



**WOMEN & FAMILY  
HOUSING STABILITY**  
*Advisory Group*

Preventing & Ending Women-Led  
Family Homelessness

**August 2023**



A PLACE CALLED

*Home*

A COMMUNITY PLAN  
FOR ST. THOMAS-ELGIN



YWCA ST. THOMAS - ELGIN



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin rests on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, Attiwonderonk, and Mississauga peoples, which are covered by the Upper Canada Treaties, specifically Treaty 2 (McKee Treaty, 1790) and Treaty 3 (Between the Lakes Purchase and Collins Purchase, 1792). This area is also covered by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum, under which multiple nations came together in peace to care for the land and the resources of the Great Lakes. Today, Elgin County is also bordered by the communities of Munsee-Delaware First Nation, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, and Oneida Nation of the Thames. We are grateful to work on this land as we strive to build a more equitable and just community.

## AUTHORSHIP

This report was prepared by YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin using the recommendations from OrgCode Consulting Inc., decisions of the Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group, as well as information/expertise shared by women with lived and living experience.

Report prepared by the following YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin staff:

Dawn Bailey (Housing Stability Project Manager)

Jeannette Singh (Director of Housing)

Valerie Marie Beneteau (Housing and Homelessness System Coordinator)

Members of our Lived and Living Experience Advisory Sub-Group:

By first name only: Allison, Amara, Holly, Mandy, Nancy, & Tasha

## ABOUT ORGCODE CONSULTING INC. THIRD PARTY EVALUATOR

[OrgCode Consulting Inc.](#), are experts in housing and homelessness.

Their core services include action-oriented research, data-informed analysis, robust facilitation, and program evaluation, as well as training and technical assistance. Their expertise in homelessness and housing takes them throughout North America and this experience is an asset to each of their clients. They can infuse promising practices from other jurisdictions where they fit within the local context. OrgCode works from an empowering and anti-oppression framework, sensitive to issues pertaining to gender, culture, age, economic inclusion, health and wellness, language, and other considerations. With over 50 years of combined professional experience, their staff combines a dynamic mixture of multi-talented individuals. In the OrgCode team, you'll find policy analysts, program developers, front-line practitioners, public sector executives, trainers, graphic designers, coaches, and facilitators.



## ENDORSEMENT

This report is endorsed by the following  
Women and Family Housing Stability  
Advisory Group Members:



**WOMEN & FAMILY  
HOUSING STABILITY**  
*Advisory Group*

Central Community Health Centre  
Changing Ways  
Canadian Mental Health Association Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services  
EarlyON Child and Family Centre  
Elgin Middlesex Detention Centre, Social Work & Rehabilitative Services  
Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic  
Elgin St. Thomas Community Foundation  
Family & Children's Services of St. Thomas and Elgin  
Fresh Start Support Services  
The Salvation Army  
Southwestern Public Health  
St. Thomas-Elgin Second Stage Housing  
St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services  
The INN St. Thomas-Elgin  
Victim Services Elgin  
West Elgin Community Health Centre  
YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

Special thanks to the Government of Canada for funding  
this project through [Women and Gender Equity Canada](#)



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada





# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION .....                                  | 7  |
| Purpose.....  | 7  |
| Governance .....                                    | 7  |
| Collaborative Agreement .....                       | 8  |
| Women-led Family Homelessness Definition.....       | 9  |
| Women with Lived and Living Experience .....        | 9  |
| GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES.....              | 11 |
| Gender-Based Lens .....                             | 11 |
| Overarching Principles of the Service Model.....    | 11 |
| A PLACE CALLED HOME.....                            | 13 |
| Community Collaboration.....                        | 13 |
| Women’s Voices .....                                | 13 |
| Local Data and Global Data Collection.....          | 15 |
| Data and Information Analysis .....                 | 15 |
| Selection of Community Plan Priorities .....        | 16 |
| SECTION 1 - COMMUNITY PLAN.....                     | 18 |
| Support and First Point of Contact.....             | 20 |
| Prevention & Diversion.....                         | 20 |
| Screening Assessments.....                          | 24 |
| Safety Plan .....                                   | 26 |
| Gender-Based Violence Response.....                 | 26 |
| Active Homelessness.....                            | 28 |
| By-Names List.....                                  | 29 |
| Coordinated Access Response.....                    | 31 |
| System Navigation .....                             | 32 |
| Family-Centred Case Conferencing.....               | 33 |
| Housing Stability Resources.....                    | 34 |
| Temporary Respite Accommodations.....               | 35 |
| SECTION 2 - ADVOCACY, AWARENESS, and EDUCATION..... | 38 |
| Advocacy and Awareness.....                         | 38 |
| Education.....                                      | 39 |
| SECTION 3 - HOUSING STOCK .....                     | 42 |
| Housing Stability Resource Development .....        | 43 |
| CONCLUSION .....                                    | 45 |

## INTRODUCTION

A Place Called Home – *Preventing and Ending Women-Led Family Homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin* is a community project scaling up foundational work completed by the “*Taking Action on Women’s Homelessness Advisory Group*” to better prevent and respond to women-led families’ experiences of homelessness and under housing.

This project consists of five phases:

1. Local and Global Data Collection
2. Analysis of Data with Recommendations by OrgCode Consulting Inc.
3. Development of a Community Plan - By the Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group with expertise from women with lived and living experience
4. Implementation of a Community Plan to be launched September 2023
5. Testing and Impact of the Community Plan
  - a. To be completed September 2023 – March 31, 2024

We are proud to present within this report, our community plan - a gender-based response to women’s experiences of family homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin. This intersectional community action plan reflects systemic change locally to decrease and prevent experiences of women-led family homelessness with a gender-based lens and family-centered framework.

### Purpose

The purpose of this community plan is to clarify and guide the process of women-led family diversions from homelessness and housing instability for long-term systemic change in St. Thomas-Elgin. We aim to increase awareness and advocacy on women-led family homelessness and conduct local and global research to advance an intersectional community action plan with a [Gender-Based Analysis Plus \(GBA+\)](#) framework. This community plan will be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis as St. Thomas-Elgin continues to work towards making homelessness and housing instability rare, brief, and non-reoccurring for all.



### Governance

The Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group (WFHSAG) was created to increase networking and collaboration to accelerate system change. Advisory Group member representation includes women with lived and living experience, housing, shelter, child protection, social services, health, mental health, legal, rehabilitation, childcare, and family services.



**WOMEN & FAMILY  
HOUSING STABILITY**  
*Advisory Group*



The purpose of the Advisory Group is to address the root causes of women-led family homelessness. The focus is to implement a sustainable community-wide plan to transform our local homelessness-serving systems in ways that reduce barriers that exist and provide equitable support to better serve women-led families within our community.

### **YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin**

The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin (YWCA STE) advises, informs, and makes recommendations to the Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group for responses to homelessness and housing stability for women-led families in St. Thomas-Elgin. Our mission is to provide leadership, advocacy, opportunities, and a voice! Empowering women and their families, everyday!



### **By Names List and Coordinated Access**

The City of St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services is the provincial Service Manager. In Ontario, service managers plan and deliver housing and homelessness services for their local service area. In partnership with the City of St. Thomas Social Services, the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin leads the operation and administration of the By Names List and Coordinated Access. Together they act as the leads for policy and procedure creation and administration in relation to the By-Names List and Coordinated Access.



