

# **French Language Services for the Homeless**

A report prepared for the  
Ottawa Homelessness  
Community Capacity Building Team

by

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## **1. Introduction**

Homelessness in the City of Ottawa continues to be a major concern, affecting the lives of many families and individuals with varying backgrounds. Service providers, funders, researchers and members of the Ottawa community are actively engaged in a Community Capacity Building initiative, designed to enhance capacity to address issues related to homelessness. The Capacity Building process has resulted in the formation of three Work Groups: Planning, Communications Strategy and Training and Coaching.

The Planning Work Group provides oversight to the development of specific sector plans for:

- Single women experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- Newcomers
- Developmentally disabled adults at risk of homelessness

In addition, the Planning Work Group oversees research and evaluation of services and best practices for:

- Single homeless men
- Homeless Aboriginals
- **French language services for the homeless**
- Housing loss prevention network
- Rural face of homelessness

All of these plans will come together through the development of a new community action plan, a comprehensive plan to prevent and end homelessness in Ottawa.

This report addresses French language services for the homeless.

## **2. Process**

The process used to develop this report included the following steps:

### **2.1 Stakeholder Meeting**

An initial meeting was held with a group of francophone service providers to help to identify issues to be explored through the study, identify documents of interest and to assist in assembling the lists of organizations to contact for interviews and focus groups.

### **2.2 Interviews**

Interviews were held with 18 key informants representing service providers, advocacy/interest groups and funders. Such a small number does not constitute a statistically valid sample of the francophone community involved with homelessness. However, these individuals were chosen as knowledgeable representatives of agencies serving the homeless and those who are concerned with promoting the rights and interests of the francophone population. A mix of service providers, from shelter and housing

organizations, drop-in centres, community resource centres and health agencies were selected for interview.

### **2.3 Focus Groups**

Two focus groups were held and facilitated in French. One focus group was with homeless families in order to obtain their perceptions of services in French. Unfortunately, although a greater number of families was identified originally, only 4 families participated in the focus group that was held at the Carling Avenue Shelter.

A second focus group was held with front-line staff from agencies serving the homeless in order to seek their views on the issues that are faced by their clients. Again, while more individuals were confirmed to attend this focus group, only 4 participated.

### **2.4 Review of Documents**

Based on the input from stakeholders, a website search and follow-up on specific references, documents and reports with information on the needs of Francophones dealing with homelessness and poverty generally were reviewed. Particularly relevant documents are summarized in this report, while others were used to provide ideas for future directions.

### **2.5 Consultation with Stakeholders**

A meeting was held with stakeholders in the francophone community to present the findings from the data collection process, review proposed actions and to obtain input on recommendations. Again, this meeting was facilitated in French and was attended by 12 participants from agencies serving the homeless, interest groups and the City of Ottawa.

## **3. Focus Population: Measuring Homelessness**

### **3.1 Francophone Population**

According to the 2001 Census, as reported in the statistical profile produced by the Office of Francophone Affairs “Francophones in Ontario”<sup>1</sup>, 128,620 Francophones live in Ottawa, representing 16.6 percent of the population. Racial minorities represent 14.1 percent of the francophone population, compared with 18 percent racial minority representation in the total population.

The term “Francophone” in that publication is based on the Census question “What was the language first learned at home in childhood and still understood?” and includes persons who identified French as their mother tongue or as one of their mother tongues. This definition may well exclude many people who work, study or choose to live in French, particularly immigrants or offspring of ethnocultural communities. Thus, this definition is an understatement of the numbers of people who would prefer to use French in their daily lives and in accessing the services they require.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Francophone Affairs, Statistical Profile – Francophones in Ontario, September, 2005 available at [www.ofa.gov.on.ca](http://www.ofa.gov.on.ca)

The Social Planning Council report “Francophones of Ottawa”<sup>2</sup> indicates that the Ottawa francophone population is predominantly located in the east end of the City, although increasingly Francophones are settling in the west – Nepean, Kitchissippi, Bay Ward, Kanata, Stittsville and Goulbourn – and in the south and southwest –Osgoode and Rideau.

### 3.2 Francophone Homeless Population

The homeless population is not easily measured and particularly if the definition of “homeless” includes the population at risk of homelessness, as well as those who are in emergency shelters or on the street. The Panel Study on Homelessness conducted by the University of Ottawa provides descriptive data on the demographic characteristics of the homeless population in Ottawa’s shelters and drop-in centres. Included in data collected for this study is information on the first language of respondents. In that study, 20.4 percent of the population reported French as the first language they learned at home in childhood and another 2.5 percent reported French plus another language. The distribution of responses by different categories of the homeless population is shown in Table One.

