

Homeless No More Engagement

Oct 24th, 2022

Berwick Lions Club, NS

Report Overview

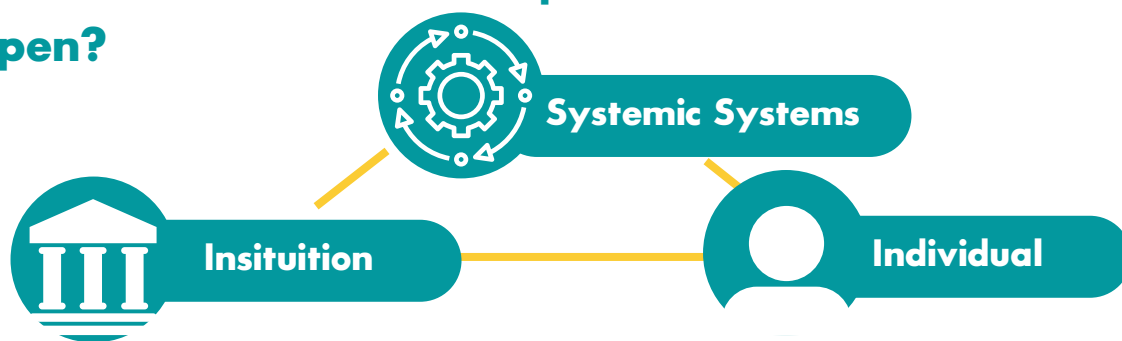
To the common eye, rural homelessness is invisible. However, the evidence shows it is a growing issue across Nova Scotia. As of August 2022, The South Shore Open Door Association reported 162 individuals, including children, were experiencing homelessness in Lunenburg County and the surrounding area. In addition, as of November 2022, 192 individuals were reported to be experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness between Digby to West Hants (Community Support and Service-Based Count 2022). These statements were further validated by the number of concerned and determined practitioners attending the Homeless No More engagement on October 24th, 2022.

There were approximately 60 participants representing approximately 40 organizations. The following document captures their voices and experiences regarding rural homelessness and their perspectives on how Homeless No More (HNM) could support their work and organizations. To do so, participants interacted with multiple question sheets and engaged in discussion prompts. The sections below share key themes from each discussion with four focus points; (1) Conditions, (2) What do We Know, (3) Things Would be Better if and (4) the New Role of the Homeless No More Committee. To find out more on Homeless No More or to hear about future engagements, visit www.homelessnomore.ca

Question Sheet #1 Conditions

What is the lived reality of our community?

And What conditions are in place that allow for this to happen?



The lived reality of the participant's community was identified with intersectional influences from institutions, various systems and individual experiences. Individuals, such as refugees, struggle to access resources from an institutional level. Additionally, organizations are struggling to access sustainable funding options from institutions. The system individuals and institutions operate in is layered with built-in discrimination, racism, inaccessibility, stigmas and a lack of representation among funders or institutional service providers. The group identified a need for policy to represent people and to be led by first-voice experiences. There was a clear expression of reimagining and rebuilding the current system, with an understanding that a lack of housing is not an isolated issue but one that is influenced by multiple individuals, systems and institutional factors.

What is good practice telling us about a Housing First approach?



Good practice tells us that a Housing First Approach offers the potential to reduce barriers by ensuring good access to support, community and services. Effective and collaborative circles of care that utilize a human-centric approach benefit the practitioner and client. Additionally, Housing First requires systems thinking and seeing the intersectionality of situations combined with the individual experience.

Note: participants also expressed a lack of understanding of the Housing First Approach. More education and literacy on the topic is required before fully understanding what good practice might be telling us about a Housing First Approach

Is a community hub good practice?

Based on participants' responses, there is a clear potential for a Community Hub. However, the group identified various barriers and expectations if it was ever to come to fruition. In order to expand the idea of a Community Hub, participants requested that community members and first-voice experience would need to be involved in the ideation process. People and funding are needed to make it happen. Collaboration would be crucial to achieving beneficial results for clients and practitioners if a Community Hub were implemented. The group identified numerous key aspects of a Hub's provided services; (1) using a client-centric or case-by-case approach, (2) offering multifaceted supports and support at every level, (3) tenant support and eviction prevention, (4) a focus on accessibility in both access to supports and build environment with 24/7 access, and (5) operate as an example of best practices and advocacy.

When thinking about a Community Hub, the group also identified organizations working with a collaborative approach, such as the Native Council of Nova Scotia and Kings Family Resource Centre. Questions on how we might connect existing supports to clients and practitioners to funding to continue offering support.

What is preventing us from being successful?