### **Collaborative Agreement**

A [Collaborative Agreement](#) was signed by the following organizations once the service model and community plan was developed:

- Canadian Mental Health Association Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services (CMHATVAMHS)
- Central Community Health Centre (CCHC)
- Family and Children's Services of St. Thomas and Elgin (FACS)
- Fresh Start Support Services
- St. Thomas-Elgin Second Stage Housing
- St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services
- The INN St. Thomas-Elgin
- West Elgin Community Health Centre (WECHC)
- YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin (YWCA STE)

The roles and responsibilities for each signing organization have been established, along with a commitment from the Advisory Group Members to implement a sustainable community-wide plan to transform our local homelessness-serving systems in ways that reduce barriers that exist and provide equitable support.

## Women-led Family Homelessness Definition

*'A woman with dependents who is without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability of acquiring it.'*  
(Canadian Definition of Homelessness)

This definition was established to meet the requirements of the funded grant for the women-led family homelessness community plan.

When supporting a woman who is pregnant, choosing the right pathway of support will be case-by-case and specific to each woman's needs and wants. The Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group recognizes the specific vulnerabilities of a pregnant woman and supports the woman's self-choice as to whether she would like to utilize the women-led family service model.

## Women with Lived and Living Experience

YWCA STE staff, alongside women with lived and living experience, and community partners collaborated over two years to develop a community plan reflecting local system change, supported by positive distribution of decision-making power, and inclusive policies and practices to support women's equity.

Together with our partners, we believe in the statement *"nothing about us, without us."* Women with lived and living experience play a valuable and essential role in building community solutions. As requested by the women participants, we established an advisory sub-group of women with living and lived experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness to make decisions and inform the community planning process. This group of women has been a vital part of the project, and we could not have done this work without their voices and experiences alongside ours.

## *Thank you!*

We are incredibly grateful to the many women and organizations from various sectors who have contributed their time, leadership, and passion to enhance research specific to women-led families and the creation of a local community plan that utilizes a gender-based lens and family-centered approach to better prevent and respond to women-led families' experiences of homelessness.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES

### Gender-Based Lens

A gender-based lens refers to analyzing or viewing a situation, issue, or policy through the perspective of gender equality and its impact on different genders. It involves considering how gender norms, roles, and power dynamics may influence and shape various aspects of society, such as education, employment, healthcare, and social relationships.

By applying a gender-based lens, one can identify and address the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities faced by different genders. It helps in recognizing and rectifying gender disparities, promoting inclusivity, and striving for equitable outcomes. This approach acknowledges that gender is not a binary concept and recognizes the diversity and intersectionality of gender identities and experiences.

Using a gender-based lens can lead to more informed decision-making, policies, and interventions that aim to create a fairer and more just society for all genders. It helps uncover underlying biases and systemic barriers, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of social issues and enabling targeted solutions.

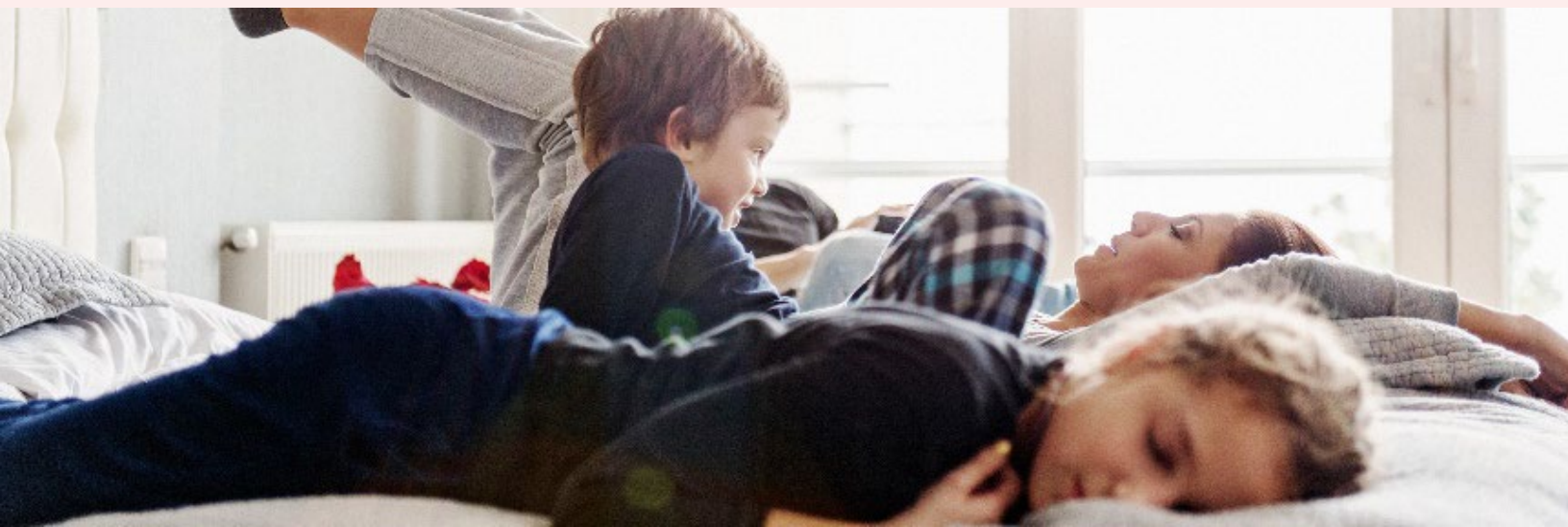
It is critical to utilize a gender-based lens with the development of a community plan for women-led families and as such gender has been considered in all development aspects. We must hold ourselves accountable with the implementation of this community plan to ensure it is executed with this lens for us to have the best outcomes possible for women and their families.

### Overarching Principles of the Service Model

As an advisory group, it was essential that the work being done was steered by a set of strong principles. This is intended to ensure that women-led families would be receiving the best service model, and support to increase housing stability. As well as providing a response to women-led family homelessness that is rare, brief, and non-reoccurring. The following principles were established and analyzed during each phase of the project.

- 1. Family-centered** focuses on children's safety and needs within the context of their families and communities, then builds on families' strengths to achieve optimal outcomes. Families are defined broadly to include birth, blended, kinship, and foster and adoptive families. It is important to support families with this approach to meet the unique needs of the family, to consider child development, child safety, and the least disruptive intervention for children. This approach supports families to utilize their skills and strengths to self-identify and resolve with the agency/staff person following the lead of the family to direct services.

2. **Trauma-informed** speaks to understanding, anticipating, and responding to issues, expectations, and special needs that are often present in survivors of trauma. This includes reducing the risk of re-traumatization. This approach is important in the scope of assuming that all individuals one is interacting with have experienced trauma and safety for the individual is a key factor in the interventions. When supporting women through a trauma-informed lens one is empowering them and collaborating to support in a way that is individualized to their needs. Trust and transparency are critical, so focusing on relationship-building is an important piece of this work.
3. **Diversion when possible** is a client-driven approach; the goal is to help the household find safe alternative housing immediately, rather than entering a shelter or experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Diversion consists of conversations that support the individual to critically think about their needs and what resources may already exist in their network. When supporting individuals through diversion the caseworker is empowering them and assisting them to control their outcomes.
4. **Informed consent and confidentiality** include consent, for the purposes of confidentiality, meaning that the service user understands and does not object to the information being disclosed or shared; the reason for the disclosure; the people or organizations the information will be shared with; and how the information will be utilized. Being open and honest about consent and what information will be shared and for what purposes helps to create relationships and trust, making it easier for the individual to be truthful. This also allows the individual to have a say in the services being provided; the who, where, and when to be within their control and the reassurance in knowing their information is being given to those who are relevant to their service goals and the allowance to revoke consent at any time necessary.



