

**Mississauga Community Legal Services**

Providing free legal assistance to low income residents of Mississauga

**mcls**  
 130 Dundas Street East, Suite 504  
 Mississauga, Ontario L5A 3V8  
 Tel (905) 896-2050  
 Fax (905) 273-4255  
 www.mississaugalegalclinic.ca

Funding to Legal Aid Ontario. We hope we will be able to resume this popular service in future. In the meantime, if you require legal advice for your family law matter you may go to the Family Law Information Centre located at the Brampton Courthouse. Family Law duty counsel are also available at the courthouse.

**Who is eligible to receive our services?**  
 Low income residents living in Mississauga are financially eligible to receive our services. Please call ahead as there are some limitations on our services. If you do not qualify for our services or we are unable to help you, we will refer you appropriately.

**Will I have to pay for help from the clinic?**  
 There is no charge for the clinic's services. However, a client may be required to pay court or tribunal costs, application fees or other special fees such as costs for medical reports. This would all be discussed thoroughly before costs are incurred.

**How can I get involved with the clinic?**  
 The Board of Directors, which manages the clinic, consists of volunteers from the community of Mississauga. Each year, new directors are elected at the Annual General Meeting. New members are welcome to join year round.

Another way to get involved is to volunteer a few hours a week at the clinic or to apply to have a co-operative education placement with us. For more information about the Board, membership, or volunteer opportunities, please contact us.

**Business hours**  
**Monday Wednesday, Friday** 9:30am - 5:00pm  
**Thursday** 1:00pm - 5:00pm  
 We are closed for lunch every day from 12:30pm - 1:00pm

**Satellite Office**  
**Malton Neighbourhood Services**  
 Every Thursday from 3:00pm - 6:00pm at  
 3540 Morning Star Drive in Mississauga

**What is MCLS?**  
 Mississauga Community Legal Services (MCLS) is a clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario to provide free legal assistance to low income residents of Mississauga. The clinic is comprised of lawyers, licensed paralegals, community legal workers, support staff and volunteers.

Some of our staff are multilingual and can provide services in languages other than English. However, sometimes, we rely on our clients or on interpretation services to provide interpreters.

Clients are encouraged to call the clinic first for help and if necessary, an appointment may be scheduled.

**What legal services does the clinic provide?**  
 The clinic provides legal services in the following areas:  
 • Ontario Disability Support Program  
 • Ontario Works (welfare)  
 • Canada Pension Plan Disability  
 • Tenants' Rights

- Employment
- Immigration
- Subsidized Housing

**What other services does the clinic provide?**  
 Mississauga Community Legal Services has a mandate to deliver public legal education seminars. We provide speakers on our areas of practice for community groups such as tenant organizations, settlement agencies, shelters, schools, etc. Another ongoing goal of the clinic is to actively participate in law reform in order to improve and change the laws whenever possible.

**Affidavits**  
**Appointments are required.** The clinic provides this service for subsidized housing and OSAP affidavits only. Please note that there is a \$10 charge.

**Family Law Advice**  
 We are no longer able to offer on-site family law advice because the provincial government cut

## Peel Region Street Outreach Request for Donations

Peel Region's Street Outreach team is requesting new/used donations that will help unsheltered individuals throughout Peel Region.

### Clothing and other supplies:

- Sleeping bags
- Socks
- Long underwear
- T-shirts
- Sweaters
- Boots
- Jackets
- Underwear
- Hygiene kits

### Food:

- Cans with pop tops
- Granola Bars
- Individually packed cereals
- Tuna and salmon cans with crackers



**Please drop off any items at:**

60 West Drive, Suite 106  
 Brampton, ON  
 Monday - Friday:  
 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.  
 Call the Street Helpline:  
 1-877-848-8481



## JOIN US!



**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@paeH.ca](mailto:daphna@paeH.ca).

# Tough Times

Nothing about Us, Without Us, Is for Us

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF UNSHELTERED INDIVIDUALS IN PEEL REGION



Anika Shama, Research and Evaluation Coordinator, Canadian Observatory of Homelessness, Homeless Hub at the March 23rd, 2023 Peel Region Council meeting.

