

NOVEMBER 2022

# Tough Times

Nothing about Us, Without Us, Is for Us

## WELCOME BACK TO TOUGH TIMES!

Welcome back readers of Tough Times – Peel's only social justice newspaper! It has been a while, but we are back! Tough Times is written by, for, and with people of lived experience of poverty and homelessness. Tough Times is published by the Peel Poverty Action Group (PPAG) with support of the Peel Alliance to End Homelessness (PAEH) and with generous funding from the Region of Peel.

Launched in 2012, Peel Poverty Action Group is a social justice organization composed of lived experts of poverty, housing precarity, homelessness, food insecurity and many organizations, service providers and allies. We are striving to bring lived voices to the forefront of our work, whether that be advocacy, education, mobilizing and government relations. We are working to call in those who wish to listen, engage and include people with lived expertise and people from diverse backgrounds and communities, including refugees and newcomers.

The foundation of PPAG and Tough Times, also started in 2012, is to provide resources, advocacy opportunities and amplify the voices of those unable to speak for themselves. We work collaboratively and progressively with all who are committed to ending poverty, housing insecurity and homelessness. We hope to learn and listen, champion learnings, and provide safe spaces. If you want to get involved with PPAG, or contribute to a future edition of Tough Times, please contact [Daphna@paeh.ca](mailto:Daphna@paeh.ca). People with lived experience of homelessness will receive an honorarium for their contribution to Tough Times.

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## A HERSTORY OF TOUGH TIMES – A TRIBUTE TO EDNA TOTH

By: Michelle Bilek

In knowing that we would be reviving Tough Times, it was important that we acknowledge and honour the woman who started it all – Edna Toth. I first met Edna over 15 years ago, as a political advocate and fierce commitment to social justice. At the time, Edna was involved in many political campaigns and championed local candidates and progressive politics during and in between political campaigns. I learned we had a lot in common (not only political affiliation) but that she was a reader, a lover of water, the sun and feminist issues. We both have Master's Degrees in Women and Gender Studies (which started my ability to hone my own policy skills) where we learned how to deconstruct social norms that oppress and marginalize people. We discussed many feminist academics and their work together and how we need more women leadership, from the Boardroom to Parliament Hill.

I also have to mention that Edna always has another champion by her side. Her husband Mike Toth was a professional soccer player, coach and eventually sportswriter and editor for the Mississauga News and author of the book *To Millennium: Mississauga's Sports Heritage*. Their love story has always been beautiful. They have four children, and I believe, 11 grandchildren. Edna liked to invite many to either "Breakies" at Bobbies (Hideaway) or a swim in the Toth Pool in Streetsville.

In her retirement from being a Librarian with the City of Mississauga Libraries, Edna wanted to provide an opportunity for folks with lived experiences of poverty and homelessness, who she met at Knights Table in Brampton, with an opportunity to share their stories and utilize their experiences to inform advocacy efforts and eventually policy. This was the beginning of Peel Poverty Action Group. PPAG shared a space and held meetings at Knights Table and eventually other locations within Peel. Discussions centred on what people were dealing with, whether that be an eviction, loss of employment, barriers to social assistance, accessibility issues, or even where they were going to sleep for the night. Edna, the warrior she is, would make calls – to politicians, leaders and bureaucrats at the Region of Peel, local program and service providers – basically to anyone who would listen and provide a solution. Everyone listens to Edna, and everyone feared Edna too, because she would let everyone know if you did not respond or addressed the issues that PPAG members were dealing with (letters to councillors, the Mayors, letters to the Editor of Mississauga News and Brampton Guardian).

Tough Times became the tangible means to provide a forum for people with lived experience to contribute and feel part of a community. Articles ranged from providing information on programs and services, to local advocacy efforts, and information on how to seek out supports. Tough Times had focused papers during elections, highlighting candidates and provided means for people with no fixed address to get out and vote.

Tough Times published 10,000 papers every two months and its distribution included libraries in the region and front line programs and services, including Knights Table and Food Banks. We hope to have hard copies available for printing in the new year in addition to the online additions produced and circulated through the Peel Alliance to End Homelessness's website. Past issues of Tough Times from 2012 to 2022 are located here: [Tough Times Tabloid](https://toughtimestabloid.wordpress.com/) (<https://toughtimestabloid.wordpress.com/>)



Edna Toth, Founder of Tough Times (left) and Annie Bynoe, Executive Director of Knight's Table (right)  
(Taken October 12, 2022)

It is with this fierceness and in her honour, we continue the legacy of Peel Poverty Action Group and Tough Times. We hope to do this work justice in the name of our social justice warrior Edna Toth.



