

SAINT JOHN'S 2018 PROGRESS REPORT on HOMELESSNESS

May 2019

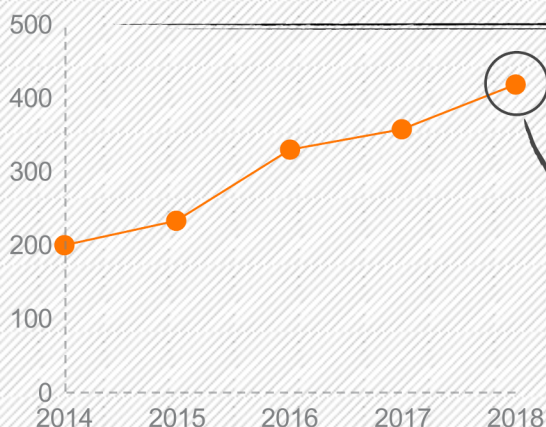


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HOMELESSNESS in SAINT JOHN

Highlights from the **2018** Progress Report



Saint John has seen a consistent annual increase in the number of people using emergency shelters, with a total of **417** in 2018



Emergency shelters had a combined **107%** bed occupancy rate

■ individuals

Average number of nights spent in an emergency shelter

28



1,155 public housing units

A decrease of **4** from 2017

1,038 rent supplements

An increase of **15** over 2017



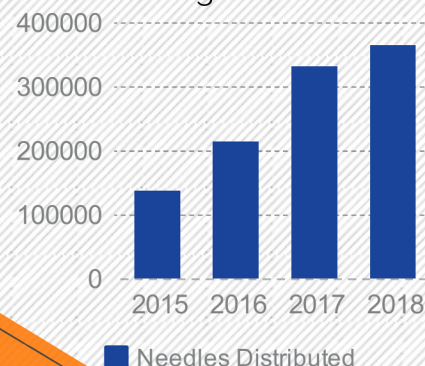
1,796

of people on the waiting list for affordable housing in the SJ region*

An increase of **228** over 2017

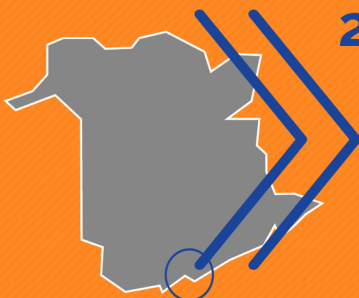
363,819

needles distributed through the Needle Exchange Program



Point in Time Count

Over a 24 hr period, **113** people experiencing homelessness were surveyed.



25% Identified as Indigenous

27% Were youth aged 16-24

48% Were in need of access to mental health counselling.



Human Development Council

*Social Development Region 2 encompasses the area from Sussex to St. Stephen

Find the full report at www.sjhdc.ca



Saint John Community Council on Homelessness

Introduction

Over the past several decades, mass homelessness has proven to be one of the greatest social challenges facing our country. Since its emergence in the 1980s, following a massive disinvestment in affordable housing and reduced spending on social supports, we have failed to see any meaningful large-scale reduction in homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2016). In some respect, this has been due to a predominantly reactionary response (the provision of emergency services), rather than a focus on preventative measures. However, in many cases, there has also been a lack of reliable data which would allow for a better understanding of the issue and, therefore, a more informed approach to ending homelessness.

In an attempt to contribute to this understanding in Saint John, the Human Development Council releases an annual Progress Report on Homelessness. Highlighting statistics on affordable housing, shelter use, and housing placements, as well as important events and updates from service providers, the report serves as an annual check-in on our progress toward ending homelessness. As with previous years, our 2018 report highlights some notable areas of progress as well as those of concern. Overall, Saint John saw a 17 percent increase in the number of individuals who used an emergency shelter. On average, these individuals were visiting the shelters more often and staying longer (an average of 28 nights). Not surprisingly, this led to a significant increase in shelter occupancy rates, putting them over 100 percent for 2018. Additionally, we saw more needles than ever before distributed through the Needle Exchange Program and Romero House served more meals than in any year since opening in 1982. **One fact remains clear: the level of need in Saint John has not diminished and despite best efforts, much of that need is not being met.**

In some respect, 2018 may have served as a wake-up call. With a notable increase in the rates of rough sleeping and shelter use in the three largest cities in the province, the news media began to take a closer look at the issue. The spotlight this shone contributed to a public call for more supports for those experiencing homelessness. But while there is widespread agreement that more supports are needed, the question is, will these supports bring about an end to homelessness? We know that the solution to homelessness is housing, but increasingly this seems to be an insufficient response. The reality is that over the last couple of years, Saint John's housing programs have housed more people than ever before. These are successful programs, meeting or exceeding their targets. Over the same period, however, our emergency shelters have largely been at or over capacity. This means that although progress has been made in housing individuals, it hasn't corresponded to any significant progress in reducing homelessness in Saint John. **Increasingly, communities are understanding that in order to achieve this reduction, a coordinated response is needed. Fortunately, in this area, Saint John is seeing meaningful progress.**



The Data

Over the past several years, tools for homelessness data collection, management, and measurement have significantly improved. However, for many years there existed no common data management software for emergency shelters in this country. Consequently, there was a significant lack of reliable and representative data on homelessness across Canada. This changed with the development of HIFIS (Homeless Individuals and Families Information System) in 1999. This federal software allows for a level of consistency in data collection and has, over time, offered a better understanding of homelessness (particularly shelter use) in Saint John, throughout the province, and across the country more broadly. Today over 500 service providers across the country track data through HIFIS.

