

PARRY SOUND HOMELESSNESS SYMPOSIUM

Presented by OrgCode Consulting
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A close-up photograph of a hand wearing a black, textured glove. The hand is holding a small, rectangular cardboard house with a square window cutout. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Change is Hard

***Why communities must
shift from reacting to
visible homelessness to
preventing it.***

About OrgCode

OrgCode Consulting Inc. strengthens Housing Solutions Systems and homeless services, develops leaders, and turns good intentions into measurable outcomes.

We're merry misfits in a sector that can't afford complacency: curious, candid, and deeply allergic to performative solutions.

We advance ideas, build practical tools, and deliver training that doesn't suck.



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THE INITIAL ASK WAS ENCAMPMENTS. THE REAL ISSUE WAS BIGGER.



We were initially engaged to support an encampment response review.



The original question focused on how the community should respond to visible homelessness and outdoor sleeping.



As with many communities, the presenting issue appeared to be encampments/Individuals sleeping rough, but the underlying issues were broader.



Our role was to assess what was happening, what was driving demand, and what would create sustainable change.



HOW WE APPROACHED THE WORK

Reviewed data, policies, and current practices

Met with leaders, frontline staff, and community partners

Examined pathways into and out of homelessness

Assessed demand pressures and service capacity

Tested assumptions against local realities

Built practical recommendations tied to implementation



ENCAMPMENTS WERE VISIBLE. HOUSING INSTABILITY WAS WIDESPREAD.



Early in the work, it became clear that encampments were a symptom, not the root issue.



Different partners were using different language, definitions, and assumptions about what they were seeing.



Without shared definitions, communities risk solving different problems at the same time.



The project shifted from a narrow encampment lens to building a common understanding of homelessness pressures and system needs.



SHARED DEFINITIONS AND SHARED UNDERSTANDING

- What is homelessness?
- What is unsheltered homelessness?
- What is an encampment versus rough sleeping?
- What is prevention versus response?
- What outcomes matter most?

Without shared definitions:

- Data becomes unreliable
- Roles become blurred
- Resources are misdirected
- Public frustration grows
- Progress is harder to measure

Shared language creates better decisions, clearer roles, and stronger accountability.



WHAT THE LOCAL DATA TOLD US

- Visible unsheltered homelessness existed, but at lower levels than assumed
- A larger number of households were living on the edge of homelessness
- Demand for prevention and emergency responses was rising
- Housing affordability was worsening faster than system capacity could respond
- Hidden homelessness was significant and often overlooked

The greatest opportunity was reducing inflow, not only managing visible homelessness



THE REAL FOCUS – DATA AND PREVENTION

Better local data to understand demand, inflow, acuity, and outcomes

Stronger visibility into who is entering homelessness and why

Prevention strategies to reduce inflow before crisis occurs

Earlier interventions with households at risk

Better alignment between municipal leadership and service delivery

Moving from reacting to visible homelessness toward reducing homelessness overall

Communities that understand inflow can reduce demand before crisis occurs.



KEY TAKE AWAYS

Visible homelessness is only one part of the challenge

Prevention delivers better outcomes at lower cost than crisis response

Shared definitions create better governance and accountability

Better data leads to smarter investment decisions

Communities that act early avoid larger pressures later



WHY THIS MATTERS

- Public pressure increases when visible homelessness grows
- Emergency responses are expensive and reactive
- Prevention protects people and public resources
- Clear governance builds trust with residents
- Leadership alignment determines whether systems improve



WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE



Fewer households entering homelessness



Faster resolution when homelessness occurs



Better use of emergency resources



Stronger collaboration across sectors



Public confidence in local leadership



COMMUNITIES DO NOT SOLVE HOMELESSNESS BY BECOMING BETTER AT MANAGING CRISIS. THEY SOLVE IT BY REDUCING THE NEED FOR CRISIS IN THE FIRST PLACE.



THANK YOU

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