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ENCAMPMENTS

By: Mya Moniz

*This story was originally shared as part of the REST Centres' podcast, Homelessness in Hiding: Our Youth Between the Cracks. Episode 17, "The Lived Experience of Encampments", is the final installment of a four-part miniseries on encampment communities, where podcast host and producer Mya Moniz explores the emotional, political, and practical sides of encampment communities to discover their importance in the fight against the housing crisis. This miniseries features the voices of service providers, outreach workers, and, in the case of the Joshua Alexander, the voices of those actively experiencing homelessness in 2022.*

To learn more about Homelessness in Hiding: Our Youth Between the Cracks, visit [Rest Centres' Podcast](http://www.restcentres.org/podcast) ([www.restcentres.org/podcast](http://www.restcentres.org/podcast))

*The thoughts and opinions expressed in this podcast are exclusively those of the hosts and guests involved and have no affiliation with the Restoration and Empowerment for Social Transition Centre or the Peel Poverty Action Group or its affiliates.*

My name is Joshua Alexander, a member of PDAP [the Peel Drug Advisory Panel]; a community worker. I've been living in the Peel Region for quite some time—probably around a decade, myself. I started experiencing homelessness between four and five years ago as a result of, I guess, bad choices, not working, not getting on EI [Employment Insurance], not knowing how to navigate the system.

I guess it all started at the end of a long term relationship. I was with my ex for about 11 years. We broke up permanently approximately four, five years ago, I'd say, and that led me to start using a lot of alcohol and other barred substances and it was a lot of self-destructive behaviour. I was able to sleep on a friend's couch for the better part of a year, but naturally that got old as I wasn't working—I was mostly spending my time using, getting high, and, you know, just taking the house for granted, so they asked me to leave.

I got into the shelter system, which actually led me down the road of more drugs, harder drugs such as crack-cocaine, methamphetamine, and fentanyl. Getting addicted to fentanyl, especially, really meant that all my money, all my resources, every decision I made, every I thought I had, every action I decided to make was about getting drugs, so it didn't matter where I slept. It didn't matter who I was with. As long as I had that high, I was content.

I started going to rehab. I've been to rehab three times, now—most recently CAMH [the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health], which had kept me clean for approximately a month. Then, over the next couple months, I had a few lapses, but overall, I'm battling and trying to find a place to live that's permanent—which is nearly impossible because I'm on Ontario Works [OW] and even with the rent portion, I get \$733 a month. A one-bedroom apartment costs \$1100 to \$1200 or more, so it's very, very, very difficult for me, as a single adult male at 36-years-old to reside in any kind of building or any kind of accommodation, so I've just been sleeping from place to place, tent to tent, doing the best I can to survive. I spent Decembers, Januaries, and Februaries outside in a tent with acetone and propane as my main sources of heat, not knowing what the side effects of that are. If you are in the shelter system, they have a maximum of two weeks for you to somehow find an affordable accommodation.

There are no washrooms, there's stigma behind every store I walk in. If I have dirty hands or if I have a rip in my pants—which, I mean, I'm sure everyone's experienced a rip in their pants whether they have money or not—we're instantly judged. I think it's one of those problems that most people think if you just ignore, it'll go away, but that's not the case. We need help. We need more programs where we are offered more chances to work and contribute to society and to be properly compensated for such work and, therefore, have a chance at some form of shared accommodation. I think there should be some kind of a list of people who are well below the poverty line where, maybe, we can get matched with somebody who we're compatible with who's also on that list and, together, we can make it work in apartment we can afford.

How can we connect with each other if we have no Internet? If we have no cell phones? If we have no access to computers? If we can't go to the library because of a certain look? It's a very common problem that a lot of people in our situation experience. It's terrible, really—it's just painful. It's sad. I can't go stay at my mother's house, and she's the only family member I have within 2000 kilometers of where I live. I have to find a basement, or a stairwell, or some kind of shelter with four walls, that's gonna block me from the wind or the elements. Otherwise, I'm gonna die from exposure, and that's a very, very real and dangerous problem that all of us that are below the poverty line have to face.

This is a first-world country. We spend millions of dollars on decorating our streets, on painting flowerpots and signs and designs and all these cool things that—you know, yeah, first world cities should have—but they shouldn't be hiding homeless people in crevices and corners and alleyways and dark, dingy parking lots. It's really sad because not all homeless people are alcoholics. Not all homeless people are drug addicts. They're just victims of bad luck and put in bad situations. Some people supported their wives or they supported their husbands for years and years and years and then, suddenly, as soon as the other person is in the position that they need to be in, they leave with three, four, five kids and an alimony cheque.

Every individual case is unique and it's diverse, it's dynamic. There are no two examples of homelessness that are the same, but we gotta figure out a way to help everyone, and I think that the key is look at these individual cases and start developing programs that will affect everyone and get everyone into the system and get help—true help. And the sad part is if you say to OW that you use shelter, you lose \$400. Now you have \$333 a month to play with, to try to find accommodation. If you can get first and last—if you're not eligible, if used it in last two years—it's impossible on \$333 to feed and clothe and house yourself, not including your children. Even food banks are running out of food for homeless people, and that's scary. When homeless people don't have access to food, then you have things like diseases, then you have things like MRSA [Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, a staph infection that's difficult to treat because of its resistance to a number of antibiotics].