Still, there are significant gaps in the data. For example, we are not unable to reliably assess the number of individuals who are hidden homeless (couch surfing) or at risk of homelessness – though we can say, based on anecdotal evidence, the number is significant. We are also currently unable to pinpoint the exact number of individuals who entered homelessness in 2018 versus those who exited. However, with the introduction of a By-Name-List (BNL) in November of 2018, we have begun to collect that information (read more on the BNL on page 15). In the near future, these tools will allow us to more accurately report on our reduction in homeless. In the meantime, however, we can piece together certain indicators to show where progress is being made and what challenges persist.

HIFIS 4.0

In 2018 the Human Development Council began implementing HIFIS 4.0 in New Brunswick. Unlike previous versions of HIFIS, which did not allow for the sharing of data, HIFIS 4 is a web-based community platform that promotes Coordinated Access amongst service providers. In addition to being user-friendly and easily accessible on personal electronic devices (e.g., computers, tablets, and mobile devices), HIFIS 4 assists in daily operations and promotes data-sharing amongst service providers.

As already mentioned, shelter use is one of those indicators on which we can reliably report from year to year, thanks to HIFIS. All emergency shelters in New Brunswick, as well as many other service providers, manage and track data through HIFIS, providing us with a reliable and consistent source of data. This report highlights shelter use data from Saint John's emergency shelters on page 8. Other tools, such as Point-in-Time (PiT) Counts complement our shelter use data and allow us to gather information on rough sleepers (e.g., on the street, in parks, etc.). In 2018, Saint John conducted its second PiT Count. Importantly, this includes a survey component, which allows us to better understand the demographics and service needs of our homeless population. This information is highlighted on pages 10 and 11. We also draw on data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), New Brunswick Social Development, and Statistics Canada (on the following page), to provide context for local housing challenges. These indicators, when considered alongside our shelter statistics and PiT Count findings, provide valuable insight as to the challenges our community continues to face in accessing affordable housing.

Housing Indicators

The table below highlights some informative indicators, including the number of Public Housing units, number of rent supplements, and the number of families on the waiting list for affordable housing in the Saint John region. These are important factors for consideration - particularly when comparing from one year to the next. Over the past few years the Saint John region has seen an increasingly long waiting list for affordable housing, without a corresponding increase in public housing units. While Social Development has increased the number of rent supplements in the region year over year (a favourable trend), it has not been nearly enough to meet the needs of those seeking affordable housing. The unfortunate lack of suitable housing options is compounded by a basic social assistance rate of \$537 which has not been increased since 2010, a rising cost of rent, and decreasing vacancy rates.

While the low social assistance rate has long been a challenge in this area, rising rents and decreasing vacancy rates are a relatively new factor. As the table below indicates, the current vacancy rate in Saint John is less than 4 percent. This is significantly lower than the nearly 10 percent vacancy rate that the city was accustomed to only a couple of years ago. While this is promising for our economy, it poses a very real challenge for housing programs and individuals seeking affordable housing. When vacancy rates are low, landlords can raise rents. While Saint John is certainly due for an increase in rental costs, having enjoyed some of the lowest rates of any urban centre in Canada, increased rents can snowball and quickly become higher than what is approved for a rent subsidy from NB Housing. If that's the case, the overall pool of available affordable housing shrinks considerably. Additionally, higher rents may mean property owners will be less likely to participate in the rent supplement program. If landlords believe they can collect higher rent from the general rental market than by having a rent subsidy attached to the unit, they'll likely choose the former. Taken together, all of these factors mean that for many of our city's most vulnerable people, affordable housing is simply out of reach.

In 2018 the Common Front for Social Justice launched a campaign to have Social Assistance rates in New Brunswick increased. According to the Common Front, the current basic rate of **\$537**, indexed to inflation, would be **\$604.18**. While still significantly below the average rent for a one bedroom in Saint John (highlighted in the table below), this increase would compensate recipients for the loss in purchasing power they have experienced over the last ten years, due to inflation. (Common Front, 2018).

Housing Indicators		
	2017	2018
Number of public housing units	1159	1155
Number of rent supplements	1038	1053
# of people on waiting list (SJ region*)	1568	1796
Social Assistance Rate (single individual)	\$537	\$537
Percentage of Households in core housing need**	8.8% (2016)	8.8% (2016)
Average rent for a 1 bedroom	\$623	\$648
Average rent for a 2 bedroom	\$747	\$755
Vacancy rate for a 1 bedroom	5.2%	3.7%
Overall Vacancy rate (SJ CMA)	4.7%	3.7%

* This region (Social Development Region 2) encompasses the area from Sussex to St. Stephen

**Core housing need refers to households which are unable to afford shelter that meet adequacy, suitability, and affordability norms. Sources: National Household Survey, 2011 & Census, 2016

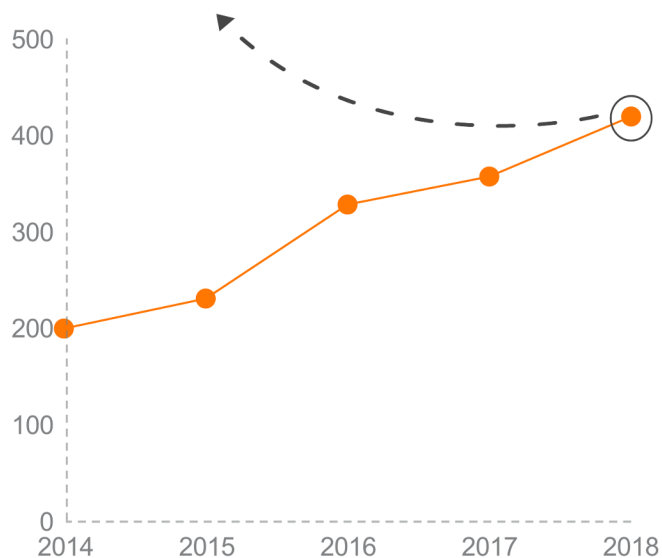
Shelter Statistics

There was a 17 percent increase in the number of individuals who used an emergency shelter in 2018. A total of 417 unique individuals were recorded in 2018, compared to 356 in 2017. This increase is in line with a developing and concerning trend over the past several years, highlighted in the graph below. The surge in shelter use was evident in both our men's and women's shelters, with each tracking their highest numbers ever. Coverdale, Saint John's women's emergency shelter, admitted a total of 107 women - a 15 percent increase over 2017. Outflow, the men's shelter, saw an 18 percent increase over last year, with 310 men. A breakdown of the individual shelters' statistics is found on the following page.

