad—like, "you just don't have a house; you can be on the street. That's pretty cool, that's pretty rad," but that's not true. When you are homeless, you tend to do anything to survive, like selling your body, or steal from stores. It wasn't something I sought after, but it was the most viable option I was being presented with, given my situation.

Z: I really didn't know what was going to happen to me. I didn't know how I got out; I just know I did. I knew I was lucky, but I personally know many others were not so lucky.

To hear the rest of Zach's story from the streets and how he escaped homelessness, be sure to listen to the full episode of the REST Centres podcast, Homelessness in Hiding: Our Youth Between the Cracks, at [www.restcentres.org/podcast](http://www.restcentres.org/podcast).