

Building Bridges: The Process to
Develop an Emergency Shelter
in Cambridge

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PREFACE

'The Bridges' is the end result of eight years of very hard work by an incredible number of dedicated, passionate individuals. It was a life-changing experience for me to be involved in the process that led to the construction of Cambridge's first permanent emergency shelter for homeless individuals and families. Along the way I learned a great deal about fundraising, construction contracts, soil testing, surveys, take-out mortgages and the thousand other matters, large and small, that are part and parcel of a project of this magnitude.

What stands out most for me, is the overwhelming support and assistance the project received from everyone - Cambridge city council and staff, the Region, the Provincial and Federal governments, and the community. We simply could not have accomplished this without the contributions of each of them. The building stands as a testament to their faith in a group of fledgling neophytes who started with a passion to help the homeless, and ended with what we hope is a best practice model for our own, and other communities. Together we have done a great thing.

Anne Tinker

Executive Director of Cambridge Shelter Corporation
Community Champion

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“How do we expect a person to move forward when their life is about survival? If we meet their basic needs they can feel a sense of dignity, and then with supports they can move forward.” Marian Best, Outreach Support Director, Cambridge Shelter

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

“The Bridges”, a 3 storey, 40 bed emergency shelter with 20 transitional apartments, opened its doors in Cambridge on November 7, 2005. The purpose of this report is to document the process that was undertaken to identify that there was a need for this facility in Cambridge, and the steps taken to see it materialize.

For the purpose of this report, homelessness will be defined as: “the state of being literally homeless. This includes people that sleep in indoor or outdoor public places, use emergency shelters, live in illegal or temporary accommodation, or rely on family, friends or acquaintances for short term housing (sometimes called “couch surfing”).”¹ Although this report focuses on those who are literally homeless, it is important to be cognizant of those who are at imminent risk of being homeless.

1.2 Background

Homelessness has increasingly become a growing problem in Canadian communities. Lack of affordable and safe housing, loss of income, addiction and mental health are just some of the factors contributing to the growing number of individuals experiencing homelessness.

Nationally, the number of people who are in need of temporary shelter is increasing, and the number of people who are at risk of being homeless has risen significantly in the past eight years. In Waterloo Region, it is estimated that between 2,000 and 3,000 individuals experience homelessness each year.²

¹ Region of Waterloo Social Services. (2006, June). Inventory of services for the housing stability system in Waterloo Region, p.1. Waterloo: Author.

² Region of Waterloo Social Services. (2005, October). *Discussion handout for sheltering needs assessment update meeting*. Waterloo: Author.

Currently in Cambridge, there are 1,006 names on the Waterloo Region Coordinated Access waiting list for subsidized housing.³ Despite this overwhelming number, there are only 3 new affordable housing projects in the planning and development stages in Cambridge.

“The face of homelessness is expanding from the single male to families with young children, from the unemployed to the employed. It is no longer an issue for larger cities alone to experience. Cities of all sizes across Canada are now identifying homelessness as a serious issue within their own communities.” (Region of Waterloo, *A community action plan for housing*, 2005, p.93)

Cambridge is in urgent need of more affordable housing. The average vacancy rate for 2005 was 2.5%.⁴ The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation considers a healthy vacancy rate in a community to be 3% or greater.⁵ According to the CMHC, the average rent in Cambridge in 2005 for a bachelor apartment was \$506, a one-bedroom apartment was \$670, and a two-bedroom apartment was \$783.⁶ These rental costs for bachelor, one and two-bedroom apartments in Cambridge are well beyond the means of many residents.

Housing Allowance/Rent Ratios

Household Type	Ontario Works (OW) Housing Allowance	Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Housing Allowance	Annual Income from Minimum Wage* - 30% monthly housing allowance	CMHC Cambridge Average Rents (Oct. 2005)
<i>Single Person</i>	\$335 (\$171-\$335 gap when compared to CMHC rents)	\$427 (\$79-\$243 gap)	\$378 (\$128-\$292 gap)	\$506 (Bach.) \$670 (1-bed)
<i>One-Parent with 2 Children</i>	\$571 (\$211-\$212 gap)	\$729 (\$53-\$54 gap)	\$378 (\$404-\$405 gap)	\$783 (2-bed) \$782 (3-bed)
<i>Couple with 2 Children</i>	\$621 (\$161-162 gap)	\$792 (\$0 gap)	\$756 (\$26-\$27 gap)	\$783 (2-bed) \$782 (3-bed)

*Based on 37.5 hour workweek @ \$7.75/hr (as of Feb. 2006) = \$15, 112.50 per year for 1 worker and \$30, 225 for 2.⁷

³ Etherington, F. (2005, November 26). Struggle to find affordable homes. *The Record*, p.A1.

⁴ CMHC. (2005, October). *Rental market report: Kitchener CMA*. Ottawa: Author.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid; Region of Waterloo. (2005, June). *A community action plan for housing*. Waterloo: Author.

2.0 RESEARCH REPORT SCAN

A historical scan of local research reports was completed to identify themes that exist throughout these reports as well as to document the importance research and data played in the process of identifying a need for a permanent emergency shelter in Cambridge. The following themes were extracted as relevant in the research: Existing Services, Numbers Accessing These Services, Increase in Shelter Usage, Gaps in the Current System, and Process.

2.1 Existing Services

A number of the reports that were scanned documented the services in existence at the time the reports were written. For example, *Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region* (1999) acknowledges that there are only two large general shelters in the Region: YWCA-Mary's Place (for adult women) and The House of Friendship's Charles Street Men's Hostel, both located in Kitchener. These emergency shelters were operating above capacity at the time of the report and indicated they had residents accessing their services that were originally from Cambridge.⁸

As of November 1999, 36 emergency shelter beds were available in Cambridge (excluding cots and couches).⁹ By December of 2000, Cambridge had three shelters that served specific populations: Women's Crisis Services had 18 beds reserved for women who were fleeing domestic violence; Argus Residence for Young People provided 10 beds for women and 8 beds for men aged 16-24; and, Out of the Cold was operating with 20-30 mattresses from November to April at various churches throughout Cambridge (Cambridge Out of the Cold opened in November 1998).¹⁰

⁸ Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries & Waterloo Region-Wellington-Dufferin District Health Council. (1999, June). *Understanding homelessness in Waterloo Region*. Kitchener: Dietrich, Morton-Ninomiya, Vandebelt, Adams, DeSantis & Klassen.