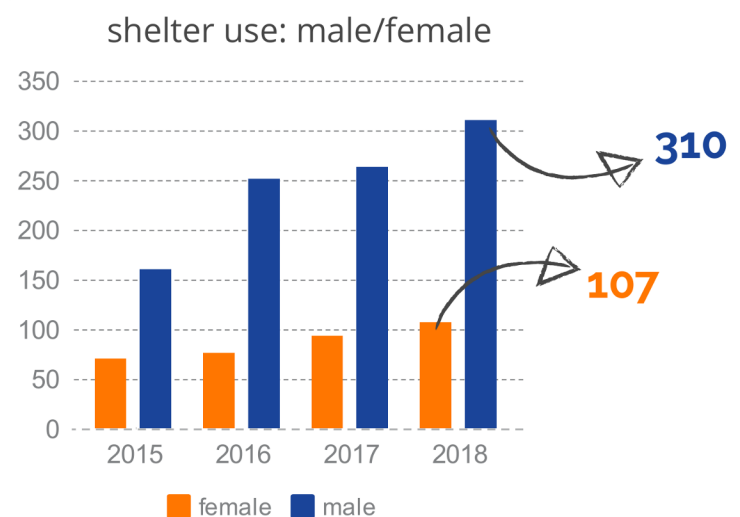
Not surprisingly, the increase in individuals corresponded to a spike in occupancy rates as well. Representing the ratio of beds occupied over the year versus the total number of beds in the shelters, this number essentially tells us how full the shelters were over the course of the year. In 2018, the shelters had a combined occupancy rate of 107 percent - a 21 percent increase over 2017. This clearly demonstrates the considerable stress that shelters are experiencing. A greater than 100 percent occupancy rate also means the inevitability of turn-aways. However, occupancy rate, while a valuable indicator, does not tell the whole story. Anecdotally, shelters have also experienced a dramatic increase in complex needs among their clients, particularly mental health and substance use issues. As these issues increase, the burden on shelters, which are typically not equipped with mental health professionals or addictions specialists, only becomes exacerbated. This context is not evident in the shelter data presented here. However, more on addictions and mental health will be covered later in the report.

Combined Emergency Shelters (Outflow & Coverdale)			
	2017	2018	Change
Occupancy Rate	86%	107%	↑
Total number of unique individuals	356	417	↑
Total number of nights stayed	9,396	11,700	↑
Average length of stay in a shelter (per visit)	5.2	4.4	↓
Average number of nights stayed per client (over the year)	26	28	↑
Number of Youth (24 or younger)	56	69	↑

417 people used an emergency shelter in 2018



■ individuals



Outflow Men's Shelter				
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of Unique Individuals	160	251	263	310
Average # of Nights Stayed	32	29	29	30
Occupancy Rate	70%	98%	103%	128%
Average Age	44	39	40	40
Number of Youth (24 or younger)	20 (13%)	36 (14%)	34 (13%)	44 (14%)

Saint John's men's shelter is operated by Outflow Ministry. In 2018 Outflow had a 20 bed capacity with an additional 10 overflow cots (allowing for a greater than 100 percent bed occupancy, reflected above). Since 2015 Outflow has seen a consistent increase in the number of men who use the shelter. It has also seen a corresponding increase in occupancy rate, with a staggering 128% in 2018. Although there had been a modest decrease in the average length of stay in 2016 and 2017 (an encouraging sign), we saw a slight increase in 2018, with men staying an average of 30 nights in the shelter. Without an emergency shelter for youth in the area we continue to see a high number of homeless individuals aged 24 or younger accessing the adult shelter, with a total of 44 staying at Outflow in 2018.

Coverdale Centre for Women				
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of Unique Individuals	70	76	93	107
Average # of Nights Stayed	15.2	21.6	20	22
Occupancy Rate	N/A	N/A*	50.3%	64.6%
Average Age	36	34	37	36
Number of Youth (24 or younger)	18 (26%)	21 (28%)	22 (24%)	25 (23%)

Coverdale Centre for Women is Saint John's emergency women's shelter. The shelter has a 10 bed capacity and saw a 64.6% occupancy rate for 2018. While this is much lower than the 128% occupancy rate at Outflow, it is important to note that homelessness looks much different for women than for men, and that women experience higher rates of hidden homelessness (as do youth). Therefore, while shelter statistics are an important part of the story, they aren't always indicative of how many women are in fact experiencing homelessness. In addition to serving more women in 2018 than ever before, Coverdale saw an increase in the length of stay per client and continued to see a high percentage of youth accessing the shelter.



Average number of nights spent in an emergency shelter...

for women:

22



for men:

30



While the number of unique individuals who used a shelter is an important indicator of stress on our homeless-serving system, equally as important is how long those individuals are staying. The longer an individual remains homeless, the more complex their situation becomes and the more difficult it will be to exit homelessness. In 2018 the average length of stay for both men and women increased - by one and two nights, respectively.