## A PLACE CALLED HOME

### Developing a Community Plan for St. Thomas-Elgin

#### Community Collaboration

Community partners have come together with the shared goal of creating a robust prevention and diversion response system for women-led families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. A community advisory group was launched from *Taking Action on Women's Homelessness* to focus more specifically on a system response and proactive approach for women-led families. As a recipient of a Women and Gender Equity Canada grant, the YWCA STE provided leadership and backbone support, alongside the advisory group, consisting of eighteen organizations. These organizations met monthly beginning in June 2021 and established several sub-committees to enhance the workflow. The Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group (WFHSAG) functioned with a high level of networking and collaboration to make decisions that would accelerate the systemic change needed to address the gendered issues of women-led family homelessness and housing instability. The Advisory Group's dedication and hard work has been instrumental in creating this community plan.

#### Women's Voices

We believe in the statement *"nothing about us without us."* Keeping this in mind, a group of women with lived and living experiences was established to inform the creation of the community plan. This group was created after a successful art expression project which drew in women from various walks of life. From those initial gatherings, a group of six women was established and they continue to meet monthly in person at the YWCA STE. The women in this group are compensated for their time with a stipend as well as a meal being offered at each meeting. Food insecurity continues to be a challenge for many of our members, so YWCA STE staff have been able to provide food hampers including fresh, frozen, and non-perishable items monthly to the women connected to this group. During the first year of group meetings, staff chaired the meetings which has now evolved into a peer-driven model with a woman with lived and living experience co-chairing with YWCA STE staff. YWCA STE staff are honored to be a part of this vibrant group of women. This women's group has a high level of trust, peer support, and connection. Women lift each other up and hold space for all voices to be heard. This valuable resource has enhanced the community plan and all development phases. Below are a few statements from women with lived and living experiences.

*"This group makes me feel a sense of empowerment and it feels great to be a part of something."*

~

*"It's great to meet new people and feel supported. Your voice is truly heard."*

*"I have felt heard, validated, proud, and value being part of this group. I have never really been part of a group like this before, but I am so grateful for this opportunity to have my voice heard."*

~

*"Coming together with like-minded women to support & encourage not just each other, but ALL women in our community. We all are strong women, who believe in bettering housing & support for women."*

### **Amplifying Voices of Lived and Living Experience Through Art**



Over three months, January to March 2022 the YWCA STE facilitated four separate art experience sessions, with the participation of sixteen women in total with lived and living experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity. The purpose of this facilitator-led artistic expression was to reflect on each woman's past, present, and future. By using a wood canvas, the participants were guided through a therapeutic art exercise reflecting on their past emotional and physical experiences - like a prompted journal entry or guided meditation, but with paint. This formed the backdrop of the piece, representing her past. Women then used mixed media on a mask to showcase their present and future selves. This artistic expression was paired with a voluntary guided reflection and sharing of their creation and life story. Women from various walks of life shared their stories within a safe and trusted space. All the pieces have come together into one shared image, demonstrating how these women are not alone, they are resilient, and their voices are being heard.

## Local Data and Global Data Collection

As a community, we were concerned that there was a lack of research and local data reflecting women-led family homelessness. We also know that many families experience hidden homelessness which makes it exceedingly difficult to truly gather real-time data. Knowing this, our project began with a literature review and local data collection by OrgCode Consulting Inc., to inform our decision-making with evidence and best practices.

OrgCode Consulting Inc. gathered local data through [lived experience](#) and [service provider surveys](#) to capture insights and inform recommendations for a community plan. A literature review and data analysis were created and shared at a community symposium on June 13, 2022.

From the recommendations provided by OrgCode Consulting Inc. the WFHSAG and women with lived and living experience completed an analysis of the seven recommendations highlighting those that would have the greatest impact and enhance our community practices to meet women's specific needs. From those recommendations, our community plan has been established.

## Data and Information Analysis

From July 2022 to June 2023 the Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group and the Lived and Living Experience sub-group engaged in courageous conversations, strategic thinking, and creative innovation to create a community plan. Information reviewed and examined included:

- [St. Thomas Elgin 2021 Homelessness Enumeration Report](#)
- [By-Names List & Coordinated Access Process Guide](#)
- [Lived Experience Survey Information](#)
- [Service Provider Information Surveys](#)
- [A Place Called Home – Preventing & Ending Family Homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin, By OrgCode Consulting Inc.](#)
- [Responding to Youth Homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin](#)
- [Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin](#)
- Community of Practice Calls with the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Built for Zero Canada; Improvement Advisor and Local Home Team Leads.



## Selection of Community Plan Priorities

The Advisory Group went through the process of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats) analysis, polls, and group decision making. This established three priorities, through the format of topic-specific expertise sub-groups.

- 1. Service Model Development (including Prevention, Diversion and Coordinated Access)** – partners included: Elgin Oxford Legal Clinic, St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services, Central Community Health Centre, West Elgin Community Health Centre, EarlyON Child and Family Centre, Canadian Mental Health Association Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services, Lived and Living Experience Participation, and YWCA STE.
- 2. Advocacy, Awareness and Education**- partners included: St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services, Southwestern Public Health, Family and Children’s Services, St. Thomas Second Stage Housing, Lived and Living Experience Participation, and the YWCA STE.
- 3. Housing Stock and Resource Development** – partners included: Fresh Start Support Services, The INN St. Thomas-Elgin, and YWCA STE.