⁹ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (1999, August). *Homelessness in Cambridge*. Cambridge: Vandebelt & DeSantis.

¹⁰ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2000, December). *So what's in the middle?* Cambridge: Mah & DeSantis.

Other emergency services available as of December 2000 included:

Agency/Group	Type of Service
Welcome Aboard Drop-in Centre	One breakfast per week Medical services one day per week Social and recreational opportunities
Vineyard Christian Fellowship	One lunch per week Clothing depot
Trinity Community Table	Drop-in lunch and meals 3 days per week
Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank	Emergency groceries

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Welcome Aboard Drop-In Centre has been in operation since 1997 and continues to be the only centre in Cambridge that offers daily services to people experiencing homelessness.¹²

2.2 Numbers Accessing These Services

The research reports that were scanned included statistics of the Out of the Cold Program (bednights) and also indicated who was accessing these services. In the winter of 1998-1999 Cambridge Out of the Cold was operating as a pilot program three nights a week at three church sites within the community.¹³ The total overnight bednights in a 22 week period from November 1998 to March 1999 was 256.¹⁴ In this same time period the Out of the Cold sites served 1,246 meals.¹⁵

The total overnight bednights from November 1999 to March 2000 was 1,639 with 5 sites in operation until February 1, 2000, and 7 sites in operation after this date.¹⁶ In this same 22 week period 3,763 meals were served.¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid; Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (1999, August). *Homelessness in Cambridge*. Cambridge: Vandebelt & DeSantis.

¹² Region of Waterloo Social Services. (2004, August). *The Region of Waterloo's role in addressing homelessness: A discussion document*. Waterloo: Author.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

It was documented in the *Waterloo Region Community Homelessness Plan (2001)*, *Only the Best for our Community: A Best Practices Report on Proposed New Shelter and Housing Supports for People in Cambridge and North Dumfries (2001)*, and *Social Issues and Trends in Cambridge*

“There had been a significant increase in the number of young people accessing the service” (Social Planning Council, *Social issues and trends in Cambridge*, 2002, p.11).

(2002), that the average number of people sleeping on mattresses per night was 20-25, a significant increase from the 1999 to 2000 winter in which the average number of people staying overnight was 8.

The 2001-2002 winter Out of the Cold statistics were not documented in any reports that were scanned. However, predictions were made in one report for the 2003-2004 winter: it was estimated that there would be 3,300 to 4,400 bed nights and 6,000 people requiring meals.¹⁸ Anne Tinker, Executive Director of Cambridge Shelter Corporation, provided actual statistics for the 2001-2002 winter: 2,094 overnights and 5,170 meals served (personal communication, March 3, 2006). She reported that for the winter of 2002/2003 the numbers were 2,683 overnights and 6,127 meals; 2003/2004 there were 3567 overnights and 7,820 meals; and, 2004/2005 there were 3,490 overnights and 7,334 meals (A. Tinker, personal communication, March 3, 2006).

“Over the past two years, there have been more seniors and young families accessing the dinner component of the program, as well as increased numbers of seniors and small families staying overnight. In addition, there is a rise in the number of women on the streets compared to five years ago (when clients were almost exclusively middle-aged men). The number of employed people using the program has also grown in recent years [.]”

(Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, *Social issues and trends in Cambridge*, 2003, p.6)

Argus Residence for Young People is another emergency shelter service in Cambridge and was documented in a number of research reports. It was reported that Argus “provides shelter and programs for young men and women between the ages of 16 and 24 years, but they are usually filled to capacity. So it appears that emergency shelter

¹⁸ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2003, November). *Social issues and trends in Cambridge*. Cambridge: Smith-Carrier, Adema, Vandebelt & Pye.

for youth requires further exploration and action.”¹⁹ Argus Residence for Young People served 178 people with accommodations and meals from 2001-2002 and the projected number for 2002-2003 was 247.²⁰ According to Waterloo Region’s *Inventory of Services for the Housing Stability Systems* (2006), Argus Residence for Young People saw 152 unique individuals in 2003, 136 in 2004 and 178 in 2005.²¹

There have not been any new documents that report the current estimates of people experiencing homelessness in Cambridge that are accessing the above-mentioned services. Dating back to 1991, it was reported that in Cambridge between 94 and 97 young males were in need of an emergency shelter in one year.²² A report created in 1999, *Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region* stated that there were 1500-2000 people homeless in the Region in one year. A similar report was created to determine the number of homeless people in Cambridge. It was found in 1999 that there were approximately 180-375 homeless people in Cambridge, however, researchers cited the difficulty in determining the actual numbers of literally homeless.²³ The recent Waterloo Region *Handout for Sheltering Needs Assessment* (2005) estimates that between 2,000 and 3,000 individuals in our Region experience homelessness each year.

2.3 Increase in Shelter Usage

Many of the reports documented the increase in shelter usage and some sought to explain the rise in need for these services. To begin, *Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region* (1999) cited an increase in shelter usage in the past five years (1993-1998) and that people who were using the shelter system were staying for longer periods of time. The authors conclude in this report that if those staying for extended periods of time could find affordable housing there would be less people accessing emergency shelters.²⁴ The *Handout for the Sheltering Needs Assessment* (2005) explains that some contributing factors to these increases in this time frame, lie in the

¹⁹ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2000, December). *So what’s in the middle?*, p.25. Cambridge: Mah & DeSantis.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Region of Waterloo Social Services. (2006, June). *Inventory of services for the housing stability system in Waterloo Region*. Waterloo: Author.

²² Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (1994, July). *Community trends: City of Cambridge and township of North Dumfries*. Cambridge: Author.

²³ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (1999, August). *Homelessness in Cambridge*. Cambridge: Vandebelt & DeSantis.

²⁴ Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries & Waterloo Region-Wellington-Dufferin District Health Council. (1999, June). *Understanding homelessness in Waterloo Region*. Kitchener: Dietrich, Morton-Ninomiya, Vandebelt, Adams, DeSantis & Klassen.

22% decrease in social assistance rates in 1995, and in the proclamation of the *Tenant Protection Act* in 1998 which allowed for 'vacancy decontrol'.