* The 2016 version of this report relied on room-based occupancy. More recent versions have used a more informative indicator for occupancy rate: bed based.

Point-in-Time Count

On March 15th, 2018, Saint John took part in the second nationally coordinated Point-in-Time Count under the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). The first count, conducted in 2016, included 32 cities. In 2018, more than 60 communities took part.

A PiT Count provides a community with a snapshot of homelessness over a 24-hour period. As a method for data collection, a PiT Count is particularly helpful in estimating the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and unsheltered locations. However, more than capturing that number, the Count also includes a survey component. This survey allows communities to collect valuable information on those who are experiencing homelessness, including demographic information and service needs. When done repeatedly, over a number of years, a PiT Count can help communities evaluate their progress in reducing homelessness and track changes in the homeless population. When considered alongside other measurement tools such as local progress reports (like this one) and shelter statistics, the findings of a PiT Count can help to provide a better understanding of a community's homeless population. Below are a few key findings from the 2018 PiT Count.

16% of respondents identified as LGBTQ2S+

Members of the LGBTQ2S+ community are understood to be at an increased risk of facing homelessness. However, because we do not gather statistics on sexual orientation in the general population, this is difficult to confirm. At the same time, given that there are no specialized LGBTQ2S+ shelter options in New Brunswick, and very few specialized programs from which to gather data, our local figure of 16% could very well be conservative.

Mental health & substance use were the 2 most commonly identified health issues identified by respondents

Mental Health and/or substance use disorder is a commonly cited reason for people's housing loss, and typically homelessness only further complicates an individual's road to recovery. 48% of those who responded said they were currently experiencing challenges with their mental health and 31% were suffering from an active addiction. These findings point to the importance of programs that can quickly move homeless people into permanent, affordable, and adequate housing while providing them with the necessary supports to achieve stability in both their housing and quality of life.

Indigenous peoples are significantly over-represented in homelessness

Indigenous peoples continue to be disproportionately affected by homelessness. While 4 percent of New Brunswickers identified as having indigenous identity in the 2016 census, 25% of individuals surveyed in the 2018 PiT Count reported indigenous identity or ancestry. These findings are consistent with national trends and are a startling indicator of overrepresentation.

POINT IN TIME COUNT

24-HOUR HOMELESS COUNT

MARCH 15 2018

SAINT JOHN, NB



48

Volunteers



117

People Counted



113

Completed the Survey



22 %

Moved to Saint John in the Past Year



54% Male
44% Female
2% Transgender, Two-Spirit, or Genderqueer



25 %

Identified as Indigenous or of Indigenous Ancestry

SLEEPING LOCATIONS

39 %



Emergency Shelter / Domestic Violence Shelter

39 %



Transitional Shelter / Housing

11 %



Hospital / Jail / Prison / Remand Centre

9 %



Someone Else's Place

2 %

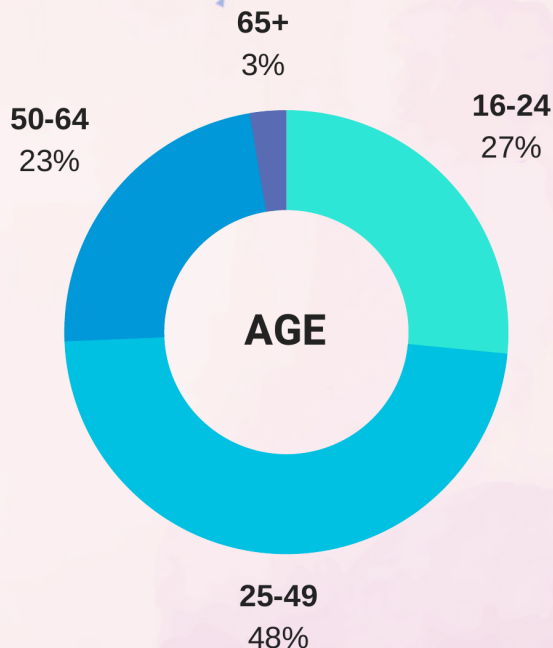


Public Space (Sidewalk / Park / Bus Shelter)

1 %



Other Unsheltered Location



REASON FOR HOUSING LOSS



Incarceration



Addiction / Substance Abuse



Domestic Abuse

MOST REQUESTED SERVICES



Mental Health Counseling



Addiction/Substance Use Supports



Interventions for Serious Medical Conditions

The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is a strategy to help determine the extent of homelessness in a community at a single point in time. PIT counts allow a community to better understand the nature of homelessness and the demographics of the homeless population. Conducting a PIT count is a first step in creating future measures towards reducing homelessness. This project was funded in part by the Government of Canada Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The count occurred in Bathurst, Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John.



Housing Programs

Saint John has a number of shelters and other homeless-specific service providers that offer a vital service for individuals experiencing homelessness. However, the intention is always to allow individuals to move along the housing continuum and find safe, secure, affordable housing. To help in this process, Saint John has several housing programs, funded through the federal and provincial governments and delivered by non-profit agencies. The programs highlighted here: **Housing First** and **Organized Departures (ODP)**, operated by Housing Alternatives Inc., target specific populations with complex needs, all of whom are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. These are direct housing programs that focus on affordability and stable tenancy and operate according to a Housing First principle: immediate access to housing without readiness conditions (e.g., sobriety). Through these programs, a total of 45 individuals were housed in 2018 - just two fewer than the previous year. Stability rates (i.e., the portion of clients who are able to retain their housing after a certain period of time) continue to be very high, speaking to the overall efficacy of these programs.