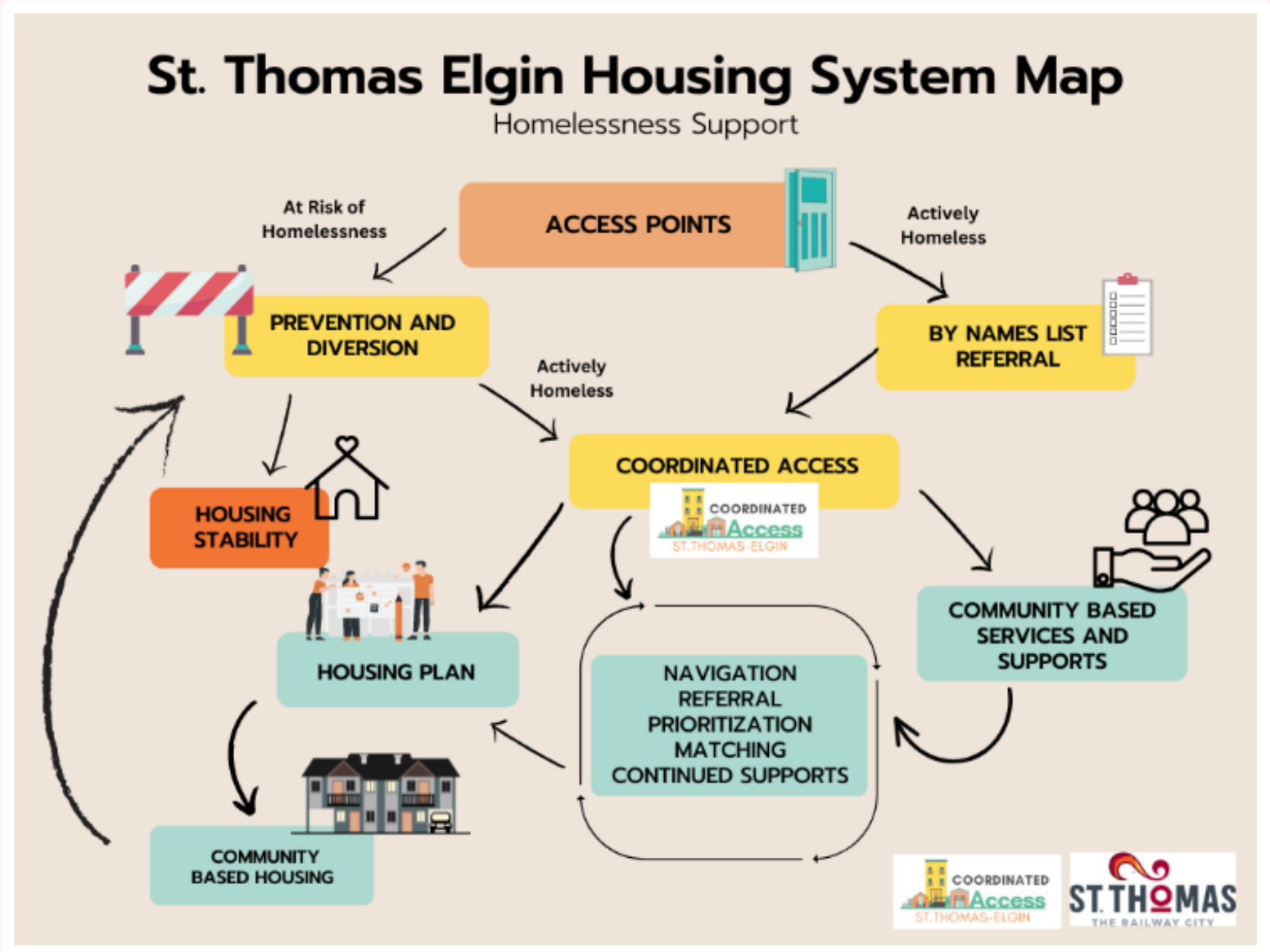
Sub-groups met from February 2023 to June 2023 with a shared mission to create processes that would build a community plan with a gender-based lens.





# SECTION 1 - COMMUNITY PLAN

Service Model for Women-Led Families At-Risk of or Experiencing Homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin



### **ACCESSING SUPPORT & FIRST POINT OF CONTACT**

A family may enter the service model through various means, based on their unique situation.

1. Community Access Points.
2. Worker within the community who is already connected to the family.
3. Not connected? A direct referral to the YWCA STE Poverty Intervention and Family Coordinator during business hours.
4. After business hours – Violence Against Women Services Elgin County (VAWSEC), and/or Emergency Response Services.

### **PREVENTION & DIVERSION**

Screening assessments will be completed and possible referral to the By-Names List. The family's path through the service model will be determined by the following:

1. At-Risk of Homelessness
2. Gender-Based Violence Response
3. Active Homelessness

### **COORDINATED ACCESS RESPONSE**

A women-led family will have access to the following responses of Coordinated Access, based on the individualized needs of the family:

1. System Navigation
2. Family-Centred Case Conferencing
3. Housing Stability Resources
4. Temporary Respite Accommodations

## Support and First Point of Contact

In creating a *'no wrong door system'* women-led families at-risk of or experiencing homelessness within St. Thomas-Elgin may have different access points when entering the service model. Community Access Points are identified service providers across St. Thomas-Elgin who have regular contact with individuals who are currently experiencing housing instability or homelessness and have been trained to assess client's needs.

Families may be actively working with another service provider when they become at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. The existing organization would have the family's history and knowledge of their situation. This service provider would work in collaboration with YWCA STE for resource and data sharing along with referral to Coordinated Access.

If a family is not connected to a service provider, the direct access point will be to the YWCA Poverty Intervention and Family Coordinator, during business hours Monday-Friday from 9 am-4 pm. After hours, a referral would be made to Violence Against Women Services Elgin County (VAWSEC), or Emergency Response Services depending on appropriateness and immediacy of need(s).

## Prevention & Diversion

Homelessness prevention refers to the policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that an individual or family will experience homelessness. Families and by extension, all individuals should be diverted or prevented from homelessness whenever possible. The first point of contact can be used as an opportunity to problem-solve the current housing situation and provide diversion support. Diversion can be used to prevent the need to use emergency shelter(s) and can help to identify safe and appropriate alternatives.

It is important to keep in mind that diversion is not a refusal to provide service but to be used to provide homelessness prevention. Homelessness prevention is a means to provide a sustainable way to exist in safe and appropriate tenancy when a person presents for service.

Prevention and diversion sets the stage for housing-focused problem solving, engaging in housing assistance, and understanding what may be necessary to help a women-led family avoid literal homelessness.

Homelessness prevention activities occur before a household has lost their ability to reside in a housing option. The goal is to sustain an existing safe, appropriate housing, whenever possible. Two strategies of homelessness prevention prove to be the most successful:

**Eviction Prevention** is a form of prevention when the household is the legal leaseholder and is at risk of losing their legal tenure for this housing option.

**Housing Loss Prevention** is a form of prevention when the household is not the legal leaseholder but is still located in a safe and appropriate housing situation and may have formal ties to the housing.

St. Thomas-Elgin has been provided the following reports from OrgCode Consulting Inc. which describes housing loss activities:

[‘The Art and Science of Preventing and Reducing Family Homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin’](#)

OrgCode Consulting Inc. - Prevention and Diversion

Diversion activities occur once a women-led family has lost tenure (legal, formal, or informal) for their housing option, but prior to entry into a shelter or unsheltered homelessness.

During the initial interaction with the service model, families will be assessed based on their immediate needs using the [Pre-Screener](#). This pre-screener can be completed by the Access Point, or the YWCA STE Poverty Intervention and Family Coordinator.

Once the pre-screen has been completed, the family will be directed through the Service Model based on the following:

- Risk of being homeless
- Experiences of gender-based violence
- Actively experiencing homelessness

The YWCA STE aims to be a leader in the community providing tracking of prevention and diversion. With a lack of best practices currently available this community plan allows for the opportunity to provide expertise in data analysis, collection, and interpretation to move from a reactive to proactive response with women-led families housing instability.

### **At-Risk of Homelessness**

Those who are at-risk of experiencing homelessness include individuals or families whose current housing situations are dangerously lacking security and/or stability.

These individuals or families could have experienced hardship, poverty, personal crisis, discrimination, lack of other available and affordable housing, insecurity of occupancy and/or the inappropriateness of their current housing (overcrowded, lacking public health and safety standards, etc.).