By: Daphna Nussbaum, Peel Alliance to End Homelessness

In recent years, there has been a growing number of encampments in Peel Region. Although they vary in size and structure, the term 'encampment' is used to describe any location where an individual or a group of people experiencing homelessness live together, usually in tents or other temporary structures.

This rise in the number of encampments in Peel is due to several factors, including a lack of affordable housing, emergency shelter overflows and overcrowding, and limited options for people who do not wish to stay in emergency shelters. The end of the provincial government's pandemic Social Service Relief emergency funding in May 2022 also contributed to the growth in the number of encampment residents, as people who were previously accommodated in hotel or motel rooms and housing units through that funding were left with few options but to return to encampments.

Peel Poverty Action Group (PPAG), a community grassroots group advocating for issues surrounding poverty and homelessness in Peel Region, commissioned a needs-based assessment in the winter of 2022, to address the growth in encampments in the community. Community partners that assisted in this endeavour included Peel Alliance to End Homelessness, CMHA Peel Dufferin, Moyo Health and Community Services, Wellfort Community Health Services and Regeneration.

The study and report highlighted the needs of those who were living in encampments and living rough throughout Peel including Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon. The report, written by Hub Solutions, a social enterprise of the Canadian Observatory of Homelessness, reflected the sentiments of 179 individuals who were struggling to survive outside, primarily in conditions that are not fit for human habitation.

The report was presented to municipal government representatives including councillors and mayors for Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon on March 23, 2023, at the Peel Regional Council.

Peel Region community members and advocates Michelle Bilek, Catherine Soplek and Sara Pinto, the latter, who spoke about her own lived experience, delegated before council on the need for more community collaboration, a Housing First approach to ending homelessness and the need to address gaps within the system.

### Report Findings

A presentation of the Encampment study report by Anika Shama, Senior Research and Evaluation Coordinator with Hub Solutions, highlighted some of the key demographics of the population surveyed. The majority of participants identified as men (72%), while approximately 30% of all participants were between 35 and 44 years old. The largest proportion of women were between the ages of 25 to 44 (32%), while the largest proportion of men were over the age of 55 (16%).

This study determined that the main causes of homelessness included housing unaffordability (42%), housing eviction due to conflict with family or friends (26%) and physical, mental and substance use challenges, often in combination (42%).

Geographically, over half the participants (54%) were situated in Brampton, followed by Mississauga (35%) and Malton (4%). A significant number of respondents had spent their nights in multiple locations, which often changed over time and included parks, streets and alleys, staircases, storefronts, rooftops, forests, buses and train stations, parking lots, under bridges and campsites tents.

When asked what they needed to live, three-quarters (73%) of the 179 respondents identified the need for a safe place to stay and spend the night. Encampment residents also mentioned the need to access to a safe structure and essentials such as food, warm clothing to survive winter, washrooms, showers, hygiene products, heating, and medication. Participants also cited the need for affordable housing options, financial stability, wrap-around care, and advocacy as some of the core supports needed to obtain and maintain permanent housing.

The report also offered recommendations that could systematically address the needs of those living outdoors. One of these recommendations was to invest in Housing First programs and review of emergency shelter policies in Peel, as well as service provision based on age, gender and cultural needs. The report was shared with the Federal Housing Advocate's Office, who is currently conducting a review on encampments across Canada.

It is important to highlight that this research was conducted to describe the perspectives of encampment residents only. The report does not include a scientific and evidence-based literature review. However, the research gives stakeholders, service providers and policymakers an overview of where the specific population stands and provides suggestions and recommendations to address their existing and emerging needs.

Watch the Peel Region video [here](#).



- Anika Shama presenting the PPAG Encampment Study Report, Key Findings and Recommendations.
- Michelle Bilek - PPAG Encampment Needs Study by Persons with Lived Experience of Homelessness.
- Catherine Soplek - PPAG Encampment Needs Study: A PPAG Member's Background to Provide Context.
- Sarah Pinto - Encampments in Peel.

## SPACES AND PLACES: UNCOVERING HOMELESSNESS IN PEEL REGION

Spaces and Places: Uncovering Homelessness in the Region of Peel is a 15-minute video proving that homelessness exists in Peel Region.