**Table One: French-speaking Homeless Population**

Subgroups (N)	Native speaking French (n)	Native French (% of subgroup)	French + another language (n)	French and another language (% of subgroup)
Family (N= 83)	9	10.8%	0	0
Male Adults (N=87)	31	31.0%	1	1.1%
Female Adults (N=84)	13	15.3%	3	3.6%
Male Youth (N=79)	17	21.6%	2	2.6%
Female Youth (N=79)	18	23.0%	4	5.2%
<b>Total (N=412)</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>20.4%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2.5%</b>

**Source: Data obtained from Dr. Tim Aubry, based on the Panel Study on Homelessness in Ottawa. Questionnaire item: “What is the language that you first learned at home in childhood?”**

Compared with the population as a whole, Francophones are slightly over-represented among the homeless and particularly so among male adults and youth. Based on these data, Francophones are under-represented among family and female adults who are homeless. However, particularly for families, it is known that many newcomers have French as a second language and so would not be included in these data that reflect the first language of respondents.

<sup>2</sup> L’Assemblée Francophone et Comité Interagences du conseil de planification social d’Ottawa, Les Francophones d’Ottawa, Octobre, 2004.

Another source of data on the representation of Francophones among the homeless is the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System that is used to register clients who use emergency shelters. Data on the primary language of clients is reported and shown in Table Two. According to these data, Francophones are under-represented in shelters in Ottawa. However, it is important to note the large percentages of data missing. For example, for single adult males, data on primary language use is recorded for less than one-half of the total number of clients. It may be that there is a greater tendency for under-reporting of language if it is other than English.

Francophone stakeholders have indicated that, in their view, the data on the francophone homeless population in Ottawa is an underestimate. In part, this is due to the absence of a clear definition of what is a “Francophone”; bilingual Francophones or immigrants with French as a second language may not be included in the definition of “Francophones” although they would prefer to have services available in French. As well, stakeholders referred to problems with the reliability of HIFIS data.

Problems with the reliability of statistical data to measure representation of Francophones and particularly francophone immigrants have also been noted in other sources. In a Working Paper produced for the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, the author notes, in referring to Census data on the number of Francophones in Ontario, “my research subjects, as well as others, have expressed considerable doubt about the veracity of these census results and the interpretation of the data (Human Rights Commission 2004). Black Francophones tend to argue that the definition of Francophones based on the mother tongue criterion largely underestimates their actual number”.<sup>3</sup> The Statistical Profile produced by the Office of Francophone Affairs<sup>4</sup> supports this view, noting that using the variable “First Official Language Spoken” with the “Racial Minority” variable results in a more adequate representation of the francophone racial minority population than the “Mother Tongue” variable alone.

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<sup>3</sup> Madibbo, Amal. “Immigration, Race, and Language: Black Francophones of Ontario and the Challenges of Integration, Racism and Language Discrimination”, Working Paper No. 38, Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, June, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Office of Francophone Affairs, Statistical Profile – Francophones in Ontario, September, 2005, page 25, [www.ofa.gov.on.ca](http://www.ofa.gov.on.ca),

**Table Two: Primary Language of Shelter Users, 2004 and 2005**

<b>January 1, 2004 - December 31, 2004</b>										
<b>PRIMARY LANGUAGE</b>										
<b>ALL CLIENT</b>			<b>SINGLE ADULT MALE</b>			<b>SINGLE ADULT FEMALE</b>				
Total Reporting	4788	57.9% *	Total Reporting	2022	41.3%	Total Reporting	916	74.9%		
English	3816	79.7% **	English	1629	80.6%	English	757	82.6%		
French	687	14.3%	French	322	15.9%	French	102	11.1%		
Other	285	6.0%	Other	71	3.5%	Other	57	6.2%		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4788</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>100.0%</b>		
<b>YOUTH</b>			<b>FAMILY UNITS</b>							
Total Reporting	409	81.8%	Total Reporting	486	92.9%					
English	348	85.1%	English	372	76.5%					
French	43	10.5%	French	67	13.8%					
Other	18	4.4%	<b>Other</b>	47	9.7%					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>100.0%</b>					
<b>January 1, 2005 - August 31, 2005</b>										
<b>PRIMARY LANGUAGE</b>										
<b>ALL CLIENTS</b>			<b>SINGLE ADULT MALE</b>			<b>SINGLE ADULT FEMALE</b>				
Total Reporting	4032	59.2%	Total Reporting	1784	45.8%	Total Reporting	698	78.4%		
English	3142	77.9%	English	1473	82.6%	English	569	81.5%		
French	598	14.8%	French	258	14.5%	French	79	11.3%		
Other	292	7.2%	Other	53	3.0%	Other	50	7.2%		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4032</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1784</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>100.0%</b>		
<b>YOUTH</b>			<b>FAMILY UNITS</b>							
Total Reporting	333	82.4%	Total Reporting	479	96.6%					
English	285	85.6%	English	336	70.1%					
French	22	6.6%	French	65	13.6%					
Other	26	7.8%	Other	78	16.3%					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>100.0%</b>					
* Total reporting refers to the percentage of total clients that reported this information.										
** Read as: "Referring only to client records where a Primary Language has been recorded, 79.7% are English."										
<b>Source: HIFIS, City of Ottawa Aggregate Database YTD August 31, 2005</b>										

