



June 3, 2021 at 3 pm

Wetaskiwin Homelessness Coalition Mural Exercise Summary

The categories needing to be addressed that came out of the conversation were roughly as follows:

🔑 Action is key.

A large, diverse group with representation from several sectors of the community, committed to the coalition and its goals will be key. Collaboration and cooperation amongst a variety of organizations, individuals and, likely, levels of government will help us all to work smarter, not harder. There is no room for independent agendas looking to be fulfilled within the Coalition.

We need a solution focused, problem solving approach that is action oriented. Issues need to be explored from all sides and then a plan will be enacted to address the aspects of the issues within our control. Aspects of the issue which are out of our control will be addressed by contacting the appropriate agency or level of government responsible and advocating for change on behalf of the Coalition and the residents of Wetaskiwin.

🔑 Effective, positive communication that educates the public on homelessness and poverty is key.

Homelessness and poverty is currently one of the most prevalent issues in our city. There is a lot of misinformation and outdated notions being repeatedly reinforced with little up to date, fact based information being offered to counteract it. A consistent communication campaign undertaken by the Coalition in conjunction with the City of Wetaskiwin Communications Manager and Open Door management will be able to counteract the distortion and inaccuracies.

A communication strategy that humanizes the issue of homelessness and precarious housing, including awareness of some of the myriad of factors that contribute to the state of being insecurely housed is key to decreasing stigma and increasing compassion and empathy. If the majority can recognize homelessness in its varied states as a result of a combination of factors that require a community response instead of the result of "poor choices" made by an individual there will be an increase in the number of people wanting to help address the root causes and be able to show kindness.

Messaging to the public at large needs to be clear, consistent in both tone and timing. Regularly scheduled communication with the residents of Wetaskiwin and areas that include one way messages that convey information as well as frequent public forums where open, respectful,

dialogue is encouraged to increase understanding by all stakeholders is a necessity. Encouraging openness and understanding in each of us will only make us better. Frustration, when met with patient and calm validation of concerns de-escalates situations to a point where real understanding can begin to take place. Denying one's concerns only reinforces their point of view.

🔑 A "to do" list and assessing priorities will be key. Having members take ownership of items on the to-do list is also key.

There are so many areas the coalition could help to address. Some of the areas include but in no way are limited to:

- access to free or low cost, quality, ongoing counselling
- access to free or low cost, quality, ongoing addictions treatment
- a comprehensive referral system that includes either virtual options or transportation options for out of town appointments
- access to free or low cost, quality, ongoing help with financial matters including but not limited to: applications for appropriate income support programs, applications for proper identification to access these programs, banking assistance, smart shopping, budgeting, help with setting up utilities etc.
- lobbying for livable amounts for varied income support programs
- developing program to address life skill development at any age or stage of life
- developing community strategies and/or programming to address the root causes of homelessness and poverty such as racism, our colonial history, individual and intergenerational trauma

🔑 A strategy to ensure all community members have equitable access to the necessities of life is key.

All members of our community deserve access to necessities of life delivered in a safe, caring, non-judgmental way. A wrap-around approach where a person can access several resources at one time through one compassionate service provider who knows what is available and how best to access them is an efficient use of time and services. A Housing First approach which emphasizes the rapid housing of homeless individuals into supportive accommodations that would then address and additional issues that might be identified after the individual is housed would be preferable.

Other identified areas of need include but are not limited to:

- transitional housing
- housing specific to youth
- access to food supports
- services that respect cultural differences and family traditions
- services offered that support diversity and inclusion

🔑 Acknowledging the challenges ahead will be key.

There will be many challenges along the way. Some we are already aware of and some that will be unforeseen. The issues we will be attempting to tackle are enormous. That's ok. We will continue to work until there is no more to do.

Some of the identified challenges include, but are not limited to:

- There is no quick fix. This will be hard.
- These are issues that do not respect regional boundaries, therefore co-operation that crosses regional boundaries will be imperative
- The public health crisis created by the pandemic will likely continue to provide challenges
- Personal and community safety
- Racism and discrimination in various forms