

LIFE SPIN

LOW-INCOME FAMILY EMPOWERMENT
SOLE-SUPPORT PARENTS INFORMATION NETWORK

May 15, 2023

Community & Protective Services Committee
300 Dufferin Avenue
London ON
N6A 4L9

Dear Members of the Committee

Founded in 1989, by a group of sole-support parent, LIFE*SPIN has grown to become one of London's leading champions of those struggling to provide for their families in poverty, with more than 6,000 families assisted each year. LIFE*SPIN invites the people we serve to take an active part in helping create sustainable supports that help each other to get back on their feet and create hopeful futures for their families.

LIFE*SPIN has operated a housing initiative in London for 20 years, as a Community Economic Development initiative, utilizing business means to create sustainable benefits to our community. LIFE*SPIN recognizes that poverty is a result of systemic injustice in our society and works towards a fairer and more equitable structure that may alter the future of many lives, particularly those struggling to survive in poverty.

As we approach the time when you will be considering the next multi-year budget and continue to seek to address the housing crisis in London, we wish to share an overarching concern that has developed over the past year in our city. Whether biases are created by faulty social science or by artificial intelligence, the discrimination that results in designing and funding community responses using biases is the same. Much of the attention on data in the City's collective initiative focuses on the sometimes ominous "shared measurement system." While shared measurement may be an important component of the data activities of the living-rough collective's impact efforts, it is but one aspect of the data landscape and may divert attention from equally important homeless in our community

London has a vast population of homeless individuals and families. There are some that are served by an increasing number of publicly funded shelters and services, and a plethora of uncounted and unrecognized homeless that live in 'private shelter spaces'. The move to only recognize and serve those who utilize publicly funded shelters is amplifying the biases against historically disempowered groups in London. In our community, this means that multi-cultural families and new immigrants that pool their money to rent a decent house, with all their children camped out in living-rooms in sleeping bags or bunks, are not counted and not served. It means that sole-support mothers and off-reserve Indigenous families who reside in derelict

housing are not being counted nor served. So too are those who couch-surf, those who live in single rooms in over-crowded unsafe boarding homes, and those who stay in abusive situations just to keep a roof over their heads.

We have witnessed the creation of a crisis on our streets that is blatantly visible. Numerous agencies and organizations are being funded to provide services to a tenth of the homeless in London. The 'solutions' being designed and funded are not ethically neutral. The coordinated data sharing system in London, that counts the homeless using public shelters does not count those who don't and while we hide the homeless in more public shelter spaces, we also exacerbate the biases and increase the discrimination in funding and resources.

As you know, London has paid consultants to design a few products that have not been implemented yet. An AI system for homelessness is one of those we await. Unfortunately, the design currently replicates the biased system that London has already implemented to serve a few. LIFE*SPIN serves low income families across the city and we have seen a marked increase in families sharing the rentals of homes and apartments to keep their children under a roof. We have seen a similar increase in numerous family members sharing small apartments, such as a family of six, living in a one-bedroom apartment. These families are homeless; they are living in inadequate private shelters. Parents will do anything to keep their children off the street, however just because they are not sleeping in the doorway of your workplace when you arrive for work, does not mean that they should be discriminated against.

London also has an aging population that is not being recognized in the current allocation of resources. When a spouse passes away, the surviving spouse loses the pension amount that enabled them to lease a one-bedroom unit. A month of potential relief from the rent bank cannot provide housing stability, nor deal with the remaining months of a lease. We also have calls from hospitals when patients are ready to be released, with no home to go home to. Home care supports actually require a home for health care workers to go to. Forgotten and uncounted in the biased system being used in London.

London has taken steps to recognize that homelessness is an issue. The resources and supports are being funnelled to the 'crisis homeless' that use public shelters and/or camp in public spaces, often times to avoid the shelter conditions or requirements. It is really up to you to ensure that the solutions are designed to address the systemic issues, not simply create new or better shelter solutions that help only a few and discriminate against the unseen and exacerbate the critical issue and biases.

Affordable Housing: According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), housing is considered to be affordable when a household spends less than 30% of its pre-tax income on adequate shelter. Households that spend more than 30% of the income on shelter are deemed to be in "core housing need". Those that spend 50% or more on shelter are in severe housing need. The London Community Foundation released their vital hub last week. Included are the most recent reports of housing in London at

<https://www.bethechangelondon.ca/data-hub-entry/housing-need-and-repairs> that may help you to see the need for more systemic solutions.

To that end, we are enclosing Towards Ethical AI Homelessness Tools, a research paper that was undertaken with a Western University Philosophy Practicum team at LIFE*SPIN this semester that explores the issues of automating inequality. Please take the time to try to understand the issues inherent in profiling the poor. We can do better and the challenge lays in understanding the systemic issues that create homelessness and finding healthier more holistic solutions that include London's children, seniors and families.

Please do bear in mind that many families in extreme housing need in London will not be represented by shelter and street outreach services. Solutions to the housing crisis in London need to include these unheard voices, increase investments in repairs to existing social housing, strengthen the enforcement of housing standards, and address the housing needs of those residing in "private shelters"

Sincerely



Jacqueline Thompson
Executive Director