### 3.3 Francophone Population at Risk of Homelessness

The population at risk of being homeless is often identified by examining those households who are in core housing need, defined as those who are unable to afford suitable and adequate accommodation without paying more than 30 percent of their income to do so. Core housing need data is available through CMHC and Statistics Canada and would require a special data run in order to identify the number of Francophones with these housing circumstances. A reasonable proxy for core housing need among renters is the number of renter households who pay more than 30 percent of their household income for rent.

According to a Social Planning Council report prepared by Paddy Fuller<sup>5</sup>, Statistics Canada data show that in 2001, 88,015 renter households in Ottawa paid more than 30 percent of their annual income for their rent. Of this number, just under 17 percent were Francophones, compared with a similar proportion of Francophones in the rental population. According to these data, the francophone population would have a risk of homelessness similar to that of the general population. Again, though, this number will exclude many francophone immigrants and it is evident from Table Three that the immigrant population is over-represented in the population at risk of homelessness.

**Table Three: Characteristics of Persons in Rented Households by Shelter Payment**

Characteristics	All Renter Households	Paying More than 30% of income for rent
Aboriginal	1.90%	1.89%
<b>Francophone</b>	<b>17.00%</b>	<b>16.65%</b>
Immigrant	26.73%	29.45%
Visible Minority	27.93%	32.39%
Aged 65 & over	8.87%	11.46%
Female	51.66%	55.04%
Male	48.34%	44.96%

**Source: Paddy Fuller, “Housing Affordability in the Ottawa Area, 2001” in *Our Social Capital*, Magazine of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Vol. IV, No. 3, April 2005.**

### 3.4 Summary

The statistics on homelessness among the francophone population, both in terms of the absolute homeless and those at risk of homelessness, indicate generally that Francophones are represented in the homeless population at a similar level to their representation in the general population of Ottawa.

Francophone stakeholders, however, feel strongly that these data under-state the level of homelessness among Francophones. First, many in the immigrant population would not be identified as “Francophone” using the Statistics Canada definition of “first language

<sup>5</sup> Fuller, Paddy, “Housing Affordability in the Ottawa Area, 2001 in *Our Social Capital*, Magazine of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Vol. IV, No. 3, April 2005.

learned” and there is a growing francophone immigrant population who prefer to receive services in French. Second, the HIFIS data, that show a lower level of French-speaking people in shelters, are incomplete and are more likely to be not completed for people unable to speak English. Third, there may be some Francophones who are bilingual and may be counted in HIFIS data as Anglophones but who may prefer to speak French, particularly when they are dealing with difficult personal circumstances.

#### **4. Why a Focus on French Language Services for the Homeless?**

Quite apart from statistics on homelessness, respondents in this review identified a number of factors that support an increased focus on homelessness in the francophone population.

Respondents indicated that Francophones have fewer options for services than do Anglophones. Most services for the homeless in Ottawa are English-only or bilingual; there are some, but not many, services that operate primarily in French (Entraide budgétaire, Action logement, la Maison Fraternité and Centre espoir Sophie were mentioned in particular). Respondents have indicated that “bilingual” services do not always mean that service by qualified personnel is available to the same degree in French as it is in English.