In 2000, the Cambridge Out of the Cold site saw an 87% increase in bed nights from 1999.²⁵ Some possible explanations for this increase include becoming better known and increasing nights of operation.²⁶ The "*So What's in the Middle?*" report also notes that there is a striking difference between 1999 Out of the Cold statistics and 2000 statistics.²⁷

"Out of the Cold volunteers have noted an increase in the number of young people aged 18-30 accessing Out of the Cold facilities, more seniors have been coming out for dinner, and there is usually someone new sleeping overnight every night of the week." (Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, *So what's in the middle?*, 2000, p.11)

Other possible explanations for this disparity include the lack of affordable housing in Cambridge.²⁸ *So What's in the Middle* (2000) notes that the number of households on the Region of Waterloo's Co-ordinated Access list for subsidized housing in Cambridge and North Dumfries in December 2000 was 1,010. The report also shows that in 1999, only 0.3% of building permits issued by the City of Cambridge were for apartments (this totaled 3 apartment units of 902 permits that were issued).²⁹ In comparison, apartments composed 29.6% of building permits issued in 1990.³⁰ The author of this report also concluded that in 2000 when an environmental scan was completed of housing that exists in the middle of the continuum, (see diagram below), there were 318 units in this category of hotel rooms, domiciliary hostels and rooms above businesses in Cambridge core areas.³¹ There are three dimensions of homelessness, and those living in the 318 units discovered were at 'imminent risk of being homeless'.³² "People are at risk of being homeless if their current housing is considered: unsafe, unaffordable, overcrowded, insecure, inappropriate".³³

²⁵ Region of Waterloo Social Services. (2005, October). *Sheltering needs assessment draft*. Waterloo: Author.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2000, December). *So what's in the middle?*, p.25. Cambridge: Mah & DeSantis.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

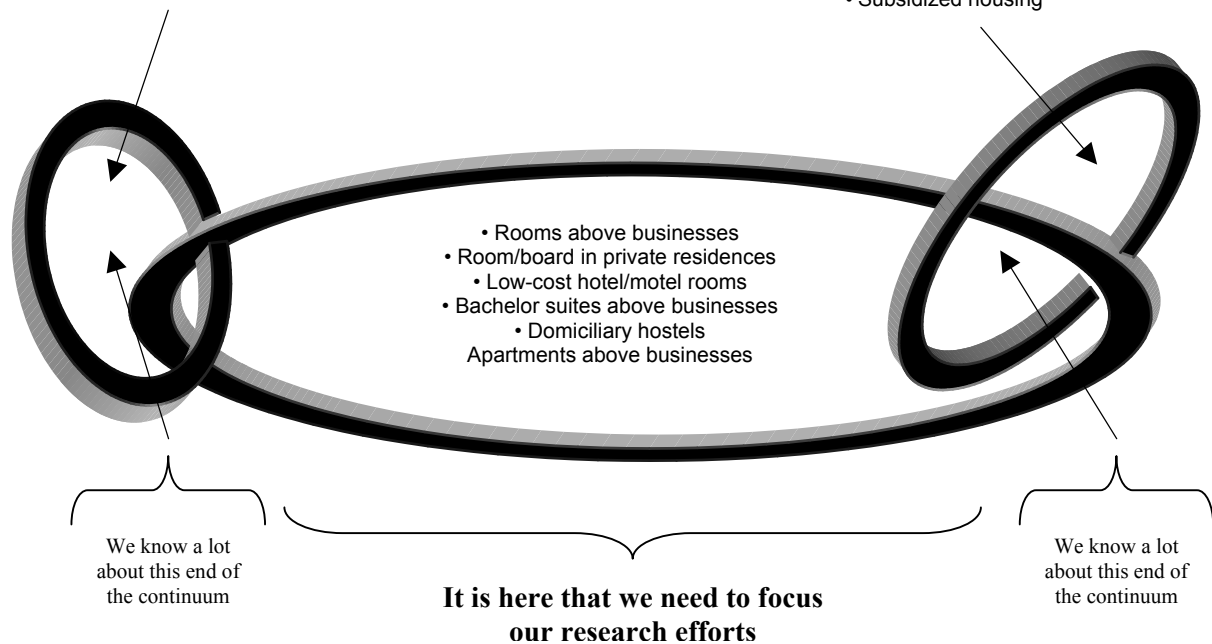
³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, p.4.

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- Emergency shelters (e.g., Argus)
- Outdoor locations & abandoned buildings

- Market units
- Rental units
- Subsidized housing



(Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. *So what's in the middle?*, 2000, p.5.)

Strangely enough in the winter of 2000 to 2001, Cambridge Out of the Cold sites saw a 32% decrease in bed days.³⁴ This sharp decrease may correspond with the policy that was developed that stated that youth under the age of 18 would not be served at the Cambridge Out of the Cold sites.³⁵ In response to this announcement, Argus Residence for Young People piloted a seasonal youth shelter that ran for this particular winter.³⁶ As a result, Argus' s numbers increased for this particular winter because of the referrals that they were receiving from their seasonal youth shelter.³⁷ The *Handout for the Sheltering Needs Assessment* (2005) notes that Cambridge Out of the Cold saw an increase in the 2001/2002 season of 28% bed days that recovered what had been lost the previous year (32%).

³⁴ Region of Waterloo Social Services. (2005, October). *Discussion handout for the sheltering needs assessment update meeting*. Waterloo: Author.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

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In 2002-2003, the Out of the Cold sites saw an increase of 33% in bed nights.³⁸ *The Handout for the Sheltering Needs Assessment* does not provide any insight for the cause of this drastic increase. Again, from 2003 to 2004 Out of the Cold only saw a slight decrease in numbers of about 2%.³⁹ The June 2005 edition of *Community Trends in Cambridge and North Dumfries* notes: “[s]ince 2001/2002 to 2003/2004, there has been a 39% increase in the average number of people sleeping at Out of the Cold sites.”⁴⁰ This report also documents that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of bed nights at Argus Residence for Young People from 1998 to 2004.⁴¹ A new 10-bed shelter for young males was opened February 20th, 2004.⁴²

