Understanding and Addressing Family Homelessness in a Northern Community – Timmins, Ontario

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This study examined the causes of family homelessness in a smaller urban centre (Timmins, Ontario) and assessed the capacity of these communities to meet the unique needs of this population, particularly with respect to children. Many community partners expressed concerns about the rising trend of family homelessness in smaller urban centres affected by specific economic challenges and identified a need for in-depth research in this area. The report fills a research gap by making use of a particular case study, the City of Timmins, for which there already exists a database of family homeless counts.

Key findings

- Families with dependent children constituted two-thirds of homeless persons in Timmins. Women made up 81% of homeless parents or guardians, while Aboriginal parents or guardians were overrepresented at 36%, despite comprising only 7.7% of the total population of Timmins (2006 census).
- Structural factors, such as unemployment, low wages and lack of affordable and appropriate housing, are the major reasons for homelessness or near homelessness. This reflects the boom-and-bust business cycle in Timmins, which is primarily influenced by the mining industry that is susceptible to uncertainty regarding the demand for metals. Other reasons include racism, domestic violence, and drug abuse.
- Homelessness has an adverse impact on both parents/guardians and children who report experiencing negative effects on their mental and physical well-being.

How can family homelessness be addressed?

The recommendations to address family homelessness in the community of Timmins, Ontario—a smaller urban centre—include:

- Enhancing services and developing strategies specific to families in the areas of housing supports, employment, education, addictions, domestic violence, mental and physical health, and basic necessities, which are important in preventing and reducing homelessness.
- Training agency staff on issues related to homeless parents, such as their needs and sensitivities.
- Working directly with Aboriginal communities to develop culturally appropriate services and to address some sensitivities surrounding family homelessness.
- Creating additional safe and affordable public and private sector housing, as well as providing resources for shelters to serve homeless families in the short-term.

Contact us

For more information on this project, please contact us:

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