*“Some agencies claim to offer services in French even though they do not have this ability (e.g. only one part-time bilingual employee), and clients are often referred to agencies whose services in French are not given priority as claimed.”*

Quality of service in French is reported as being lower than that offered in English, in bilingual organizations. Francophones are likely to have to wait longer for service because there are limited bilingual personnel. They may need to deal with intermediaries – for example, an organization may have a bilingual receptionist who deals with francophone clients but may not have trained personnel able to offer all services in French. As well, bilingual service is not necessarily available at all times. Nor are all resource materials available in both official languages.

*“The tools that clients need to help them improve their situation are often available only in English, which reduces Francophones’ chances to make improvements.”*

When services are only available in English, even for bilingual Francophones, it can be very stressful to try to address their issues in a second language. Respondents have indicated that, unfortunately, the absence of a francophone environment, where the language and the culture are understood, Francophones can feel marginalized and isolated, often aggravating their situation. Some may choose not to receive service, rather than be served in an English environment.

“Clients who are unable to communicate and be understood in their mother tongue may feel frustrated and angry (their identity is not recognized, their situation and specific needs are not taken into account, and their existence and rights are denied)”

It should be noted that researchers examining the homeless situation in Sudbury, where there is also a significant francophone population, identified many of these same issues. (See Box on page 11)

## **Homelessness in Sudbury**

Sudbury is another area in Ontario with a significant proportion of Francophones. The most recent census identifies 29.6% of the Sudbury region as Francophone. A study published in July 2003 reported on homelessness in Sudbury generally and included a section on the francophone population.

### **Magnitude of the Problem**

Study authors recognized difficulties in defining Francophones, particularly in an area like Sudbury where considerable assimilation has occurred and many of the francophone population are fluently bilingual. As a result, there was considerable variation in the proportion of the homeless population who self-reported as Francophone in seven studies over a three year period.

The percentage of Francophones recorded among the homeless population varied between 10% and 24%. The authors concluded that “despite the variation, it appears that Francophone homeless people have been consistently under-represented compared to the general Francophone population”.

In examining causes of homelessness, the authors concluded that there were more similarities than differences in reasons given for homelessness by Francophones and Anglophones. The greatest problems stemmed from the lack of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment and problems with social assistance.

### **Services in French**

The Sudbury study found that homeless Francophones quickly yield to the language demands of providers of services in English, even though they are proud of their language and wish to be served in French. Francophones feel respected when they are served in French. Being able to communicate in their mother tongue provides a measure of comfort and security for those who are in desperate circumstances.

Service providers reported that problems of mental health are predominant in the homeless population and that community resources to deal with these problems are very limited. Organizations that are mandated to serve Francophones often had to take on additional roles because there are not enough services provided in French. For example, they have had to accompany their clients in accessing unilingual English services in order to ensure that they could obtain the necessary housing, food or other services.

Service providers also noted the importance of retaining contact with the homeless person once housing has been found. That is the time when case management and inter-agency coordination are required to ensure the person becomes stabilized and fully integrated into the community. These services should be provided in both English and French.

### **Directions for Change**

The following recommendations were included in the Sudbury report:

- Funds should be allocated to allow service providers to hire skilled staff with knowledge of the culture and language of francophone homeless clients.
- A process to address the concerns of the francophone homeless, including a process to obtain their direct input, should be put in place with a view to ensuring that new services or improvement of existing services are both efficient and sensitive to the needs of francophone clients.
- Front-line services addressing immediate needs for food, shelter and clothing, as well as longer-term investments, such as employment supports and educational programs, must be offered in a way that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.

## 5. Issues for the Francophone Homeless Population

### 5.1 Trends in Homelessness for Francophones

Almost all respondents from the Ottawa francophone community felt that the homeless situation for Francophones was getting worse in the past few years, although most did not know specifically about francophone usage of shelters. Primary reasons for the worsening trend in homelessness for Francophones were identified. Many of these factors apply to the homelessness situation in Ottawa generally.

1. Changes in the rental housing market. Specifically respondents noted that the cost of housing is rising, it is more and more difficult to find affordable housing, the quality of existing housing is deteriorating, there is little development of new affordable housing, and removal of rent control has resulted in very high rents.
2. Waves of immigration from francophone countries of Africa. There has been an increase in immigrants in the last 12 months from francophone countries in Africa. Many of these immigrants, even though they are fluent in French, are identified as Anglophones because their mother tongue is not French. An increasing number of immigrants have experienced trauma or have mental health troubles, they are often under-employed and they often have large families (4-6 children).
3. Deinstitutionalization, particularly of psychiatric facilities. Respondents remarked on the reduction in hospital beds for people with mental illness.
4. Poverty and decline of the social safety net. There are more and more people with low income, and especially a growing number of women, who are at risk of losing their housing. Increases in fuel costs were also noted.