It is important to note that although these are the largest housing programs in the city, there are other NGO-operated programs as well. Additionally, many individuals who lack safe, affordable housing find placements through New Brunswick Social Development. While those numbers are not captured here, 2018 was a landmark year for bringing these players together and working in a coordinated fashion (a topic discussed more on the following pages). As this coordination increases and we focus on consistent cross-sectoral collection of data, our housing numbers will become more complete and present a more full picture of the "outflow" from our homeless-serving system.

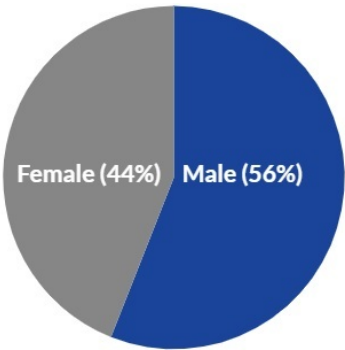
Housing First & Organized Departures Moves

	2017	2018
Total Intakes	69	70
Total Moves	47	45
Organized Departure Moves	34	37
Housing First Moves	13	8



■ Housed for 12+ Months (84%)
■ Housed for less than 12 Months (16%)

Stability rates for each program continue to be well above what would typically be expected from these types of programs. According to best practices, about 75-80% of moderate acuity clients (those supported by ODP) would be expected to be stable after one year. For high acuity clients (those supported through the Housing First program) the expectation would be closer to 70-75%. The 84% stability rate of Housing Alternative's clients after 12 months demonstrates the effectiveness of these programs.



Historically, the ratio of male to female moves has been almost exactly 50:50. Having slightly higher numbers of male moves in 2018 might speak to the fact that the men's shelter was over capacity for much of the year.

Coordinating Our Approach to Homelessness

As already mentioned, Saint John's housing programs have housed more people over the past two years than ever before. Not only that, but stability rates for these clients have been higher than expected. These are successful programs, meeting or exceeding their targets. At the same time, however, our emergency shelters have been at or over capacity for much of that time. This means that although progress has been made in housing individuals, it hasn't corresponded to any significant progress in reducing homelessness in Saint John. Increasingly, communities are understanding that in order to achieve this reduction, a coordinated response is needed.

Like many complex social issues, homelessness is touched by a number of different systems: Health, Justice, Education, Social Development, and the non-profit sector, to name just a few. The complexity of these systems on their own is one thing, but navigating all of them at once in order to access services and find housing can be a frustrating and difficult task. Luckily, there are models that have shown incredible promise in addressing these challenges and ending chronic homelessness. These models are known as **Coordinated Access Systems (CAS)**. A Coordinated Access System is a homeless-serving system in which all homeless-serving agencies, as well as government and public systems such as those mentioned above, are all communicating, using common forms and assessments, and actively referring identified homeless individuals to appropriate resources. Implementing this type of system, while a good deal of work, is now seen as an essential component of ending homelessness.

Helping Saint John along this path is Built For Zero Canada (BFZ-C): an ambitious national change effort helping a core group of leading communities end chronic homelessness in Canada. As a member of Built for Zero, Saint John is committed to developing a better understanding of our homeless population through the use of a By-Name List (see page 15 for more details) and allowing data to inform and drive our actions. BFZ-C emerged out of the 20K Homes Campaign, of which Saint John was also a member. In early 2019, the 20K Homes Campaign surpassed its goal of housing 20,000 of Canada's most vulnerable homeless people and turned its attention to ending chronic homelessness in Canada.



Barrier Busting Bash

Early in 2018 the Community Council on Homelessness began planning an event that would bring together multiple sectors to discuss barriers that individuals face in moving from homelessness to housing. Dubbed a "barrier busting bash", the event was seen as a way to not only address significant barriers to housing individuals, but also identify the inherent issues with the current silo-structure of the homeless-serving system. By doing so, it would serve as a jumping off point for conversations around Coordinated Access in Saint John.

In order to identify barriers, surveys were distributed to homeless-specific agencies and focus groups were held with individuals with lived experience. Certain barriers that were identified were specific policies, such as the Household Income Policy, which makes it difficult for individuals on Social Assistance to share accommodations while maintaining separate cheques. Other barriers were more broad, such as the stigma associated with mental health issues and substance use disorder.

On the day of the event, each identified barrier was contained within a journey mapping exercise. In partnership with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), a small working group of the CCH developed three different profiles and scripts for service providers (e.g., social assistance, NB Housing, the emergency shelters, Service NB, etc). Each participant was assigned one of these profiles and had to navigate that individual's journey through homelessness. Once the exercise was complete, groups discussed the types of barriers that they had encountered and what the reason was for that particular barrier. Many common themes emerged, including: a lack of communication between service providers (including a lack of understanding of other service providers' policies or procedures) and the need for individuals to bounce from one agency to another (potentially over an extended period of time) before securing the help they need. These issues are not unique to Saint John and are they types of problems that are addressed by implementing a Coordinated Access System.



Representatives from a variety of sectors gather at the Nick Nicolle Centre for the Barrier Busting Bash

Saint John's Housing Blitz

The Fall of 2018 brought with it increasing concern among front-line workers in Saint John's homeless-serving sector. Not only were emergency shelters reporting elevated occupancy rates (often exceeding capacity), service providers in the Waterloo Village were also noting an increase in rough sleeping. Outflow, with a maximum capacity of 30 beds, was forced to turn away 34 individuals in the month of November as a result of being overcapacity. At the same time, temperatures were beginning to drop and a response to the crisis was needed. On November 20th, 2018, a community meeting was held to determine what that response should be.

Out of the Cold Shelter?