## **Imminently At-Risk**

A person can become imminently at risk of homelessness for several reasons, including but not limited to:

- precarious employment,
- sudden unemployment,
- discontinuation of supportive housing program,
- eviction,
- severe persistent mental health concerns, addictions, substance use and/or behavioural issues,
- Divisions of households (such as separation, divorce, conflicts with caregivers, or loss of a roommate)
- Violence or abuse (or direct fear of) in current housing situation (family/gender violence and abuse, dependents experiencing neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, seniors facing abuse, and/or abuse or discrimination caused by racism, sexism, homophobia, or misogyny)
- Institutional care that is inadequate or unsuited

## **Precariously Housed**

Any individual could experience precarious housing due to low income, local economy, and/or the lack of available affordable housing options.

The greater the financial pressure to cover basic costs, the more at-risk a household will become to experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Individuals and families who struggle to maintain their housing in these situations often do so at the cost of meeting nutritional needs, providing proper childcare, maintaining household utilities, and other health and well-being expenses.

[The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation](#) defines core housing need to be when a household does not meet at least one of the housing standards.

The housing standards include:

- Adequate
  - Housing not requiring major repairs (excessive mold, inadequate heating or water supply, significant damage, etc.)
- Affordable
  - Dwelling costs more than 30% of total before-tax household income.
  - Those in extreme core housing need pay more than 50% of their income on housing.

- Suitable
  - Housing has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household/family.

*“Women and gender diverse peoples are more likely to experience hidden forms of homelessness (such as couch surfing or staying with friends and family) meaning that the full scale of the gendered housing crisis is unknown.”*

*1 in 4 women-led, single-parent households live in unsuitable, inadequate, or unaffordable housing. YWCA Canada (Instagram, 2023.08.24.)*

### Is Couch Surfing Homelessness?



This is determined and assessed on a case-by-case basis for each women-led family.

How do you determine if it is critical to intervene and provide support? Is there a time limit to how long they can stay? Do they have limited access to the space for example they have to leave during the day and can only access it at night? Do they have a key to the home, or do they require someone else to give them entry? Do they

have their own space that is safe and has no fire safety concerns? Will their couch surfing self-resolve or require case management/by-name referral for intensive support to provide resolution?

*Women’s homelessness is often not visible. Studies focused on women identified the pattern of hidden homelessness. A woman couch-surfing with friends or relatives to avoid the street is among the hidden homeless. An older woman living with relatives who are exploiting her, or abusive, is among the hidden homeless. Women cycle through stays with friends, time in a shelter and time on the street, changing locations to avoid wearing out their welcome and closing off a crucial lifeline. ([YWCA Canada: When There’s No Place Like Home – A snapshot of women’s homelessness in Canada](#))*

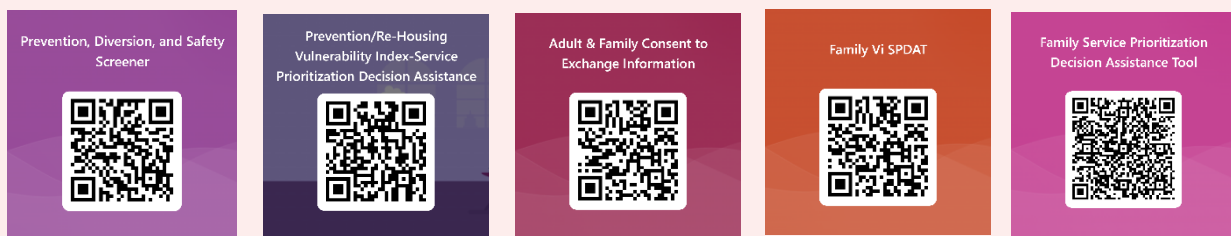
Each situation should be assessed with the previous questions in mind. Many individuals can self-resolve their housing concerns independently or with limited intervention. We want to provide them the opportunity to do so instead of jumping in too soon and not allowing that natural skill set development and resilience to occur.



## Screening Assessments

Further assessments will be completed by community supports to understand the complexity of the situation. The following Screening Assessments will be completed with the family:

- [By-Names List and Coordinated Access Progress Guide](#)
- [Prevention and Diversion Safety Screener](#)
- [Prevention/Re-Housing \(PR-VI-SPDAT\)](#)
- [Consent and Confidentiality Agreement](#)
- [Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool \(VI-SPDAT Family\)](#)
- [Family Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool \(F-SPDAT\)](#)



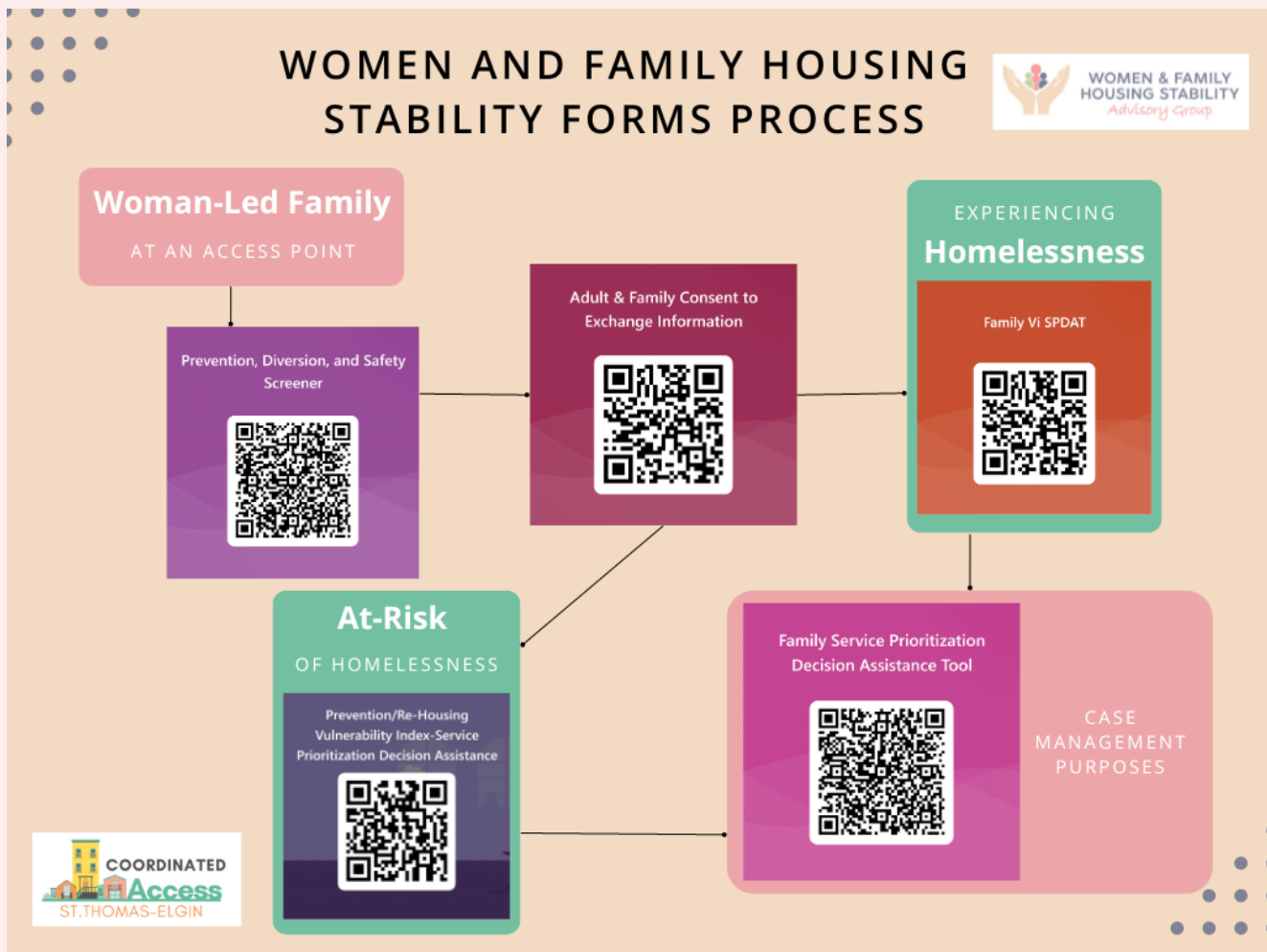
A Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool, or the SPDAT, publication from OrgCode Consulting Inc. is a triage tool for people working in the housing and homelessness sector. It allows the assessors to identify who should be recommended for each housing and support intervention, moving the discussion from simply who is eligible for a service intervention to who is eligible and in greatest need of that intervention. It is used from initial engagement with the system of care through to reducing or exiting people from supports once stabilized in housing. Like a triage station in an emergency room, this tool allows the housing and homelessness system to respond efficiently and appropriately to people based on need.