### 5.2 Challenges for Ottawa in Resolving Homelessness for Francophone Clients

Respondents recognized that Ottawa faces some major challenges in trying to prevent and end homelessness. Issues raised generally included:

- Shortages of affordable housing
- Devolution of social housing to the municipal level
- Budget pressures
- Lack of control over all elements of the system and related services.

For Francophones in particular, the following challenges were identified:

- The fact that Ottawa is a predominantly English environment
- The absence of reliable data on Francophones in Ottawa, their needs and the state of service that is offered to them
- Critical gaps in service in French.

## 6. Continuum of Housing and Support Services

### 6.1 Housing and Support Services for Francophones

Ottawa has a full continuum of housing and support services for the homeless that is shown in Chart One (Appendix 1).

The Directory of Ottawa Community Services identifies which of these agencies provides bilingual service or service in French alone. Based on a comparison of the Directory with the agencies listed in the continuum, most categories of housing and support services are identified as offering bilingual service. For example, all of the main shelters are shown as providing bilingual service and approximately one-half of the drop-in centres provide either bilingual service or service in French only. Several of the community centres provide bilingual service, as do a number of community resources for housing search and stabilization.

However, some key informants identified that not all agencies that are identified as providing bilingual service do, in fact, have the capacity to provide adequate service in French.

*“A good number of agencies claiming to be bilingual on paper do not have the ability to deliver services in French. We therefore end up referring Francophones to agencies that cannot deliver the appropriate services.”*

From a front-line service provider:

*“In practice, numerous agencies claiming to be bilingual offer little to no services in French.”*

In addition, respondents indicated that it is not clear what services are available in French. This issue was identified, in particular, in focus groups with homeless families and front-line service providers.

*“The first thing that needs to be done is to give information on the services offered and those available in French.”*  
*“A leaflet describing the services in French should be produced.”*  
*“Mechanisms for informing Francophone stakeholders and clients of the services available must be developed (e.g. leaflets, workshops, training sessions, etc.).”*

## 6.2 Standards of Service in French

Most shelters for the homeless in Ottawa are under contract with the City for the services they provide. The exception is the family shelters which are directly operated by City staff.

At present there is no wording in the contracts with shelters pertaining to the language in which service is provided. Shelter standards are being developed and they contain the following statement in the Guiding Principles: “An understanding that, as far as practicable, the client will have service provided in the official language of his/her choice”. Once the standards have been finalized and approved, the City intends that language of service will become part of new contracts being prepared for 2006.

Drop-in centres also receive funding from the City for services they provide to the homeless. Again, there are no specific requirements for French services by these agencies. However, the City is in the process of developing a Community Funding Framework Report and they anticipate addressing the issue of French language services in funding agreements that will be developed with agencies once City Council approves the Community Funding Framework in November 2006.

Other services funded by the City, for example, for supportive housing and for services focussed on prevention of homelessness do not incorporate requirements for services in French. Services delivered by the Province are governed by the French Language Services Act of Ontario that designates Ottawa as an area where individuals have the right to receive provincial government services in French.

Key informants were asked to rate the adequacy of housing and support services for the francophone population. The majority of respondents rated almost all housing and support services as inadequate. The two exceptions were “housing search assistance” and “legal/advocacy support” where the majority rated these services as adequate. It is recognized that there are severe shortages of social, supportive and transitional housing for the homeless population generally, as well as increased needs for many support services, particularly for mental health and addictions. The francophone population feels these service gaps as acutely as the general homeless population, overlaid with the challenges of obtaining service in the language of their choice.

## 6.3 Strengths of the Service System

Respondents identified much strength in the service system for homeless francophones:

- Dedication and Commitment of Francophone Service Providers. Francophone service providers are determined to improve services in French. They work hard and are very engaged in trying to do better and to defend the rights of Francophones for services. People are very knowledgeable, passionate and committed.
- Common Interests and Natural Linkages Among Francophone Service Providers. There are strong partnerships and a natural solidarity among francophone service

- providers. It is a close community and there is mutual trust that leads to good working relationships. Plus there is a common vision with a sharing of priorities regarding the needs of Francophones.
- A growing and dynamic French network. There is somewhat of a structure in place, strong leadership and capacity in the community.
  - Mechanisms for exchange and collaboration. Certain networks were identified as working well, in particular, “le Réseau de services de santé francophones” and “le réseau des centres de ressources communautaires” (i.e. the networks of Francophone health services and community resource centres serving Francophones).
  - Clear focus. Very good service provision in francophone agencies where there is a clear focus and mandate. The Montfort hospital, Action logement, Entraide budgétaire and la maison Fraternité were all mentioned as important players.
  - Political support. Good support by francophone politicians and a political will to support French services.
  - Families in family shelters mentioned in particular the Children’s program, social workers and nurses as very helpful.