One common response to this type of scenario is the creation of additional, temporary shelters. These Out of the Cold Shelters are often crucial in filling a gap – providing additional warmth and shelter during cold months. However, while they are often necessary, they are also expensive to operate, unstable, and do not address the structural or situational issues that lead to homelessness in the first place. Considering this, the community opted to take a different approach. As with opening a temporary shelter, the aim would still be to increase the availability of shelter beds. However, the community agreed to do this by housing people. A request was made to New Brunswick Social Development for 15 rent supplements as well as funding to support a number of moves from the shelters into permanent housing. The funding was approved.

Creating a By Name List

In order to determine which individuals would get a rent supplement, the community adopted an emerging best practice in the homelessness sector: the creation of a By Name List (BNL). While the shelters and Fresh Start began to do intakes and referrals, backbone support was provided by the Human Development Council to begin building and populating the BNL. Within a month, more than 60 individuals had been added to the list. When adding someone to the BNL we collect not only their name but a variety of information (current living situation, age, how long they've been homeless, if they are a member of a priority population, etc). All of this information helps to prioritize people based on their level of need and vulnerability. Beginning in December, a Housing Blitz Committee was formed and would meet on a weekly basis to review the BNL and connect individuals to the 15 rent supplements at our disposal. Throughout this project (from December 2018 – April 2019), more than 20 people were housed. The diagram below provides more details on the process of adding individuals to the BNL and prioritizing them for housing. This process - and the community's use of a BNL - will continue and expand as we move toward a Coordinated Access System.

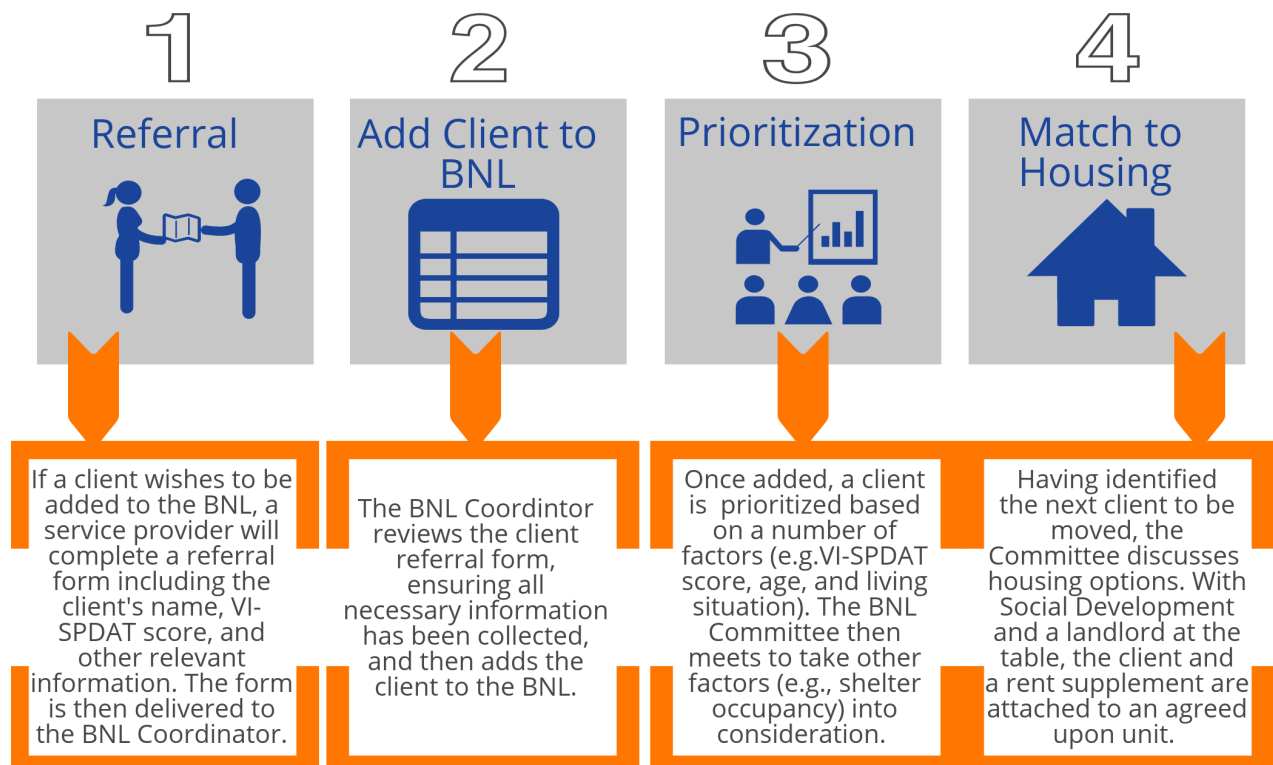
What is a By Name List?

A By-Name List (BNL) is a real-time list of all people experiencing homelessness in your community. It includes a robust set of data points that support coordinated access and prioritization at a household level and an understanding of homeless inflow and outflow at a system level. This real-time actionable data supports triage to services, system performance evaluation and advocacy (for the policies and resources necessary to end homelessness). BNLs have quickly become a best practice for communities working to end homelessness.



Members of the Housing Blitz Committee meet at the Social Enterprise Hub

HOUSING BLITZ PROCESS



Harm Reduction

As highlighted in our 2017 Progress Report*, a number of agencies and programs in Saint John operate according to a principle of harm reduction. This essential evidence-based approach aims to reduce the adverse health, social and economic consequences of substance use without requiring abstinence. At its core, harm reduction acknowledges that with proper supports in place, risk can be mitigated. Increasingly, this approach is becoming more relevant in the homeless serving sector, as the opioid crisis continues to claim the lives of Canadians, including those in New Brunswick. More than 10,300 lives were lost between 2016 and 2018 due to apparent opioid related overdose across the country. In New Brunswick, approximately 19 individuals died from an apparent opioid related incident between January and September of 2018 (Statistics Canada, 2019).