Vulnerability Indexes (VI-SPDAT) help provide informed consent, questions that focus on physical health, potential substance use, service use, victimization, and potential comorbidity (the effect of all other conditions an individual may have; presence of one or more conditions).

Participants can expect the standardized screening tool regardless of the provider, and providers can standardize screening across workers and organizations. The tool allows St. Thomas-Elgin's homelessness support system to efficiently target resources towards individuals/families who need them the most. Appropriate interventions are based on acuity scores.

If a SPDAT assessment has not been completed at the time of intake, the Access Point should use progressive engagement to ensure that a SPDAT assessment is completed as soon as possible after intake to utilize and build rapport when possible. The SPDAT assessment should be completed at point of intake as often as possible.

The Prevention/Re-Housing Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (PR-VI-SPDAT) is a brief survey (self-reporting) that can be conducted with those not currently experiencing homelessness to determine whether a client has high, moderate, or low acuity. This tool is to be used only with families that are currently housed and feel they are at imminent risk of losing their housing. “Imminent risk” is determined by the person being interviewed.



## Safety Plan

*'Recognizing that for many families - especially women-led, one-parent families – housing instability and crisis may be caused by a variety of reasons, including relationship breakdown, economic stress, lack of safety, etc., the completion of a safety screening process aligns with trauma-informed care. Creating physical and emotional safety while assisting families to address their needs, including dealing with the housing crisis, is essential.'* - A Place Called Home – Family Homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin.

The WFHSAG has prepared a [Safety Screener Script](#) and [Safety Plan Template](#) as resources that can be utilized across community services when supporting women-led families. Creating a safety plan is vital when supporting a woman who identifies as having been or is experiencing abuse. This plan will assist the woman in knowing what they need to do to keep themselves and their dependents safe. Through the service model community supports will be accessible and offer screening for gender-based violence (GBV) or intimate partner violence (IPV) referrals.

## Gender-Based Violence Response

For a community to thrive, all people must have equal rights, be able to exercise their own voice safely, live free from intimidation, harassment, discrimination, and violence. A gender-based violence response supports human rights, justice, equality, and equity.

Gender-Based Violence is a term used to represent the harmful acts of abuse perpetrated against a person's will rooted in a system of inequality between an individual or group based on actual or perceived sex, gender identity or expression, sex characteristics, or sexual orientation and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. It is a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue.

All genders may experience gender-based violence, however women, girls, and [2SLGBTQI+](#) individuals face a disproportionate risk of gender-based violence across unequal status in society.

*'Did you know? In Canada, 1 woman or girl is killed every 48 hours.'*  
YWCA Canada (Instagram, 2023.08.25.)

*'Did you know? In Canada, Indigenous women are 7 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be a victim of murder & 3 times more likely to be violently and/or sexually assaulted.'*  
YWCA Canada (Instagram, 2023.08.21.)

Not only does gender-based violence impact a person's health and emotional safety, it also has a significant impact on employment, both outside and inside the workplace. It prevents a woman and gender diverse individuals contributing, participating, being productive in the workforce as it leaches into every aspect of a survivor's life.

*The lack of safe, accessible and affordable housing is one of the most significant barriers preventing women, girls, and gender diverse people from being able to leave violence and rebuild their lives. Due to both a lack of affordable housing supply and gendered pay inequities (women and gender-diverse people are over-represented in low-wage, precarious work and also, on average make less than men), survivors are often forced to choose between staying in an abusive relationship or having a roof over their heads. YWCA Canada (Instagram, 2022.11.28.)*

If upon entry, the woman identifies that her current situation is the direct result of experiencing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), the direct referral will be to St. Thomas-Elgin Second Stage Housing or Violence Against Women Services Elgin County (VAWSEC). These community partners have specialized supports to best provide services to women with these experiences. YWCA STE will remain connected to share data and resources.

### **St. Thomas-Elgin Second Stage Housing**

Provides transitional supports and safe housing to women with or without children, who are leaving an abusive relationship.

### **Violence Against Women Services Elgin County**

A safe place to stay – open 24 hours a day with emergency transportation to safety and drop-in counselling at any time of day. Along with a 24-hour Community Helpline with confidential and real-time help over the phone for everyone.



## Active Homelessness

Homelessness can happen to anyone.

*Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, or ability of acquiring it. (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness)*

Homelessness does not discriminate. A person can become homeless from something as simple as losing a job, a loss of a mode of transportation, or an incident that stops you being able to pay for accommodations, etc.

Homelessness can be the result several vulnerabilities such as,

- systemic or society barriers,
- a lack of affordable and appropriate housing,
- challenges of the individual or family,
  - financial,
  - mental,
  - cognitive,
  - behavioural,
  - or physical needs
- and/or racism and discrimination.

Experiencing homelessness is largely negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful, and distressing; most people do not choose to be homeless. Homelessness can describe an array of housing and shelter circumstances with no access to shelter (i.e., unsheltered) at one end of the spectrum to being insecurely housed at the other. Unsheltered or absolute homelessness includes living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation. Emergency sheltered indicates those staying in an overnight shelter and/or shelters for those impacted by family violence.

*Violence is a cause and a consequence of homelessness. Homelessness is a cause and a consequence of violence.*

If upon entry, the family identifies as being homeless, they will be referred to the community By-Names List (BNL), (for more information see [STE By Names List and Coordinated Access Process Guide](#)). The By-Names List is a real-time list of all people experiencing homelessness in a community. It includes a robust set of data points that support Coordinated Access and prioritization at a household level and an understanding of homeless inflow and outflow at a system level. This real-time actionable data supports triage to services, system performance evaluations and advocacy for the policies and resources necessary to end homelessness.

