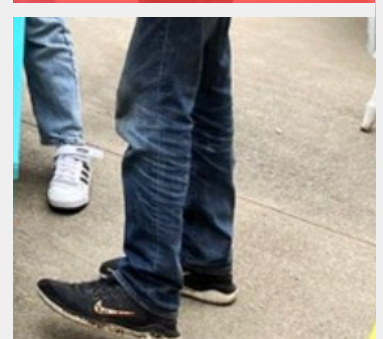
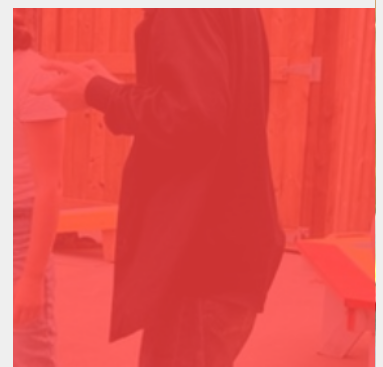
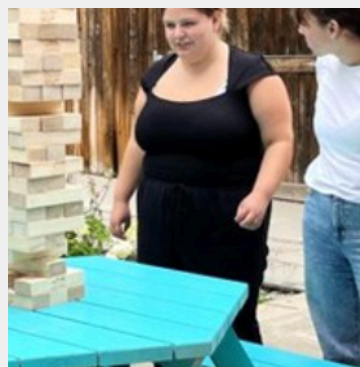
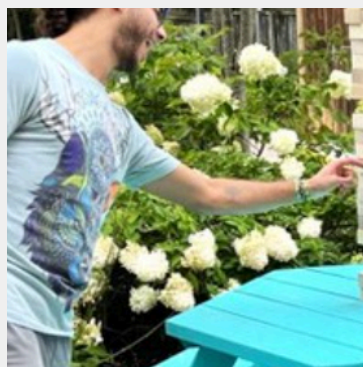
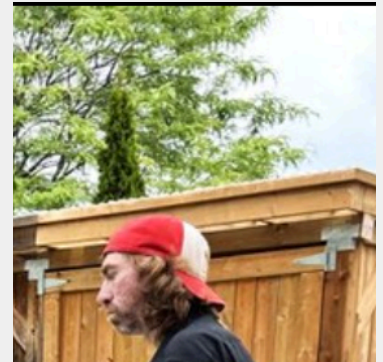


Examining Local Perceptions of Supportive Housing in Waterloo

A qualitative research analysis studying NIMBY attitudes toward supportive housing

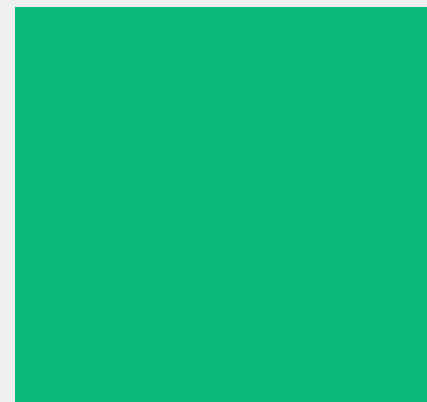


Introduction

Homelessness and housing insecurity continues to increase across Canada. Supportive housing has developed as a response, offering people stable, long-term housing along with supports such as mental health services, harm reduction, crisis assistance, and life-skills development. In the Waterloo Region, Supportive Housing of Waterloo (SHOW) plays a crucial role in this work by providing permanent, affordable housing to those who have experienced homelessness.

While many Canadians widely support approaches such as supportive housing, attitudes tend to shift when housing is planned in one's own neighbourhood. Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) is a phenomenon that reveals an evident obstacle to the acceptance and establishment of supportive housing in communities. NIMBY attitudes are often fueled by stigma, misinformation, and fears regarding crime rates, safety, and changes within the neighbourhood.

This research explored the gap in understanding of how supportive housing is perceived at the community level and how SHOW can improve communication, engagement, and collaboration with community members. By conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews, this study examined how community members understand supportive housing, the meanings they associate with the program, and how it influences their experiences, safety, and community identity. 7 business owners were interviewed, and were asked questions on their perceptions and ideas on supportive housing. Those interviews have informed our findings and our recommendations.





Major Themes

Perceptions of Supportive Housing

Participants viewed supportive housing as a beneficial response to homelessness, especially for providing safety, security, and access to resources. At the same time, views were mixed or uneasy which was often shaped by secondhand information or occasional negative experiences.

“I feel like there should be more of this kind of supportive housing in society... if they have a safe space to at least stay, that would be really beneficial for society” (Participant 1).

Community Connection

Community members shared a sense of disconnection between SHOW and the broader community that contributes to uncertainty. SHOW’s low visibility approach serves its purpose by reducing knowledge of the building itself, however, stigma can get reinforced without proper communication.

“But I wish sometimes that there was more communication back and forth with us... it would help us probably better know how to respond to certain situations” (Participant 5).

Actionable Solutions

Many participants expressed that they have had little to no interaction with SHOW staff and management, but also shared that they would like this to change. They suggested that face-to-face engagement and proactive education by SHOW are essential to breaking stigma in the community.

“Definitely like a one-on-one. I think someone physically coming to the business, as opposed to anything online” (Participant 4).



Recommendations

Have an Open House

Invite community members to one of the SHOW buildings to introduce them to the services you provide and the people you serve. People's opinions change through education.

Increase Community Communication

Management and staff can introduce themselves to community members and employees in the area. A general email can be given for community members to direct their questions to. Start community programming, like a drop-in basketball game that members of the community and SHOW residents can participate in.

Monthly Newsletter

Highlight the wins from the past month, spotlight key donors, show what the residents are up to, share events that are coming up.

“Honestly, I think that primarily it just comes down to having interactions with folks that utilize the resources... just getting to know people who use these resources is the number one way to make people see the other side.” (Participant 6)