Its purpose is to encourage political and personal action to obtain homes and services for people who are struggling.

Peel Poverty Action Group (PPAG) produced the video with the help of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, a videography and research team from York University, and the Social Planning Council of Peel.



Watch the video [here](#).



### Inside the Issue

Peel Encampment Study Highlights the Needs of Unsheltered Individuals

I'm Here Foundation Donates to Peel Region Street Outreach

Spaces and Places: Uncovering Homelessness in Peel Region

Questionnaire with Martin Reid Ward 9

Lived Experience Perspective - Q&A with Michael

Code Blue: Resuscitation - Act Now for Housing First

Making Progress on Homelessness in Peel Region

## I'M HERE FOUNDATION DONATES TO PEEL REGION STREET OUTREACH



I'm Here Foundation donated brand new socks, gloves and winter hats to Peel Region Street Outreach Program for our homeless residents.

## COUNCILLOR'S CORNER - "SUPPORT, AMPLIFY, CONNECT": INTRODUCING COUNCILLOR MARTIN REID, CITY OF MISSISSAUGA, WARD 9



Martin Reid Ward 9 (Meadowdale, Central Erin Mills)

Martin Reid, a new Councillor for Mississauga's Ward 9, whose motto is "Support, Amplify, Connect", was interviewed by 'Tough Times' on his community vision, his thoughts on poverty, homelessness and affordable housing and what he hopes to achieve during his term in council.

### Name and Ward Representation

- Martin Reid Ward 9 (Meadowdale, Central Erin Mills)

### How long have you been a councillor?

- First Term. Started November 2022

### Why did you choose to become a municipal councillor?

- I was inspired by the work Pat Saito had done in Ward 9 over the last 30 years and I wanted to continue to build on that.

### What is your vision for Peel Region/Your City?

- My vision for Mississauga is to continue to make it a great place to live, work, worship and play. It will take a lot of work for my children to be able to have the opportunity to buy a house and plant their roots here one day, so the work starts now. Community safety and wellbeing, road safety, ending homelessness in my corner of the world and empowering small businesses are all areas of passion for me so I am doing my best to Support, Amplify and Connect those organizations that advocate for these causes. I want to see all of our support services thrive in Ward 9. They are all doing great work.

### What do you hope to achieve in this term of council?

- I hope to be a strong voice for community building. All of the parties that are invested in the above mentioned areas, I am taking time to meet with, to hear their vision and figure out ways to help them prosper.

### What are you passionate about?

- I am passionate about movement. Movement out of poverty, movement towards affordable housing, physical movement towards a healthier community where older adults can stay in their homes and young people can get off their devices and get outside and safely play in our parks and pathways. Emotional movement towards mental wellness is a team effort as well. Getting better every day as a community is my passion project.

### What keeps you up at night?

- Nothing. I am anchored by my faith, I know I am in the right place at the right time and furthermore, I am confident we are moving in the right direction as a community. My conversations with advocates gives me hope the tide is changing. There are many people that share a common vision. This role has given me the opportunity to meet many leaders and I am encouraged by the steps they are taking and the progress they are seeing.

### What do you feel is the biggest issue affecting residents in your community from a poverty perspective (social assistance, racial inequality, food insecurity, affordable housing)?

- I have seen where some of my residents are receiving some sort of assistance and the opportunities for financial advancement are not secure enough. Their assistance is consistent and even if it is not enough, it is consistent whereas the opportunities presented to them are not. There is a lack of faith in the opportunities presented. We need real economic empowerment. We need more stakeholders involved in the housing conversation as I feel many agencies are doing the best they can with what they have. I appreciate all of the advocacy that we are seeing, and I am hopeful the province and the federal government will continue to hear the needs and get to work. I was part of the Mayor's Black Alliance and the recommendations we brought to council are being implemented. I feel my role as council is to keep the momentum going with these recommendations and to see our communities benefit from the opportunities they open up.

As you are aware, lack of affordable housing is an ongoing issue affecting many families, with an estimate of over 28,000 people on the Region's Centralized housing wait list (Council report December 21, 2021), with people waiting anywhere for 5-12 years and in some cases more, for social housing.