A women-led family is referred to the By-Names List and will be provided the services as prescribed by this document's community plan and the By-Name List and Coordinated Access Process Guide for those experiencing homelessness. The following documents will be completed to further assess and support their situation:

- [Adult/Family – Entry Form \(St. Thomas-Elgin By-Names List\)](#)
- [Adult & Family Consent to Exchange Information](#)
- [Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool \(VI-SPDAT Family\)](#)
- [Family Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool \(F-SPDAT\)](#)

Women-led families who are at-risk of or are experiencing homelessness will be added to the By-Names List only after basic homelessness prevention and diversion questions have been asked.



## By-Names List

A By-Names List (BNL) is a comprehensive list of all known persons in a community experiencing homelessness, updated in real-time. Each person on the list has a file that includes their name, homeless history, health, housing needs, and record of their consent to collect and share information that support Coordinated Access and prioritization at a household level. As well, the By-Names List contains an understanding of homeless inflow and outflow at a system level. Families with dependents are recorded under one file.

The By-Names list supports the following:

- Facilitates timely, efficient, and effective information sharing and matching to services and support for people who are experiencing homelessness and assists community partners to organize and store information.
- Coordinates housing services for those experiencing homelessness.
- Improves access to programs and services for those experiencing homelessness or facing a housing crisis.
- Reduces inefficiencies and duplication of housing and homelessness services within our community.
- Ensures programs and services are matched based on acuity, need, and vulnerabilities of remaining homeless.

- Pursues and advocates for additional resources for prevention and housing programs and services.
- Advocates for policies and legislation to support efforts to solve homelessness.

The YWCA Housing and Homelessness System Coordinator has the sole responsibility to add and remove names to the By-Names List. In partnership with St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services (Service Manager), YWCA STE administrates the production of policies, procedures, and best practices within St. Thomas-Elgin relevant to the prevention, reduction, and functional end to homelessness. These policies, procedures, and best practices can be found in the By-Names List and Coordinated Access Process Guide. St. Thomas-Elgin is an active and progressive community of [Built for Zero Canada](#) aiming to reduce and end chronic and Veteran homelessness and by extension all homelessness.



The By-Names List will be managed by the YWCA Housing and Homelessness System Coordinator who will:

- Monitor for data quality.
- Facilitate frequent updates by following up with agencies on a regular basis to ensure consistent and progressive advocacy is provided to those who are on the By-Names List.
- Advise the filling of vacancies in dedicated housing and support programs.
- Ensure adherence to privacy legislation.
- Process requests for information.

All By-Names List client information will be confidential and subject to the [Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#) (MFIPPA).

## Coordinated Access Response

### Coordinated Access St. Thomas Elgin

Whether a family has identified as being at risk of or homeless; both streams lead into the Coordinated Access response.



A Coordinated Access system is the process by which individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness are directed to community-level access points where trained workers use a common assessment process to identify the individual or family's housing and support needs. Depending on the household's depth of need, the Coordinated Access process also identifies community priorities for access to housing support services and then helps to match them to available housing-focused interventions.

Coordinated Access offers better data collection, no wrong-door mentality, and faster response to meeting the needs of women-led families. Coordinated Access is identified as an evidence-informed approach by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and the National Alliance to End Homelessness in the USA.

St. Thomas-Elgin recognizes the marginalization and intersectionality of homelessness and the diverse identities and causation of households including women-led family homelessness. Coordinated Access triages and matches individuals and families with housing and services based on their current situation, their vulnerabilities and needs, and the support they currently receive.

Coordinated Access Key Objectives:

- Help communities ensure fairness and prioritize people most in need of assistance,
- Help more people move through the system faster,
- Reduce the number of new entries into homelessness, and
- Improve data collection and quality.

In St. Thomas-Elgin, Coordinated Access is led by the YWCA STE and the City of St. Thomas-Elgin (Social Services) and has governance provided by several committees and tables including municipal council. The YWCA STE and City of St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services act as a single data and entry point for both the By-Names List and Coordinated Access. Coordinated Access was identified in the St. Thomas-Elgin [10-year Housing & Homelessness Plan](#) and was launched in July 2020 [[2022 Progress Report](#)].



## System Navigation

### **What is System Navigation?**

System Navigation refers to when an agency or support person is working one-on-one with women and their families to direct them to the appropriate service pathways. This is done by supporting the women with warm transfers to other agencies, attending meetings with the women, and making direct referrals. Many women are in survival mode or unsure how to access services, so when agencies use their knowledge, connections, and collaboration the woman in need is directed through service pathways in a way that meets their individual needs.

### **Local System Navigation**

As the woman moves through the service model, and the families' needs are assessed they will be paired with a Case Manager/System Navigator/Coordinator. Through the community plan, the following service providers have offered a variation of case management or system navigation to women-led families.

**Fresh Start Support Services** – Family System Navigator; will be providing 'light touch' system navigation to families with children under the age of six, who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The Family System Navigator will support women in identifying their needs, goal setting, and ensuring that they have access to the programs and services in the community plan intended to support families.

**St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services** – Housing Program Coordinators; help to facilitate and coordinate eviction prevention; housing stability and homelessness prevention supports and activities within the St. Thomas-Elgin social housing portfolio and with housing and homelessness community service providers where appropriate.

**St. Thomas-Elgin Second Stage Housing** – Transitional Support Workers; will provide support to women who are on their waitlist who have identified as being in or leaving an abusive relationship and residing within the YWCA STE Family Transitional Home (established through the community plan). A variety of supports will be offered including but not limited to support with safety plans, independent living skills, parenting supports, transition planning, and long-term plans for independent living.

**Violence Against Women Services Elgin County** – Will support women in community as well as those who have been welcomed into the 24-hour Emergency Shelter. Support for these women includes help for their children, abuse counselling, legal consultation, family court support, help finding a safe place to live, and assistance in managing the effects of abuse.

**West Elgin Community Health Centre** – Rural Homelessness Systems Navigator; will provide system navigation specifically to women-led families who are experiencing homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness in the West and East ends of Elgin County. Access to a seasonal (December-March) emergency family shelter space at EM Warwick Conservation area through Dutton, Dunwich, and West Elgin Housing Stability Coalition.

**YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin** – Poverty Intervention and Family Coordinator; will provide Intensive Housing Based Case Management to families with children over the age of six, and within the moderate to high acuity range. Individualized service plans and a strengths-based approach will be utilized while providing system navigation and service referrals.

A collaborative data collection model will be utilized by all service providers. To support our evaluation of impact and progress, women will complete the [Participant Post-Service Questionnaire](#).

## Family-Centred Case Conferencing

Case Conferencing is a routine, centralized process that helps community leaders and case managers navigate, monitor, and advance the progress of people moving towards housing and housing stability as well as a more efficient and effective service provision. For our community, these action-oriented meetings are crucial and valuable as it brings all players to the table in the best interest of the women-led families being served.

Case Conferencing allows communities to:

- Ensure holistic, coordinated, and integrated assistance across providers for people experiencing homelessness in your community.
- Review progress and barriers related to each person's housing goal(s).
- Identify and track systemic barriers and strategize solutions across multiple providers.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities and reduce duplication of services.
- Support community goals to reduce and end homelessness.

Within this model, agencies come together to support the family, with the woman being an active participant. These case conferences will help to understand each family's individual goals, expectations, values, and everyday life to lead them to housing stability.

Parents know their children and their family best and when women are involved in the case conference it strengthens family functioning and addresses challenges that may threaten family stability while goals are being established.

