

Homelessness in North Hastings and Housing First

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To the Editor,

Homelessness is not just a big city issue. We have homelessness in North Hastings and this is not just in Bancroft. It was highlighted at St. Paul's when they had the Out of the Cold shelter open that homelessness is very real in North Hastings.

Affordability has become a huge factor in the housing market in Bancroft as well as the rest of Canada. There are very few houses for sale that the first time home buyer, on a limited income, can afford to buy. We have little to no rental units available and when a unit does become available in many cases the rent increases over 20 per cent between renters. People can no longer afford the basics of food, water and shelter.

Regardless of why people are homeless I firmly believe that we all need to have a place to call home. Housing First needs to become the reality in North Hastings.

Housing first is not a new concept. It has been around for many years. Medicine Hat, Alberta has been doing housing first for many years. They have successfully decreased their homelessness and have found that it is cheaper to house a person or family than it is to leave them homeless. They have proven that by providing housing first they are actually able to cut costs for other social and emergency services. There are fewer calls for emergency services such as police and ambulances and visits to emergency rooms. There are reduced number coming into contact with the justice system including jails and courts. Children are not being separated from their parents and being put in foster homes. The overall cost for social programs and services is far less when people have housing first.

Housing First not only makes sure everyone has a place to call home but they also have the supports in place that assist in keeping them housed. Housing first means that you have a safe and secure place to call home. You have a place where you and your family can start to heal and deal with life's challenges again. This is very difficult to do when you are living outside or couch surfing with no real place to call home.

Why housing first? Because it is the right thing to do and it will save money in the long run.

Canada is one of the richest countries in the world yet we have homeless people. We have governments who would rather give out corporate welfare than make sure its most vulnerable people are housed. The provincial and federal governments have known that this housing crisis was looming for years. They have done little to nothing to alleviate the problem and have only made it worse over the years. We know that Hastings County has no interest or political will to help those of us who live North of 7. When St. Paul's called for help they were offered flannel blankets. The bottom line is that unless we help our people the situation is only going to become worse and people will die.

Housing first needs to be a priority for everyone in North Hastings but especially for our seven municipal councils. More needs to be done to make Housing First a reality in North Hastings.

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