It is also important to mention another report, *Housing and Homelessness: The Challenges Faced by People with Disabilities*, that was written in April of 2003. This report provides some possible explanation for the increase in shelter usage. The report draws attention to the lack of shelter allowance provided by ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program): the amount allotted is not enough to secure appropriate housing in the private market.⁴³ It concludes that “individuals are spending 70-80% of their income on housing”.⁴⁴ (It is important to note that those on ODSP just received (2006) their first increase in income in 10 years). Other possible causes that contribute to the increase in homelessness amongst those with disabilities, is the long wait to obtain ODSP which is often 4-6 months and during this wait period the applicant has no income to support themselves.⁴⁵ Other causes that factor in for those with disabilities are attitudinal bias, lack of appropriate supports, programs being closed, fees being charged for services that used to be covered, communication and literacy issues, lack of affordable housing for people with limited incomes, and lack of accessible housing.⁴⁶

“When we consider that housing is a continuum that is influenced by a variety of factors, including source of income and availability of affordable housing, individuals with disabilities represent a population that is at risk. The high rate of poverty among the disabled, the lack of affordable and accessible housing, and the increasing demand on resources and services, are serious challenges.” (Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, *Housing and homelessness: The challenges faced by people with disabilities*, 2003, p.13)

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2005, June). *Community trends in Cambridge and North Dumfries*, p.10. Cambridge: Cheng & Pye.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2003, April). *Housing and homelessness: The challenges faced by people with disabilities*. Cambridge: Smith-Carrier, Patterson & Vandebelt.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.24.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

2.4 Gaps in the System

The reports scanned note that there was an increase in service demand during the time period that was reported on and therefore gaps existed in the service continuum due to the lack of an emergency shelter in Cambridge. Many of the reports cited recommend that a permanent shelter be built to meet this demand.

In a *Community Trends* report dating back to 1994, concerns were expressed by local citizens and service providers that both adult males and youth were living on the streets due to the lack of emergency housing in Cambridge for males. In *Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region: A Background* (1999), it was documented several times that Cambridge is under-serviced in terms of an emergency shelter. According to the report, the lack of services in Cambridge at the time was listed as one of the key external influences impacting homelessness in Waterloo Region and as a structural flaw that makes the experience for those who are homeless worse.⁴⁷ It notes that people from Cambridge are required to travel by bus to Kitchener to access shelter, leaving their support networks behind and relocating to an unfamiliar community.⁴⁸ In 1998, the House of Friendship's Charles Street Men's Hostel in Kitchener recorded that 120 people accessing services listed in Cambridge as their last place of residence.⁴⁹

“ ...this kind of policy seems to augment the difficulties of people facing homelessness when their community does not have the resources for support within them.”
(Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries & Waterloo Region-Wellington-Dufferin District Health Council, *Understanding homelessness in Waterloo Region*, 1999, p.58)

Understanding Homelessness in Cambridge (1999) cites why emergency shelter services in Cambridge at the time were insufficient and unable to “fully provide the level of emergency service that is needed”.⁵⁰ The reasons documented include insufficient funds and supports, and a shelter system that focuses on specific populations such as

⁴⁷ Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries & Waterloo Region-Wellington-Dufferin District Health Council. (1999, June). *Understanding homelessness in Waterloo Region*. Kitchener: Dietrich, Morton-Ninomiya, Vandebelt, Adams, DeSantis & Klassen.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (1999, August). *Homelessness in Cambridge*, p.1. Cambridge: Vandebelt & DeSantis.

youth or women fleeing abuse.⁵¹ Therefore, three major gaps in service are identified: no beds for men seven days a week throughout the year, (Out of the Cold was operating three nights a week from November 1 to April 1), no beds for families seven days a week, and, no beds for women who are not fleeing abuse.⁵² Individuals experiencing homelessness in Cambridge that were interviewed for one report in 2000 expressed concern about where they will go in the winter considering that beds are not available seven nights a week.⁵³

“We need a shelter...especially in the winter.”
-individual experiencing homelessness
(Social Planning Council of Cambridge
and North Dumfries, *So what's in the
middle?*, 2000, p.23)

2.5 Call to Create a Shelter

A number of reports included a call to funders and decision-makers to create a permanent shelter in Cambridge. For example, public opinion garnered at community forums such as the “Opening Doors” forum in 2000 and a community meeting held in Cambridge in 2001, expressed that Cambridge having a permanent year round emergency shelter was a top priority.⁵⁴ When consulting people with lived homelessness experience the authors of *Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region* (1999) found similar responses and suggestions (building a permanent shelter) in order to address homelessness. *The Waterloo Region Community Homelessness Plan* (2001) lists four priorities in addressing homelessness: Meeting Immediate Needs; Creating a New Supply of Housing; Supports for Special Needs, Prevention, Building Community Capacity; and, Information, Education and Community Awareness. Building a permanent shelter in Cambridge would be a measure that if taken would fulfill the priority of “Meeting Immediate Needs” which includes providing “more emergency shelter” and “24-hour basic need services”.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2000, December). *So what's in the middle?*, Cambridge: Mah & DeSantis.

⁵⁴ Waterloo Region Community Homelessness Group. (2000, July). *Opening doors: A call to action on homelessness in the Region of Waterloo*. Kitchener: Author. ; Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo. (2001, December). *Waterloo Region community homelessness plan*. Kitchener: Author.

⁵⁵ Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo. (2001, December). *Waterloo Region community homelessness plan*, p.35. Kitchener: Author.

Only the Best for our Community (2001), a report commissioned by Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group (CAHG), in its entirety is a call to create a shelter. The report states in the introduction: "It is our hope that this report will help pave the way for the creation of a shelter/drop-in center and a housing-that-supports-transition facility that will successfully serve people in the Cambridge area."⁵⁶ The report includes recommendations from a visioning session held to document how stakeholders envision a shelter for Cambridge (friendly, spacious and well-landscaped).⁵⁷ Stakeholders cited as attending Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group included agencies such as: Cambridge Shelter Corporation, John Howard Society, City of Cambridge Elected Officials, Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Argus Residence for Young People, Vineyard Compassionate Action, Region of Waterloo Planning, Housing and Community Services, City of Cambridge Planning Services Department, Cambridge Active Self Help, Cambridge Housing Acting Together, Waterloo Region Housing, Trinity Community Table, Member of Parliament, Cambridge Self-Help Foodbank and Welcome Aboard Drop-In Centre.⁵⁸ Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group is specified in this report, including their commitment to pursuing and supporting the creation of a permanent emergency in Cambridge. This is cited in CAHG's terms of reference: "to support Out of the Cold as it moves toward creating a year-round 24 hr./7 days a week shelter service in Cambridge beginning November 2000."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2001, October). *Only the best for our community*, p.1. Cambridge: Curry & DeSantis.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.32.