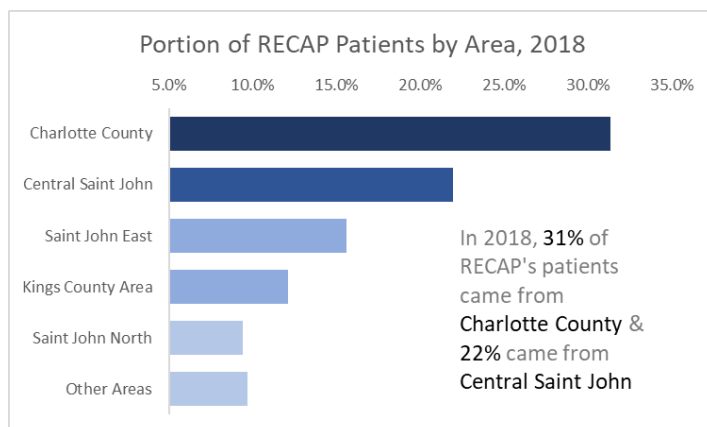
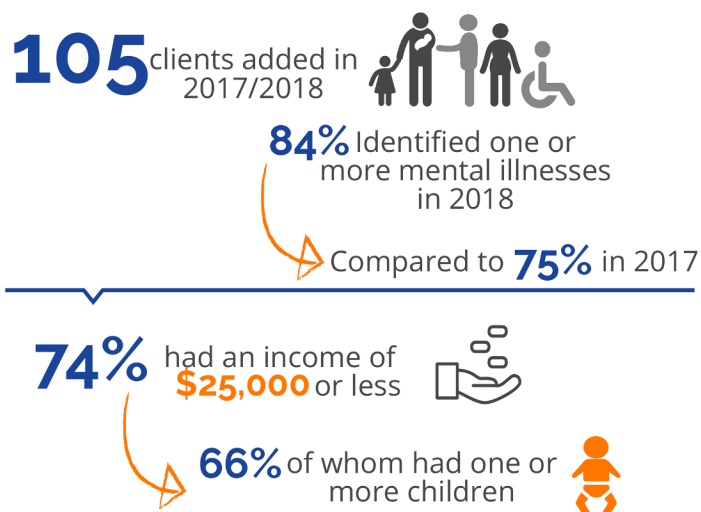
In 2018, Saint John hosted its first Harm Reduction Symposium: Sounding the Alarm. Based on its success, a second Symposium was held in early 2019, focusing on awareness, education and potential strategies to address both urban and rural concerns regarding mental health and substance use challenges facing individuals and families in New Brunswick. This section highlights some of the local statistics, agencies, and initiatives related to harm reduction in Saint John.

Interested in taking action?

The Harm Reduction Nurses Association is open to any service provider and students interested in harm reduction initiatives. Find out more at www.hrna-aiirm.ca

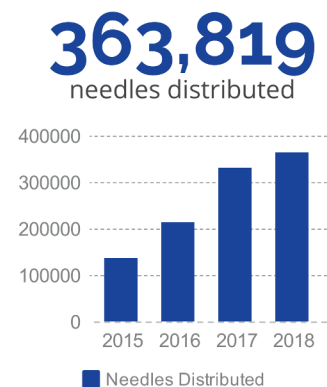
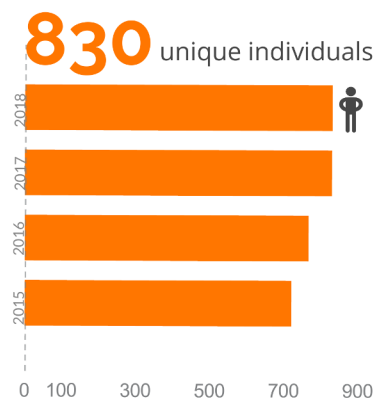


RECAP (Research, Education, Clinical Care for at Risk Populations) is a community access clinic in Waterloo village rooted in the care of patients with Hepatitis C. Using a harm reduction approach, RECAP is focused on lessening the negative consequences of problematic substance use through individualized and family holistic care including opiate substitution therapy (OST), primary care, psychology, specialist care in infectious diseases, internal medicine and pediatrics. Since 2014, 380 people have consented to being added to RECAP's database, 105 of those in 2017/2018.





Avenue B Harm Reduction Inc. (formerly known as AIDS Saint John) offers a Harm Reduction based Needle Distribution Program in the greater Saint John area and beyond. They provide support services for people who use drugs and who are at risk for HIV, hepatitis C, and other blood borne or sexually transmitted infections. Over the past several years, Avenue B had seen a fairly dramatic increase in needle distribution, as demonstrated in the chart below. They have also seen a consistent increase in the number of unique clients served.



Avenue B Needle Exchange Program				
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Unique Clients	720	766	829	830
Visits	7,347	8,611	10,359	7,859
Needles Out	136,410	213,309	331,082	363,819
Needles In	74,182	118,167	127,393	174,562
Crack Kits	7,244	5,777	7,723	9,434

Did you know?

Peer support describes programs where individuals with lived experience of issues such as mental illness, addiction, and homelessness provide support to others dealing with similar issues. By listening and offering guidance based on their own experiences, peers are uniquely equipped to support others in a similar situation.

Increasingly, this lived experience component is being recognized as the key to a meaningful reduction in homelessness.

Peer Health Navigator Project

Currently, Avenue B is conducting a pilot project aimed at training 10 peers from the drug using community to become trained peer health navigators (PHNs). It is intended that these PHNs will increase the capacity and access to testing, health care and other community services for people who use drugs. Peer Health Navigation is a person-centred approach that enables people to guide, connect, refer and educate peers through the many systems of care. The goals of peer health navigation are to support people in their goals, build capacity among their peers, manage their own health care with the overall goal of improving the overall health and wellness of people who use drugs.