I don't wanna be homeless. I wanna go back to school. I want an education. I have goals. I have dreams. I wanna have a family. I don't have kids right now because I know I can't afford to have kids right now. I want a house, but I know I can't afford a house. I need a partner for a house, maybe even two partners for a house. I want to start a business. My dream, personally, is to work in IT [information technology]. I want a nice desk job, working with Cisco Systems. It's only a two-year program or, at most, three-year program, but I can't afford that right now, being in the position I am. I have to feed, clothe, and somehow shelter myself.

MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus): <https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/index.html>

# ONTARIO PROVIDING MORE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IN MISSISSAUGA

Province's investment helps vulnerable populations at risk of, or experiencing homelessness

News release published October 13, 2022



Photo by: Matt Bremier/Indwell.

Mississauga — The Ontario government is providing over \$4.5 million to help create 40 supportive housing units.

Two former private seniors group homes are being incorporated into a new development by Indwell, to provide supportive housing for people dealing with mental health and addiction issues, racialized groups and homeless people or those at risk of homelessness.

Located at 25 Thomas Street in the old village of Streetsville, the complex will contain 40 studio apartments, 10 of which are barrier-free, each with its own kitchen and bath. There are several common areas including a roof deck, servery and community space that can hold up to 40 people.

“Our government is getting shovels in the ground and building homes across Ontario through innovation and collaboration with all of our partners in the housing sector,” said Michael Parsa, Associate Minister of Housing for Ontario. “We’re pleased to support this important project in Mississauga, which will allow community members who need it most the ability to build their future in an affordable, safe and secure home.”

The new development will preserve and incorporate two listed heritage properties located at 25 Thomas Street and 253 Victoria Street. Finished landscaping will include Indigenous plantings and a private terrace. The building is also close to grocery stores, schools, parks, transit, and employment opportunities.

As highlighted in [Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy](#), this initiative is part of the province's Social Services Relief Fund, which has provided over \$1.2 billion of support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, to help municipalities and Indigenous program partners create longer-term housing solutions and help vulnerable Ontarians, including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Ontario government is also investing an additional \$25 million annually in our new Homelessness Prevention Program. The new program simplifies and streamlines operations so municipal service managers can spend less time on paperwork and more time working with their clients to help find housing and other supports and help those at risk of homelessness stay in their homes. The additional funding brings Ontario's total yearly investment in the program to close to \$464 million.

News Release: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002386/ontario-providing-more-supportive-housing-in-mississauga>



## LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVE - Q&A WITH GIOVANNA

*Giovanna is a resident in Peel with lived experience who advocates for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. Here she discusses her own experience; share her views on the challenges affecting the Region and offers advice for those who want to be more involved.*

### **Can you share your lived experience?**

My lived experience consists of facing multiple types of abuse, living alone and having to leave work at a young age and receiving a low income. Also, experiencing a lot of fear and mental or brain illness.

### **Do you currently have housing?**

Yes, I am housed. I received it in the beginning of the summer in 2006.

### **What kind of work are you doing now?**

I have a home based business. It involves providing services for others and providing items that people may use every day. I also do advocacy. It may be inside or outside of court. I am involved in a lived experience table where we discuss various topics of need. I also serve the community in advocating for housing, financial and safety issues.

### **What are some of the biggest problems in Peel affecting unhoused and low-income people?**

One of the biggest problems affecting unhoused and people of low income is not having more designated or finalized spots for those on the street to sleep in for 7 or 8 hours per night in the 2022, 2023 winter cold. It is now November and there is nothing finalized.

Another problem is of course, not having enough buildings erected for subsidized housing especially when the list is long. Many homeless individuals are not receiving housing, primarily.

### **What would you tell people who are interested in becoming advocates for the homeless?**

I would tell people who are interested in being an advocate for the homeless to get involved with their municipal government and federal government. Speak to them directly. Set up a meeting with them. Email them and encourage many others to do the same and to join you in these efforts either on their own or directly with you.

### **What does the Region need to do to improve the quality of life for people who are experiencing homelessness and poverty?**

The Region needs to cover all areas of need for those who are homeless and experience a low income. This includes housing, mental health, hospitalization, medical care, finances, food, foot care, clothing, all social services, entertainment, legal services and also spiritual services and health and cleaning products.

### **What would you like people reading this article to do or to know?**

For those reading this article, what I would like you to work together or beside others, with your unique skills, abilities and desires to improve your life and others lives. Work on your dreams every day. Believe that change will happen. It can happen. Believe in yourself and others. Encourage others. Never ever, ever give up. Keep pressing on. Your dreams and efforts matter. Stay strong and live courageously.

# 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).



**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](tel:647-461-1383) if you are interested.**