2.6 Process

Very few reports that were scanned actually documented the process that has been undertaken to build the shelter. *Only the Best for our Community* (2001) and *Social Issues and Trends in Cambridge* (2003) document that a decision has been made to develop a shelter and planning has begun. The *Handout for the Sheltering Needs Assessment* (2005), which takes an inventory of emergency shelters and services, describes the number of beds available at “The Bridges”. One report in particular *The Region of Waterloo’s Role in Addressing Homelessness: A Discussion Document* (2004) describes some aspects of this process in terms of funding: the Region providing a one time grant, and purchase of service agreements for some clients at “The Bridges” in Cambridge.

According to the document *The Region of Waterloo’s Role in Addressing Homelessness: A Discussion Document* (2004),

There is need to further coordinate housing supply with support services in order to enhance the continuum of housing and supports required to address the needs of those who are homeless and to prevent those who are precariously housed from becoming homeless. The Bridges project in Cambridge and Charles Village in Kitchener are two examples of how Social Services and the Planning, Housing and Community Services are working together to develop necessary supports alongside affordable housing.⁶⁰

To see a historical timeline of the process to build “The Bridges” see Appendix A.

⁶⁰ Region of Waterloo Social Services. (2004, August). *The Region of Waterloo’s role in addressing homelessness: A discussion document*, p.12. Waterloo: Author.

3.0 STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Ten key players in the development of “The Bridges” were interviewed to gauge their understanding of the process that they undertook to build “The Bridges”. Themes were extracted from the interviews that were conducted with the stakeholders but sometimes these themes blur due to their interconnectedness. For a detailed list of those interviewed see Appendix B.

3.1 Learning There was a Problem

According to the stakeholders interviewed, the process to build a shelter began with learning there was a problem of homelessness in Cambridge. One person described the process overall as: “a grassroots movement—people see people sleeping on the streets, people talk to each other and people come together.” However, others did not see it this way. Many did not know a homeless problem existed because oftentimes those who were homeless were not visible to the community. So how did these stakeholders learn that there was a problem of homelessness in Cambridge? One way was through data, trends and documents. One informant notes, that for her, questions about homelessness were in the forefront because large cities were documenting their plight of homeless individuals in their cities. Marian Best commented that she and a group of others researched other cities’ Out of the Cold programs and visited one in St. Catharines to volunteer.

A number of those interviewed said that an essential step was to explore what was available and what was missing in the community. This involved informal observations by stakeholders such as community trends (increase in foodbank usage) and formal reports (as documented earlier in the research scan). Five informants noted the various reports that were created that argued the issue of homelessness was real in Cambridge. Anne Tinker noted that the first report that was really released on the issues, *Homelessness in Waterloo Region*, did not show the whole picture about Cambridge’s homeless population. So it was necessary to have the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries research the issue specific to Cambridge and document it in *Understanding Homelessness in Cambridge*. *So What’s in the Middle* was mentioned by two people interviewed because it was a document that helped in understanding why people ended up homeless: according to this report people did not have appropriate housing. *Only the Best for Our Community* was mentioned by one interviewee who saw it as an excellent way to look at various communities’ models and draw on best practices. Steve Garrison, former Executive Director of Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation, notes that these documents gave the

project credibility. When these observations about trends were made formally and informally, stakeholders recognized Cambridge was underserved.

“We weren’t serving this population...Kitchener/Waterloo was. It was obvious that no one else was doing it. Four levels of government had blinders on. **It was a hot potato that no one wanted to hang on to.**”

-Robb Bendus, Board Member and Volunteer at Cambridge Shelter

Other observations included: a lot of crossover of people experiencing homelessness to Kitchener because of lack of services in Cambridge, services that existed (Argus and Haven House) addressed a part of the homeless population, overall decline of number of apartments being built in Cambridge, overall lack of social housing, and specifically, the lack of any self-contained housing units for singles.

A second way that the stakeholders came to learn that homelessness was an issue in Cambridge was through dialogue with service providers that were encountering this population. Michael Lawrie, former Board President of Cambridge Shelter Corporation, explained that if these front-line workers were saying there was a problem, there definitely was. Marian Best notes that it was appropriate to then start the process with people who were already dealing with it first hand, for example: Cambridge Active Self-Help, Business Improvement Association, hospitals, social services, housing supports, and, mental health services. Ben Tucci, a local Councillor, also made mention of having discussions with downtown merchants and realizing this was a problem for Cambridge. Five of the respondents also made mention of Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group as a venue where these discussions between front-line workers could take place. Anne Tinker said that Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group helped to start the process to build the shelter.

Thirdly, the stakeholders and the community recognized there was a problem of homelessness in Cambridge through trial. Marian Best said that in order to identify there was a need “we tried the Out of the Cold program to see the numbers.” Once the doors were open, Robb Bendus said that it was apparent there was a homeless population in Cambridge because of the notable use of the Out of the Cold program. Two informants discussed the impact on Out of the Cold volunteers learning first hand that homelessness was a reality in Cambridge. Jim Kirchin, a long-time volunteer and board member for the shelter, said: “seeing first hand opened my eyes to the plight of the homeless.” After the first winter of operation Tinker looked at the statistics of number of bed nights and realized how great the need was. A permanent shelter began to be discussed by key players at Out of the Cold when they acknowledged that people are not just homeless in the winter.

“We started to realize- where do people go in April?” –Marian Best

3.2 Mobilization of the Community

“The first time I heard Anne [Tinker] say we’ll build a [permanent] shelter I said yeah right.” -Michael Lawrie

Once the key players decided that Cambridge needed a permanent shelter and they intended to take on the project, it was necessary to mobilize the community. Many of the key informants touched on the process and topic of how the community (including politicians) was mobilized (informed and eventually supported the project). One of the largest pieces discussed was public awareness-both politicians and government and the general community. To begin, one informant noted the struggle with working with City Council in the early stages. Gloria DeSantis, former Executive Director of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, felt that there was a sense of denial at first on the part of City Council but over the course of two years they began to recognize that homelessness had to be dealt with. Ben Tucci discussed his perspective as a City Councillor: “We recognized there was a need for better care and accommodation for homeless people.” He explained that the people from Cambridge Shelter Corporation and Kiwanis approached the City requesting a grant and he acted as a champion for this cause, urging these funds to be allocated. (Funds will be discussed under the third major theme).