#### **6.4 Areas for Improvement**

Respondents focussed on the following weaknesses or areas to improve the service system:

- Absence of a formal structure. There is no network, per se and not enough opportunities for service providers to interact. Little circulation of information among providers. Often services offered by other agencies are not used although they could support and complement their efforts.
- Insufficient financial resources and especially to offer services in French and to translate documents and materials. As well, the shortage of francophone human resources was identified.
- Gaps in Services. A general lack of service compared to needs was identified, resulting in longer waiting lists for Francophones. Some specific services were mentioned, including support services in social housing, a francophone addictions treatment centre, mental health services, immigrant services and shelters for women and families.
- Lack of Recognition and Sensitivity to the “French Fact”. Respondents felt that the importance of being able to speak French was not well recognized. Participants in the focus group for homeless family members indicated that being able to speak French was very important for them, so that they could understand 100% of what was being said. Service providers noted that cultural interpretation services are available for other languages, but not for French. Often, francophone employees are required to do translation, both of documents and for clients. Respondents also noted the absence of a spokesperson at the City for French services and a lack of understanding and respect for differences in the French community.
- Shortcomings in Bilingual Service. Respondents indicated that a number of agencies that are “bilingual on paper” do not have the real capacity to deliver

- services in French. All participants in the homeless family focus group supported this view, as did several front-line service providers.
- Need for French-only Points of Service. Respondents noted the absence of French-language service agencies, in particular for addictions treatment, shelters and immigrant services.

## **7. Priorities and Principles for Action**

### **7.1 Guiding Principles**

On the basis of input from key informants, homeless families and front-line service providers, the following principles are proposed to guide further action in expanding choices available to Francophones who are homeless.

**1. Assure that services provided and the allocation of resources are based on the relative needs of Francophones who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness.**

Respondents emphasized the importance of basing decisions on the needs of people “on the ground”, planning around the needs of the community and ensuring solid links between services that are offered and the needs of those to be served.

**2. Promote social inclusion and equity between services for Francophones and for Anglophones.**

Respondents felt that there were historical inequities in levels of service for Francophones and that increased funding would be required to create more equity, for example, in ensuring that Francophones would be served as quickly as Anglophones.

**3. Recognize the specific needs of Francophones and their right to be served in French, as one of Canada’s two official languages.**

Respondents identified that service in French should be considered a right, not a luxury and that provision must be made for the particular linguistic and cultural identity of Francophones.

**4. Recognize the new reality of La Francophonie in Ottawa, in particular the growing importance of francophone newcomers.**

A focus on the francophone population must take into account the interests of newcomers from francophone countries, and their specific cultural sensitivities.

**5. Ensure accountability on the part of the City of Ottawa directly, and the agencies they fund, for the provision of francophone services to the homeless.**

Respondents identified that contracts with agencies serving the homeless should specify bilingual requirements and that this should be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. These conditions should apply equally to services that are provided directly by the City.

**6. Reinforce networks that are currently in place.**

Rather than “re-invent the wheel”, respondents indicated that any new actions should build on the systems that are in place and that function well.

## 7.2 Proposed Actions

On the basis of input from key informants, homeless families, front-line staff and the stakeholder community, the following actions are proposed:

### **A. Creation of a network of all francophone service providers, housing organizations and other agencies serving the homeless. It is recommended that:**

A1. The City of Ottawa host a preliminary meeting of francophone stakeholders to put in place a structure for a francophone homelessness network, including determination of a vision, mission and key steps for implementation.

A2. Francophone stakeholders, in conjunction with the City, work to identify the resources needed and potential funding sources to support development and on-going operations of a francophone homelessness network.

### **B. Establishment of bilingual requirements and accountability mechanisms to ensure provision of bilingual service in services for the homeless funded by the City of Ottawa or by the Province of Ontario. It is recommended that:**

B1. The City ensure that appropriate levels of French language capability are available in services for the homeless operated directly by the City.

B2. The City establish, in consultation with francophone service providers and management of funded agencies, standards of bilingualism to be used in contracts with shelters, day programs and support services for the homeless.