Agency Updates

Outflow Ministry

Outflow has been vocal about the goal for our men's emergency shelter since its inception: We want every man who comes to our door to have a safe and affordable place to live. Without question, realizing this goal will look different depending on who we are serving, whether that means joining the Housing First or Rapid Rehousing program, moving into a special care home, or even finding a place of his own without needing any additional support. In short, we do not want anyone to arrive at the shelter and feel like he is making his last stop and we are excited every time that one of the men from our shelter is able to find stable housing. Housing is a crucial next step for the men we meet at the shelter.

Outflow is also excited about a new path out of homelessness that we are developing. In some cases, we have been able to successfully combine our housing program and our employment program. This combination allows Outflow to help some of our clients go even further on their journey out of poverty, as sort of a next step after the next step.

We have seen three benefits to integrating these two programs. First, we are able to see the men we work with on a regular basis. This means we can more quickly identify potential problems the men are having before the problems result in an eviction. Second, we are able to provide stability in a positive environment to the men in both programs, which helps them to solidify their housing and transition into regular routines. Third, we are able to help the men in both programs become less reliant on subsidies and other programs to maintain their housing.

-Anthony Dickinson

Outflow Ministry

Fresh Start Services for Women

Fresh Start Services for Women continues to work to meet the growing need for housing in Greater Saint John. With 3 full time staff and dedicated volunteers, 2018 saw us provide direct and indirect services to 1459 clients. As part of our growth, staff began in the fall to put an emphasis on homeless prevention; working directly with landlords to stop evictions and resolve tenant challenges to ensure women and their families remained housed. In three months, due to our focus on reaching out to landlords before or when evictions were issued, we were able to prevent 38 clients from losing their housing. Rising rates of homelessness and the challenges to find affordable housing have led us to need to focus on prevention; taking many forms – offering services to landlords such as lease agreements, facilitating tenant meetings to resolve conflicts, or working as a mediator for landlord/tenant discussions. Moving forward into 2019, Fresh Start is working towards continuing to focus on homelessness prevention.

- Melanie Vautour

Fresh Start Services for Women

Coverdale Centre for Women

Coverdale operates with a strong belief in the ability of women to overcome every hurdle, including stepping up out of poverty. We have seen women gain confidence and climb against every odd, solidifying our desire and ambition to help each woman work toward independence and an easier life.

Some of the hurdles women who access Coverdale's services face are barriers to employment. These barriers include: criminal records, lack of employment history, lack of resume writing skills, inexperience with office interpersonal skills, lack of boundaries, and a lack of hard skills that employers would find valuable. We work to address these gaps and more with a Transition to Work program that teaches employment skills as well as looking at gender-centred personal care skills each week for 6 weeks. This program is available to our CRF clients.

Another way that we aid women in gaining practical skills is to employ them. We hire women accessing our services to clean the Drop-In Centre. This helps them to gain proper cleaning skills, important workplace communication skills, a sense of responsibility, and an entry to add to their resume and a reference for their job search. The women we have hired for this role in the past have been guests at our Women's Emergency Homeless Shelter or Hope Bridge Home, guests at our CRF, and women in the community who access the Drop-In Centre and programming.

This past year, in collaboration with the John Howard Society, Coverdale secured a Cleaning Training Program contract with Corrections Services Canada for the women and men residing in our respective CRF's. This position is a 10 week rotational term contract for each person employed, giving them valuable vocational training including certification with on the job training of cleaning services. It affords them, like our own cleaning contract, a resume entry and a reference. It also provides them with an opportunity to show growth in their life since incarceration. It aligns with both agencies desire and mission to support their clients in moving forward.

We continue to look for positive ways to give women the aide they need to keep moving forward, always seeking the next step to improve their confidence, self-esteem and their living conditions to provide a better quality of life for themselves as well as their families.

- Mary Saulnier-Taylor

Coverdale Centre for Women

Romero House

Established in 1982, Romero House has seen a consistent level of need in the community since it's opening. However, 2018 was another record year for service use in a few categories. 82,339 meals were served in 2018 - approximately 1,500 more than the previous year, and more than any year before that. Total membership for the clothing room at the end of 2018 was 4,300 households with a total of 5,947 visits. Again, this represents more visits than ever before and is an addition of 273 households consisting of 340 adults and 229 children. Of those numbers, 841 consistently returned for help one or more times per month for the entire year.

- Evelyn McNulty

Romero House

Safe Harbour House

Safe Harbour House provides transitional programming support for homeless youth. The ultimate goal of the house is to provide residents with a supportive environment and offer them programming to help boost self-efficacy and equip them for independent living.

To accomplish this goal, we rely on an client-centered approach in which residents are guided to develop a road map for their time with us. Such plans generally include components related to career guidance, life skills development, building supportive relationships, and healthy living.

The length of each resident's stay at Safe Harbour House can vary. We operate under a philosophy that values impact over strict time constraints. The duration of each resident's stay is based on their needs, their level of readiness to transition to independent living, and their financial stability.

Partners For Youth Inc re-opened Safe Harbour House in March 2017 and since opening have observed and noted many successes, challenges, gaps and goals. Everyday provides an opportunity to (re)create individualized case plans/goals for marginalized youth. Residents have managed to complete high school, have been accepted into post-secondary education, have become employed, maintained sobriety, felt safe, had a stable home, obtained identification and earned a driver's licence, improved their physical and mental health; practiced healthy relations with others in the home and added various life skills to their tool box. The project has been most successful for 26 New Brunswick youth who had no safe place to live while they tried to function normally.

- Alison White

Safe Harbour House

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