According to the participant's responses, four key areas prevented practitioners and service providers from success. First, the group felt they need more access to staff funding and sustainable multi-year project finding. Note that the group mentioned the struggle of the ask to innovate a program to secure funding. Sometimes, groups need regular funding for already successful programs. Additionally, there needs to be more equity for the clients they serve. Participants feel support is often off-loaded to organizations, and staff are experiencing low emotional and practical capacity. They need support and reciprocity from the government to increase staff capacity. Finally, government, policymakers and community members also need a greater understanding of the lived reality of rural homelessness across their communities.

Who needs to hear this?

The group felt that all levels of government, Federal, Municipal, Provincial, healthcare workers, landlords and tenants, community leaders, Airbnb owners, and large businesses should all learn more about rural homelessness in communities. Participant responses articulate that the homelessness crisis must be seriously considered during policy change and implementation. The group felt that the homelessness community is written out of public policy.

Whats the ask?

After exploring what is preventing us from being successful and considering who needs to hear this, the group generated ideas for moving forward. Discussions of potential asks offer a tension point when considering government involvement. On the one hand, the government directly impacts policy and policy changes. Many participants noted that the government needs to transition to a community-based and informed approach. Especially when it comes to decisions on rental caps, extending funding periods (to 3 to 5 years) and zoning municipalities for affordable housing.

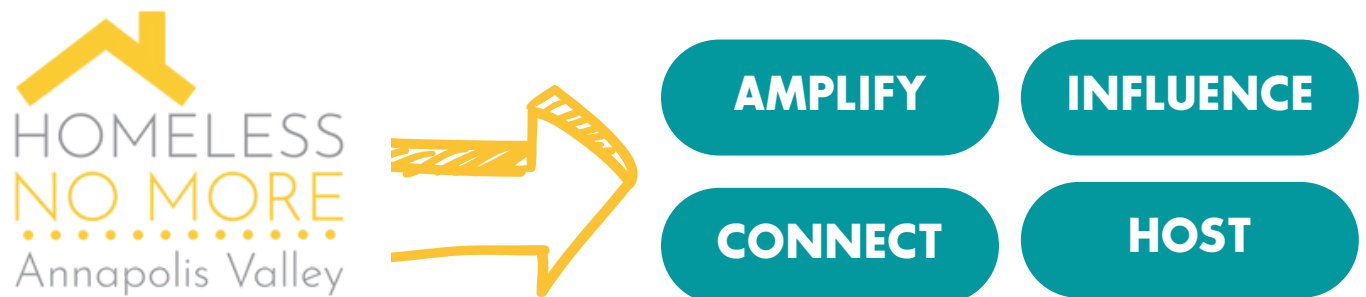
On the other hand, participants are looking for grassroots approaches toward educating communities on where to access support, program awareness and, in particular, for landlords to gain more understanding and empathy towards the current housing crisis. Based on the responses, it is clear that both are valuable and needed. The group has multiple asks. The group wants to see more information brought to the various levels of governing bodies. As well as focused and specific education in communities to help rebuild the current approach to and understanding of the housing crisis and rural homelessness.

Question Sheet #3 Things would be better if...

Who needs to be at the table?

When considering the new role of HNM, the group expressed a main priority of representation and identified various key groups to be at the table. Some of the main groups included; first voice experience, healthcare, LGBTQ2S+ community, educators, municipal staff or council members, Department of Child Services, youth, seniors, funders, policy influencers, historic black communities, as well as African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq organizations. There was a tension point when considering the involvement of landlords.

How can this network support you?



Four main factors arose when the group considered how Homeless No More could support their work. The group imaged that HNM could work to amplify homelessness first-voice, practitioner experiences and organizational barriers. While also working to connect organizations through information sharing and hosting opportunities to learn, ideate and collaborate. The group's main hope is for HNM to act as an influencer or catalyst of change. While being led by local organizations, HNM can work to represent rural homelessness across the region and advocate to address the housing crisis.

What would you bring to the table, and what would you take from it?

Based on participant responses, there were various expectations and hopes about what could be brought to the Homeless No More table and what could come from it. Participants hope that the representatives at the HNM table can collect and share perspectives, be knowledgeable about rural homelessness in our region, understand a harm reduction approach and be passionate about the work to reimagine the status quo. In addition, participants feel it is important to have healthcare professionals and individuals with lived experience at the HNM table. The group should also represent diverse community backgrounds, experiences and generations. Participants hope that HNM can help and represent the work to reduce barriers and bring local organizations to a thriving state instead of only surviving.

Looking for more information or to get involved in HNM?
email info@homelessnomore.ca