B3. The French Language Services Division of the City provide information and support to funded agencies to assist them in developing French language policies and practices.

B4. The French Language Services Division of the City work with the Housing Branch to develop mechanisms to evaluate on an on-going basis the provision of service to the homeless in French by funded agencies and by the City directly.

B5. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Community and Social Services ensure that services for the homeless funded by them or delivered directly meet bilingual requirements of the French Language Services Act.

### **C. A complete continuum of housing and support services for the homeless available to the francophone population. It is recommended that:**

C1. The City of Ottawa prepare a complete inventory of housing and support services available to homeless Francophones and ensure its wide distribution to agencies in the community and to families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

C2. Francophone stakeholders communicate the availability of services in French through pamphlets, workshops, training sessions and so on, both for clients and service providers.

C3. As increased funding becomes available, the City consider funding the following gaps in services that were identified for the francophone homeless population:

- Drop-in centres in the periphery and with a full gamut of services for mental health and addictions
- Increase in social housing generally, and noted particularly for Orleans
- Shelter for women
- Immigrant services

- Services in a francophone milieu, such as in francophone social housing
- Prevention services including employment counselling, financial support, parenting advice and home maintenance
- Activities for parents in the family shelters, including English language training, preparation for work, crafts and budget planning.

C4. Francophone stakeholders meet with the Province and with the Local Health Integration Network to emphasize the need for improvements in francophone services for homeless people with mental health and addictions.

**D. Establishment of an accurate profile of the francophone homeless population to be used as a basis for the equitable allocation of resources. It is recommended that:**

D1. The City, in collaboration with francophone service providers, researchers, the immigrant community and francophone advocates (e.g. ACFO) develop an appropriate definition of “Francophone” that is open and inclusive and would reflect choice regarding in which official language service should be provided. This definition would then be used for data gathering by the City and would be promoted for use by other researchers.

D2. Shelter operators work to improve collection of data through HIFIS to ensure more comprehensive coverage and to ensure that homeless families and individuals have the opportunity to identify their preferred language of service.

D3. The University of Ottawa researchers include data related to language in their publications of the Panel Study results.

D4. The Housing Branch of the City of Ottawa request that Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation obtain statistics from Statistics Canada on core housing need in Ottawa by language category (based on “First Official Language Spoken” variable rather than “Mother Tongue”).

**E. Sensitization of service providers and funders to the need to ensure adequate and appropriate services in French are available for homeless families and individuals. It is recommended that:**

E1. The French Language Services Division of the City of Ottawa put in place a program to sensitize service providers, City staff and other funders of the need to offer appropriate choices with respect to homelessness services for Francophones.

E2. Service provider agencies make every effort to engage bilingual personnel and to encourage the participation of Francophones on their Boards and as volunteers.

**F. Implementation of training in French for front-line service providers. It is recommended that:**

F1. Service provider agencies offer training in French as a second language for front-line staff who are Anglophones.

F2. Service provider agencies offer training in cultural and linguistic interpretation for bilingual front-line staff who are called upon to act as intermediaries for francophone clients.

F3. The Community Capacity Building Team ensure that training is available to front-line service providers in French on operational issues, such as harm reduction, support for

people with mental illness, Tenant Protection Act, social service reform and development of logic models.

## 8. Conclusion

Evidence from this review supports previous work that identified the need for improvements in French language services for the homeless.<sup>6</sup> Francophone stakeholders are adamant that statistics showing representation of the francophone homeless population as similar to their representation in the population at large are misleading and this view is supported by work elsewhere that has identified under representation of Francophones if the “mother tongue” variable is used.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of any debate on statistics, it is clear that Francophones are not always given access to services in their language of choice and often face the choice of either struggling to communicate in a second (or third) language or having to wait until service is available in French. It is important to remember that these situations occur at a time when people face trying and often critical circumstances. Coping with this language issue creates an additional barrier for them that is unjust and particularly so, because of the importance of these services in assisting people to improve their situation.

We are grateful to the francophone stakeholder community for the contribution of their time, their ideas and their passion for this issue. We hope that implementation of these recommendations will have a positive and tangible impact on homelessness for Francophones in Ottawa

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<sup>6</sup> Molgat, Marc, Minoritaires et Sans Abri: Des Francophones en Marge À Ottawa-Carleton, Septembre, 1994 and notes from the francophone table at the September 11, 2003 Community Consultation for the update of the 2002 Homelessness Action Plan.