“There is more than just a fiscal bottom line... social issues need to be addressed.” -Ben Tucci

Another positive experience with working with the City was noted by Anne Tinker when she explained that a by-law was amended that would allow the shelter to be built anywhere in Cambridge.

Two key informants discussed the federal government’s mobilization in terms of the SCPI program (Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative). Gloria DeSantis mentioned the difficulties with the actual process indicating that the proposal was almost rejected because those making the funding decisions did not have an understanding of Cambridge issues. However, as we will see later, although it was an arduous process, the project did receive SCPI funding and Anne Tinker notes that Janko Peric (the MP at the time) made sure that some of the SCPI money went to Cambridge.

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As mentioned before, a major topic that emerged when interviewing stakeholders was public awareness and support. Not only was it necessary to educate the city on the issue but the general community. One informant, Robb Bendus, admitted his own ignorance of the issue at first.

According to the stakeholders, why was this process of education necessary?:

- People did not believe that there were experiencing homelessness because there were no panhandlers, shopping carts, “in Cambridge you didn’t have to step over people” (Jim Kirchin)
- This was an embarrassing topic for the community
- Some community members did not understand that those experiencing homelessness are people
- To garner support for the project

Many respondents spent time discussing how the public was educated. There were many community conversations/forums that were set up to discuss the issue. An example of this in Waterloo Region that was mentioned in the interviews would be the “Opening Doors” community forum. Michael Lawrie commented on the importance of going out and telling people’s stories and community forums were an excellent venue for this. Also, reports written such as “So What’s in the Middle?” and “Only the Best for Our Community” were presented to government and the community and were used as a tool to raise awareness. It was necessary for key players such as Anne Tinker to make community connections, whether this was “pounding on doors” to inform people, going to places and introducing themselves, or speaking to service clubs. Steve Garrison noted the importance of drawing together key people from the community to participate in public awareness and fundraising campaigns.

This last comment speaks to the importance of volunteers in mobilizing the community. People were invited from the beginning to be part of the process or volunteer at the Out of the Cold sites. In fact, one key informant commented on how he was able to develop his own understanding of homelessness through volunteering. He also noted that the magnitude of volunteers contributed to awareness through simple word of mouth.

The media also played a significant role in public awareness in the form of newspaper coverage and press releases. However, one respondent referred to several negative newspaper articles on the issue that she felt may have fuelled negativity surrounding the issue and acted as a barrier. An alternate perspective was offered about these same newspaper editorials- that they were only the opinions of a few (not the community in general). In fact, these articles may have had a positive impact because

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they encouraged the same respondent, who mentioned the negative articles initially, to get involved in the project.

This brings the report to its next section: community warriors and the passion that drove them to pursue this project. It was mentioned previously that key actors in the project such as Anne Tinker and Robb Bendus were out mobilizing the community by “pounding on doors”. One respondent expressed the success of the project partly due to the “stubborn and passionate people” involved. “There was a willingness to rise to the challenge.” Anne Tinker, in particular, was noted as an advocate because of her drive and passion. The interviewer found it interesting that a number of those involved in the project described their passion for the cause and why this issue was important to them individually. Michael Lawrie explained that his brother had been working with people experiencing homelessness and he became aware of the issue from him. He spoke in depth about the necessity of hearing people’s stories and treating people with dignity and respect. Steve Garrison discussed his long term commitment to housing and homelessness and how this was engrained in him. Robb Bendus talked about seeing students that he taught with tough backgrounds that could use help. Anne Tinker discussed how she was driven by her faith.

“I had to choose between the catering business and the sheltering business. There was no choice. It was an opportunity but there was no guarantee.” –Anne Tinker

As a community donor, the organizations and individuals that donated showed their support for the project and this demonstrates community mobilization. The church as a community donor provided Out of the Cold with space to run the program, some of the volunteers to help run the program, and helped to mobilize the community through their support. In the beginning, there were three church sites, Wesley United, Maranatha and Knox in Preston, and by the end of Out of the Cold there were seven church sites in operation. Although, Michael Lawrie indicated his church congregation (Wesley United) was a bit skeptical of the idea at first, they came around. Anne Tinker explains that churches already see homelessness services as a need because they do not see people as deserving or undeserving. One respondent noted that after 5 years of running Out of the Cold the churches were tired and there was a realization that moving from church to church each night was not efficient.

Community donors also exist in the form of volunteers. The importance volunteers have on community mobilization has already been noted, but the initial response of the community when called upon to volunteer is significant. Anne Tinker explained that at the very beginning of Out of the Cold she made an open call for volunteers and 100 people came out. (There are currently 500 volunteers at the Cambridge Shelter). Tim Welch, former Housing Programs Manager at the Region of Waterloo, commented that he was amazed by the dedication and enthusiasm of the volunteers to see the project through and provide continuing support.

Speaking about community donors in the true sense of the word, fundraising was a large part of getting the community mobilized. According to three stakeholders, an important step in the process was to look to all sources of funding and make connections with a wide mix of donors, including corporations and individuals. In the beginning of Out of the Cold, Anne Tinker worked with Gloria DeSantis to find small pots of money and then to become a United Way member agency. When the project shifted to a permanent shelter, fundraising for the capital campaign required Anne Tinker and Glen Boy, the Campaign Consultant, to make presentations to various people, businesses, councils and clubs, but also to actively ask for significant amounts of money. The capital campaign lasted for two years and \$1.5 million was raised. It is important to note that one community member, Jim Chaplin, put up \$1 million of his personal wealth as a guarantee so the project could get a construction loan. Anne Tinker discussed the importance of being proactive in fundraising and trying to get community members to participate in planned giving and bequests, and transferring those that were capital donors to operational donors.