### What are your thoughts on addressing the lack of deeply affordable housing in Peel Region?

- That report saddens me. I have been in social services for over 25 years and this statistic has not improved. I am happy that we are looking at this cause differently now and it is a part of every development committee meeting I sit in.

### In addition to increased funding provisions from the federal and provincial governments, what else do you think is required to help address the issue?

- People need better jobs. People need better education to get those jobs. Communities need to do a better job of letting key agencies plant their services in these communities. Cities need to do a better job of providing core funding to lesser known agencies that are doing great work so that they can act.

### What collective actions can communities take to help ensure more affordable housing?

- All of the above and let the churches have as much open access as they need to adopt their respective communities without fear they are there just to make converts.

There is a homelessness crisis in Peel. Shelters are at capacity. Approximately 1,000 people are using the shelter system, with countless others living in encampments, on the street or couch surfing. Homelessness has increased in our communities for many reasons. Recognizing this is a complex issue, how can we better address homelessness in our communities?

- Sometimes, people are not aware of the work that is already being done. Communication is disconnected and the message is not getting out in a way that encourages people to join the cause. I have learned so much about the social services and not-for-profit groups that exist. If every one of the existing groups had an increase in their funding that could afford them the home base they need, the marketing budget they need, the outreach staff they need etc., we could do a little bit more and get more of the every day person that does not believe they can make a difference to join the cause.

### Anything else you wish to add?

- Support. Amplify. Connect. That was my personal motto before I started the campaign and it became my campaign slogan. Everything comes down to how we support those already doing the work, how do we amplify their message and how can we connect those that need the service with the best provider.

Thank you for your participation in this interview. We appreciate your dedication to making Peel a better place to live.

## CODE BLUE: RESUSCITATION - ACT NOW FOR HOUSING FIRST

The last edition of Tough Times introduced the Region of Peel's reaction to the Ford government's vice grip to shrink municipal budget tools pre-planned and costed to build up to 2,200 units of affordable and supportive rental housing by 2027.

That means that new housing units will not be seen, and not be green.

Official Plans crafted by experts and approved by municipal elected officials, which include innovations such as cost-effective inclusionary zoning and localized environmental solutions, have been tossed aside.

Peel Region is disturbed to calculate that about \$2 billion will be axed from 10-year budget forecasts by Bill 23 – The More Homes Built Faster Act. This puts water, sewage and transportation infrastructure at risk.

Since November 2022, as their January 2023 budgets were finalized, appeals and motions from municipalities to the Ford government to "make budgets whole" have gone unanswered.

As well, some 7,400 acres of protected greenbelt watershed and farmland will be opened up for high-priced residential development. Furthermore, the new developments are proposed to be serviced with a new Highway 413, to run parallel to the existing underused 407 tolled highway.

People across Ontario will experience negative food, water and other environmental impacts.

In Peel, we experience how a lack of affordable housing has a bad impact on food security.

In 1990, The Knights Table was founded by Cecil Peters, after he and his daughter witnessed first-hand a woman sifting through the garbage at the local Dairy Queen for something to eat.

After 2003, Peel Poverty Action Group (PPAG) members regularly spent time at Knights Table to hear stories of people experiencing homelessness and hunger, which worsened under the Progressive Conservative Harris government. After a 2003 change in government, and some change in heart, PPAG was funded by Ontario Trillium Foundation to document stories with researchers from Social Planning Council of Peel and York University, and release in 2009 its video "Spaces and Places: Uncovering Homelessness in the Region of Peel".

Now in 2023, Mississauga Food Bank (MFB) reports that cost of housing is ramping up record numbers of people who access Food Banks in order to make ends meet, even if they have jobs.

In February 2023 there were 13,850 users, the highest monthly number yet – and a 44% increase from 2022. Since 2019, food bank usage across its network of over 50 agencies has risen by almost 60% since 2019.

In 2022 MFB distributed food for over five million meals to vulnerable and needy neighbours.

In April MFB just moved to a new, larger space of over 43,000 square feet. It intends to provide more fresh and frozen food to the community and keep programs running smoothly.