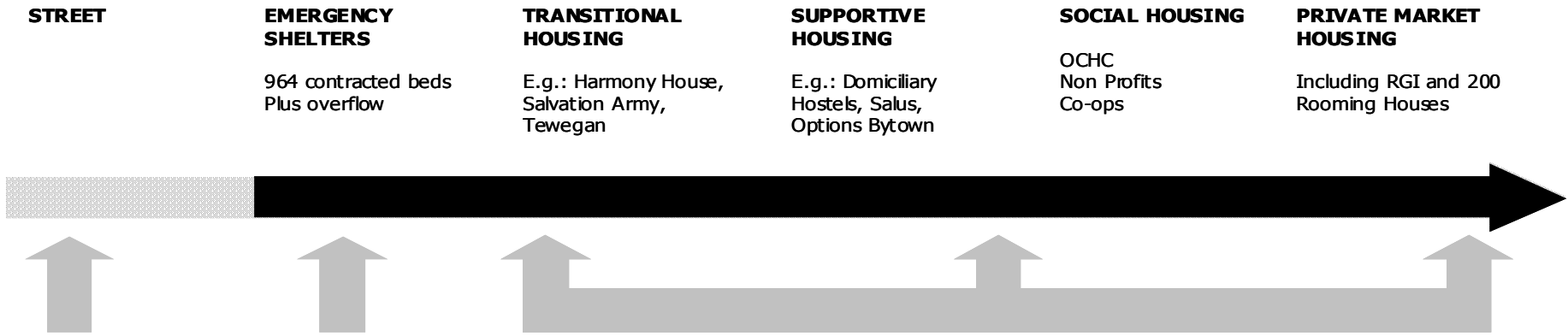
<sup>7</sup> Office of Francophone Affairs, Statistical Profile – Francophones in Ontario, September 2005 and Madibbo, Amal, Immigration, Race, and Language: Black Francophones of Ontario and the Challenges of Integration, Racism, and Language Discrimination, Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement – Toronto, June 2005.

Appendix 1

# Continuum of Housing and Support Services

Housing

Support Services



STREET	EMERGENCY SHELTERS	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	SUPPORTIVE HOUSING	SOCIAL HOUSING	PRIVATE MARKET HOUSING
	964 contracted beds Plus overflow	E.g.: Harmony House, Salvation Army, Tewegan	E.g.: Domiciliary Hostels, Salus, Options Bytown	OCHC Non Profits Co-ops	Including RGI and 200 Rooming Houses

- OUTREACH**
- health
  - housing
  - counselling

- Street  
Salvation Army Van  
Centre 507  
Operation Go Home  
Odawa Friendship  
Centre  
Wabano Health  
Centre\*  
Jewish Family Services  
Ottawa Inncrity  
Ministries
- Drop-in  
Centre 454  
The Well  
Centre 507  
St. Joe's  
Centre Espoir Sophie  
St. Luke's  
Shepherds of Good  
Hope  
Odawa Drop-in\*

- HOUSING SEARCH AND STABILIZATION**
- housing assistance
  - referrals to community resources
  - health services: physical, mental, addictions

- Onsite in shelter  
The Shepherds of Good Hope  
The Mission, The Salvation Army  
Cornerstone, Oshki Kizis, Reception House, PQ  
CRS and SWCHC in Family Shelters, Youth  
Services Bureau  
Ottawa Inner City Health, Royal Ottawa Hospital,  
Public Health Department, CMHA  
E. Fry\*, Harmony House\*, Tungasavvingat Inuit\*
- Community-based  
Housing Help  
Action Logement  
CMHA  
The Well  
Minwaashin Lodge\*  
The Mission\*  
Rideau Street Youth Enterprise\*  
Catholic Immigration Centre\*

- HOUSING LOSS PREVENTION**
- life management / social supports
  - financial assistance
  - health: physical, mental, addictions
  - employment / training
  - legal / advocacy

- On-site  
Bruce House, Salus, Options Bytown, Daybreak, Cornerstone  
Shepherds of Good Hope, OCHC (through Options), Evelyn  
Horne,  
Tewegan\*, CMHA (youth)\*
- Community-based  
Pincrest-Queensway CRS and 6 other agencies (Housing Loss  
Prevention Network), The Salvation Army, Catholic Immigration  
Services, Housing Help (rooming houses), Centre 507\*, Catholic  
Immigration Centre\*,  
City of Ottawa Rooming House Services

\* SCPI service funding to March 2006