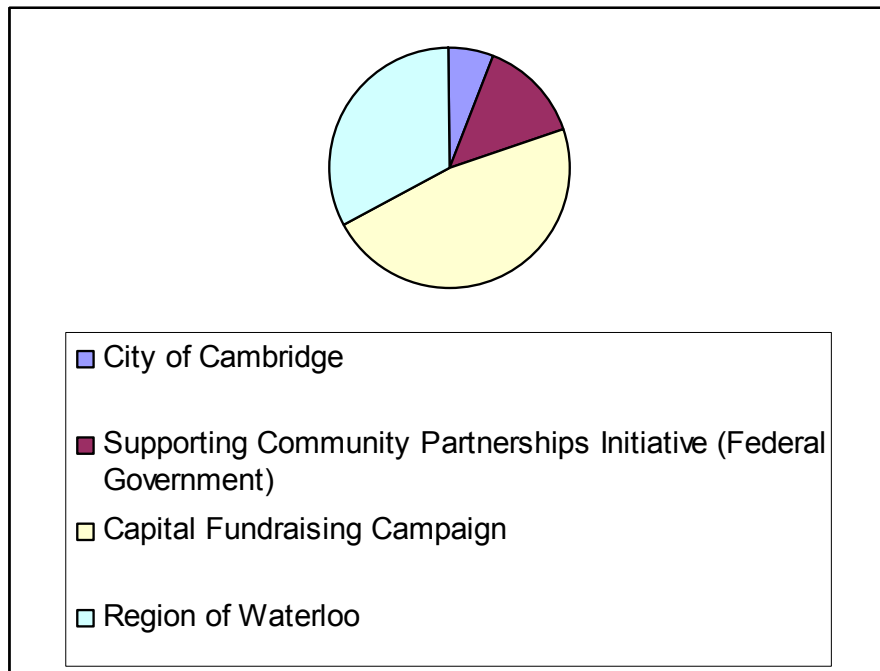
“It’s humbling to see how the community came together to support this cause.”-Jim Kirchin

3.3 Project Completion

The final theme extrapolated from the key informant interviews is how the project was completed in terms of government funding, land search, partnerships created and the model used for service. The total cost of the project was \$3.2 million. In order to complete the project, government funding needed to be secured. At the city level, the City of Cambridge allotted “The Bridges” \$200, 000 for the building. The Federal and Provincial governments granted \$440,000 in housing dollars and the SCPI (Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative) gave \$450,000. Many noted the extensive Regional support for this project. \$270,000 of affordable housing money was granted as well as

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\$300,000 to purchase the land. In total Waterloo Region committed \$1.135 million for the capital. The Region also has an ongoing purchase of service agreement to provide a per diem for some shelter residents of which they pay 20% and the province pays 80%. Anne Tinker discussed the extreme difficulty in securing the funds for this project.



Once the money was secured from the above mentioned sources (community donors and government), “The Bridges” could proceed with finding a property and beginning construction. Many informants mentioned the grueling process of trying to get a safe and appropriate property. Anne Tinker noted it took 18 months and in that time 20 properties were investigated. It turned out that fortunately Tinker knew the two property owners of the present site and was able to purchase the land for \$220 000. A number of the respondents mentioned that they assisted in this process. Once the property was

found it was necessary to act quickly at this site and begin to build. Jim Kirchin was able to contribute his expertise to get city planning department approval. Kirchin noted that this aspect was important to the project because it kept the Board of Directors from spinning their wheels. An architect and project consultant were hired and the project consultant was eventually replaced by Anne Tinker. One definite setback that was encountered was a problem with the walls. The first floor walls ended up having to be torn down and the construction had to be restarted.

Another important topic under the theme of project completion is that of the partnership between Cambridge Shelter Corporation and Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation (both partners formed Making Room Incorporated as a joint board to oversee the project). Steve Garrison and Anne Tinker were at the same meeting at the Region and they discussed putting in a proposal together to expand “The Bridges” project and have a transitional unit component to the new building.

Why was a partnership considered at the time?:

- Partnerships were the buzz word at the time
- Need continues beyond emergency shelter (link to transitional units)
- Transitional units are more of a long term solution
- Transitional units give hope because it is more than just a shelter

Kiwanis and Cambridge Shelter Corporation worked together to complete this project and currently 16 transitional units are housed on the second floor of the building and four on the third. Steve Garrison noted that this was an organic process because there are not a lot of models in existence of partnerships of this type. Therefore, “we were learning as we went along and inventing as we went.” Garrison discussed how it was difficult to manage the partnership because the two agencies were required to make joint decisions, but they often experienced conflict because of the differing values each agency held due to the nature of their service. He acknowledged in his interview the amount of energy it takes to keep a partnership together and admitted that this is a testament of the two agencies’ spirit.

“We needed to prove to people that once we got into the building we could sustain it.” –Anne Tinker

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A number of those interviewed discussed the need to review best practice models and clarify the agency's approach in the process to complete the project in order to ensure that the final outcome will be the best it can be. Other communities with shelters were visited and questions were asked about what was working for them and what would they do differently if they could. A best practices report, *Only the Best for Our Community*, was written that documented Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group's findings from many visits to various communities. One observation was that there was a definite benefit to having as many services as possible at one location.

Cambridge Shelter Corporation reaffirmed their values and approach by reworking their vision, mission and values and ensuring that all involved knew who the agency was and what they do, so a standard was established. This is especially important because of the staff's realization that the work they complete as an agency gives them a huge responsibility due to the fact that they are dealing with people's lives.

Common themes that appeared in the interviews around the agency's approach were:

- Common sense approach
- Holistic
- Help with everything
- Not just warehousing people
- Advance people that have the willingness and ability to move on
- Clients re-establish themselves
- Dignity and respect
- People are worthy
- Everybody is welcome
- Everybody moves at a different pace
- Everybody out there has a story

"It is my goal to have this [shelter] as a service model that other communities will come to and say wow!" -Anne Tinker

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT PROGRAM

The Bridges is a 20, 000 square foot facility with a 40-bed shelter, three family shelter units, a drop-in centre and 20 transitional housing units. Since The Bridges opened its doors in November 2005, the program has provided 8,830 bed nights and over 14,000 meals to people in need in its first 30 weeks of operation. There are 40 beds available each night with mattresses to supplement for overflow on busy nights. A hot nutritious meal is served by volunteers 7 nights a week. The Welcome Aboard Drop-In Centre operates five days a week and provides over 100 participants each day with a warm, safe place and access to a wide variety of services and programs. These services include medical care and foot care clinics, identification clinics, literacy, life skills, social and recreational programming, referrals and connections to addiction treatment facilities and mental health programs, help with housing searches, and, a trustee program. In the past year Welcome Aboard Drop-In Centre had over 14,000 visits. The Cambridge Shelter's mission statement is: "to provide safe shelter, and to offer support and encouragement for the individual hopes and needs of people dealing with life issues."

Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation operates the 20 transitional housing units on the second and third floor of "The Bridges". Currently, 19 of the bachelor-style apartments are occupied. These units are rent subsidized.



"The Bridges"

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

In closing, it is evident through the research report scan that research and data played a major role in identifying that there was a need for a permanent emergency shelter in Cambridge. Stakeholders explained that the steps taken in this process were learning there was a problem, mobilizing the community, and completing the project.

5.1 Is the Need Being Met?

Now that “The Bridges” building is complete and people seek refuge there, is the need for emergency shelter in our community being met? Stakeholders were asked whether they thought if “The Bridges” would meet the need that was originally identified. Most expressed that they felt it would meet the need and explained why, but many raised concern over the capacity for growth. A number of stakeholders commented on Cambridge Shelter Corporation’s model of service and organizational structure as reasons for the success of the shelter.

“I think [we are meeting the need] because we [Cambridge Shelter] are willing to grow with the needs of the people. We are willing to re-look at what we have done and what we are doing in the future.” -Marian Best

Others commented that the shelter is doing a remarkable job of instilling hope and meeting basic needs of those accessing services. One respondent explained that “The Bridges” is an excellent model because of many services being in one place. Also, the building design was applauded because of the family units and transitional units. Steve Garrison pointed out that this is only a short-term solution. Concerns were raised over the need growing as numbers accessing services are already increasing. “We are already running at over-capacity. The building has a certain capacity, then what? The building can only do as much as it is designed for” (J. Kirchin, personal communication, February 15, 2006). Anne Tinker expressed that in 10 years time “The Bridges” will no longer be able to meet the demand. Due to capacity issues already mentioned, and as Tim Welch argues, there have been concerns over revenue already.

5.2 Next Steps

Where do we go from here? Now that “The Bridges” is built where are the gaps that still exist? Many of the stakeholders interviewed expressed the need for more affordable housing, and supportive housing (mental health services and addiction services). The number of people experiencing homelessness is increasing and with that comes an increased demand for service. In order to achieve a long-term solution to homelessness more affordable housing needs to be built (S. Garrison, personal communication, March 10, 2006). This includes more transitional apartments so that people staying at the shelter have somewhere to move on to. Many of the stakeholders commented on the need for more mental health services and supportive housing for this population. In terms of addiction services and housing, it was recommended that more addiction treatment centres are opened locally and that stabilization houses (dry houses) are needed for people before and after they attend rehabilitation.

BRIDGE LIVING

(a poem written by Jamie a former resident at Bridges)

I lay my head at bed twenty four, I know you all see me,
how do you miss such a great big tree.
Some of you even want to chop it down and others may think I'm a clown.

Some take this place as a joke well this is the place I have to call home.
So start treating my home with a little respect, and maybe you will earn it yet.
I'm not coming down on any of you, we all have things were resolving too.

I just want to stay sane, were all going through a little pain.
Just like you I'm trying to change my act, and there are times I don't know how to react.

I hear all of your voices all thoughts of negativity.
Why must you be such a nuisance, all your talking is a bunch of nonsense,
cant help you change, that's up to you to find your way.

We need to try to get along now you feel you don't belong.

We all had better once.

We just took the real good punch, one that almost knocked us out.

Get up Get up that was just a tap to the head, don't give up the little voice said,
keep on fighting you'll get by, how do you know if your not willing to try.

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APPENDIX A

Historical Timeline of Process to Build “The Bridges”

<i>Significant Event</i>	<i>Date</i>
• Steering committee established to bring Out of the Cold to the community	1997 (spring)
• Opened three churches up as Out of the Cold sites (Maranatha, Wesley United and Knox in Preston)	1997 (fall)
• Release of documents <i>Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region</i> and <i>Understanding Homelessness in Cambridge</i>	1999
• HRSDC grant for 2 part time positions (Hired two staff-Anne Tinker and Marian Best)	June 2000
• Opened up Cambridge Shelter Corporation at Wesley United	July 10, 2000
• Became incorporated as Cambridge Shelter	October 2000
• Release of the document “So What’s in the Middle?”	December 2000
• Partnership with Kiwanis began	January 2001
• Cambridge Shelter took Welcome Aboard on as a program	February 2001
• Release of the document “Only the Best for Our Community”	2001
• Found property	January 2002
• Fundraising-capital campaign	2003/2004
• Began construction	November 2004
• Tear down walls and start rebuilding	March 2005
• New shelter opens its doors	November 7, 2005
• Grand Opening	May 2006

APPENDIX B

List of Those Who Were Interviewed

PERSON INTERVIEWED	TITLE	ORGANIZATION
Robb Bendus	Board Member and Volunteer	Cambridge Shelter Corporation
Marian Best	Outreach Support Director	Cambridge Shelter Corporation
Gloria DeSantis	Former Executive Director	Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries
Steve Garrison	Former Executive Director	Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation
Jim Kirchin	Board Member and Volunteer	Cambridge Shelter Corporation
Michael Lawrie	Former Board President	Cambridge Shelter Corporation
Marie Morrison	Manager of Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration	Region of Waterloo Social Services
Anne Tinker	Executive Director	Cambridge Shelter Corporation
Ben Tucci	City Councillor	City of Cambridge
Tim Welch	Former Housing Programs Manager	Region of Waterloo Planning, Housing and Community Services

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

The following questions were asked of stakeholders during the interview process. The first question was asked as a broad overview and the remaining 5 were asked to gain specific insights.

1. Could you describe your involvement in “The Bridges”?
(how and why did you get involved?)
2. Why did you or your agency feel that there was a need for a permanent emergency shelter in Cambridge?
3. What were the steps that you or your agency took to identify this need?
4. Once you established that there was a need what were the next steps you or your agency took?
5. How would you describe the process of identifying a local need for this shelter to be built and the work done to have it materialize?
6. Do you feel that the shelter will meet the need that was identified? Why or why not?