## PPAG HAS 3 "FIRST RESPONDER" TIPS OF WHAT TO DO UNDER CODE BLUE

1. Stay calm and speak with a loud clear voice to be easily understood.
2. Get training.
3. Secure site safety and minimize distraction.

Stay calm and speak with a loud clear voice. Tough Times can be a place for your calm and clear voice, and also for what you see. Reach out to us with your story idea so we can work out production details. Photo images, graphic design and cartoonist/illustrator talents are welcome.

Get training. Addressing the digital divide is a top priority to deliver Region of Peel – Ontario Works and Social Assistance, according to March 2023 update report. Let's unite our efforts to ask for and receive the digital devices, internet and know-how people need to move from survive to thrive.

Secure site safety and minimize distraction. PPAG calls for action, to fix the funding for "Housing First" so that people can feel safe in appropriate affordable housing, and be enabled to take the next steps to self-direct their self-selected lives.

## LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVE - Q&A WITH MICHAEL



Tough Times/ Open Window Hub sat down with Michael to learn more of his journey from experiencing homelessness to finding housing.

### Which topic would you like to address today?

- Mental illness

### Why is this important to you?

- I chose this topic because mental illness is real. Mental illness is just one thing, there are many contributing factors to it. We need to talk about it, to destigmatize what is happening on the streets.

### What is your lived experience of homelessness?

- My experience of homelessness has been a journey. First time was due to addiction (2001), second time was due to mental illness (2003) and the third time was due to HIV and mental illness (2019). My support system was poor, no friends, family or community resources. I was isolated and unable to function within society.

### Have you found housing? If so, when?

- Yes, in 2020 after a year of being homeless, I found a unit after I put out an ad on Facebook. The Region of Peel, Housing Support Worker through the Open Window Hub (Library) assisted me with first and last month's rent. I have now been housed for the past 3 years.

### What do you feel society should know about people with lived experience?

- By focusing on lived experiences, you will learn more about how mental illness plays into our daily lives.

### What do you think the Region of Peel needs to do to address the homelessness, mental illness and poverty crisis we are experiencing?

- It is a crisis, it creates trauma for a person, especially if you are experiencing homelessness and mental illness for an extended time. Homelessness, mental illness and poverty go hand in hand. Many people are struggling, unable to cope and this is where unhealthy life choices/decision arise. The Region of Peel needs to look at housing, making it available, accessible and affordable. We also need to focus on the shelter system. Shelters need more in-house treatment for addictions and mental illness. A treatment program when the person leaves shelter, so they are still supported within the community.

The Region also needs to bring teaching class within group settings to show people how to navigate the system. We need to learn how to cooperate with the support systems, so that we use them appropriately and to better our situation.

### What would make your situation better?

- Knowledge and education building, with lived experience themselves and the community. Library is naturally the largest building in the City to provide resources, use this to the advantage of the Region of Peel.

Financial cost – transportation, getting to and from appointments. At this time, Ontario Works only provides transportation funds if you are going to a minimum number of doctor's appointment. But those on the street or low income, need to obtain food at the food banks, cellphone (for survival purposes).

Access to resources – while many actively search for the support, i.e. psychiatrist, the waitlists are far too long and at times not available.

Time – The first night, I will never forget. I was sitting thinking where do I go, I was in shock. This was the journey for me, for an entire year. It affected my mental health, as I worried about regression, going back to the old Mike, where

addictions were part of my coping strategy. It affected my physical health, I was more aware of my mental health needs, but in turn did have an impact on my physical health, the depression as strong.

### Are you part of any groups who are advocating for those experiencing homelessness?

- This is something I am very passionate about and at this point, I continue to be apart of the Open Window Hub community. The Open Window Hub is an access point to information and resources. The most vulnerable and at risk come through the doors. They are a wealth of knowledge that I am so grateful to have in my life and I wish more people would come to use their services.

### Is there anything else you would like to share?

- For those experiencing mental illness and homelessness, it comes in waves. For many reasons, including safety and comfort, we often cohabitated with other who are experiencing the same issues. If we can work through our trauma this will place us in a better position to move forward.

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@paeh.ca](mailto:daphna@paeh.ca) or 647-461-1383 if you are interested.