Case conferences will be facilitated by a Coordinator/Case Manager/System Navigator. Best practice will be to schedule case conferences within the first forty-eight hours of the family entering the service model. The woman will assist with identifying who they would like at the table including new and existing supports.

An experience of homelessness can affect a person's ownness in their own lives and by extension the lives of their dependents. By having the women involved in their own support provisions, the women can gain and reskill themselves in their independence. A dependent experiencing homelessness can develop challenges with their health care, nutrition, and access to food, face educational interruptions, trauma, and a breakdown in family dynamics. An adverse childhood experience such as homelessness and housing instability can lead to an increase in episodes and length of illnesses, hunger, and lack of essential nutrients, in cognitive challenges, emotional and behavioural instability, as well as affect their mental health and ability to manage stressors later in life. Our community plan hopes to decrease both the women and dependents chances and episodes of moving from place to place and the instances of possibly living in precarious situations. The Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group hopes to end the cycle of homelessness for women and their dependents before it starts. As listed in a study by Raising the Roof, the contributing factors listed above when experienced long term can lead to contributing factors of the dependents own homelessness when they become at adult.

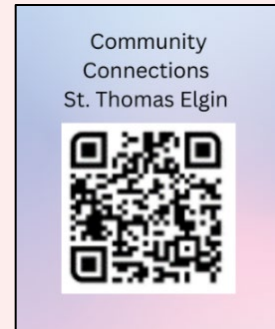
## Housing Stability Resources

The Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group has compiled a list of community resources that can aid in creating housing stability for women-led families. This list of [Housing Stability Resources](#) can provide a positive impact on physical and mental health through connections to homelessness reduction services and housing supports. Housing Stability Resources extend the capabilities of access to basic needs e.g., food, health services, and financial assistance. Categories include resources related to: community plan partner agencies, legal support, financial support, mental health/wellness, child development, childcare, and parenting support.

Another invaluable resource within St. Thomas-Elgin is the 2023-2024 Community Connections St. Thomas-Elgin guide. The Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group along with our sub-group of lived and living experience women, played a vital role in updating the guide this year, providing recommendations, edits, and feedback with a gender and family-centered lens.



The [Community Connections Guide](#) is available at many social service agencies and online. This bi-annual resource compiles a list of community resources that will aid in creating housing stability for a women-led family. Categories include housing, legal support, financial support, mental health and wellness, child development, childcare, and parenting support.



## Temporary Respite Accommodations

When prevention and diversion are unsuccessful, or if a women-led family comes into the service model experiencing active homelessness, the WFHSAG articulated solutions to ensure that there are referring options to rapidly transition/re-house and provide safety net(s) for the family.

During the process of transitioning, vital supports will be wrapped around the family based on their individualized needs. Respite accommodations are meant to be time limited. When matching a family to a respite accommodation, supports will prioritize a family-centred approach, ensure that all family members will remain together, and that they are safe.

When re-locating a family, supports will work to provide transportation, promote food security, and access community housing stability resources when available and appropriate. The following accommodations can be accessed as needed: hotel nights, placement within the YWCA STE Family Transitional Home, or the Rural Elgin Shelter.

Respite accommodations are intended to:

- Allow families to meet their basic needs.
- Provide a safe space for women-led families to rest their heads.
- Offer a family-centred approach/keep and avoid separation.
- Allows supports to quickly wrap resources around the family and potentially divert them from homelessness.

A hotel night is intended to be a very short-term (three to five nights), emergency placement for a women-led family in St. Thomas-Elgin, utilizing local hotels. Service model supports will quickly intervene to assist the family in transitioning to a location where they can stay more long-term. Supports will assist the family in accessing the funds needed to finance the hotel utilizing Housing Stability Resources such as the Housing Stability Financial Assistance (HSFA) program through St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services, or the YWCA STE's Family Rent Bank.

The YWCA STE Family Transitional Home was acquired through the important advocacy work of the WFHSAG members to support the community plan and service model. This one-year pilot project will provide short-term respite accommodations to women-led

families for up to three months. Women-led families will work with their supports to safely transition into independent living accommodations. The location of the home is in a quiet complex, close to an EarlyON Centre, with a variety store next door, beautiful outdoor parks/spaces, close to a bus route, and only a 10-minute walk to downtown St. Thomas. The home is fully furnished and has been set-up in a way that supports varying family units, based on the number of dependents, and specific needs of each family. The house has the capacity to temporarily accommodate two unique families at the same time, when it is safe and feasible to do so. Program fees will be collected based on the income of the families, number of dependents, and ability to pay. Case workers will assist the families in sourcing out program fees, and housing stability resources as needed.

The Rural Elgin Shelter will operate four months out of the year, at the EM Warwick Conservation Area, located in West Lorne. This short-term shelter space runs from December through to the end of March, providing temporary accommodations during the winter months. This space will be available to families, and single adults from St. Thomas and Elgin County who may also have pets accompanying them. Volunteers will be responsible to the operations of the space; the Rural Homelessness Systems Navigator will provide support to individuals accessing overnight stays. While a family or individual is staying at the transitional space, they will have full access to all nature activities outlined by the Conservation Authority. All partnering organizations are welcomed to meet with individuals onsite, along with hosting family-centred case conferences.

Through the advocacy of the WFHSAG, in 2024 the St. Thomas-Elgin community will see two additional housing expansions that have confirmed additional homes and/or respite accommodations for women-led families. For information about Fresh Start Support Service 'House of Homes' and the YWCA STE's Tiny Hope Project, refer to page 42/43 of this report, Section 3 - Housing Stock.



## SECTION 2 - ADVOCACY, AWARENESS, and EDUCATION

### Advocacy and Awareness

*Awareness is the state or ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events, objects, or sensory patterns. In this level of consciousness, sense data can be confirmed by an observer without necessarily implying understanding.*

Reaffirming to the purpose of the WFHSAG, it is essential that the committee continues to advocate for systematic change in moving the needle on ending women-led family homelessness in St. Thomas and Elgin County. Through understanding the root causes of women-led family homelessness, and the belief that every woman in our community has an inherent right to safe and affordable housing, the WFHSAG will advocate for the following:

- To end the gendered housing crisis.
- Access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing for women-led families.
- As a collaborative network, members are dedicated to bringing the gendered issues of homelessness and housing insecurity to the public and government officials.
- Transformation of our local homelessness serving systems to reduce barriers that exist for women-led families.
- Equitable support to better serve women and women-led families within our community.
- We will advocate locally, provincially, and federally for more equitable support and funding for women and their dependents to enhance their safety, well-being, and housing security.
- A gender-based lens when creating systems of care for women and women-led families.
- A sustainable community-wide plan to support women-led families.
- Special priority status for women-led families on the Centralized Waitlist (social housing list).
- A family-centered approach when working with women-led families.
- A system that focuses on prevention and diversion at the core of all efforts.
- All agencies are working for long-term social change to make sure legislation, policies and practices support the rights and interests of women-led families.
- To end anti-indigenous racism and violence against indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people.
- To end gender-based violence.

- The voices of women with lived and living experience be heard.
- Improved access to transportation.
- Increased housing stability resources for women-led families.
- Increased access to childcare.
- Ongoing community education and awareness to breakdown the stigma around homelessness.

*Advocacy is identified as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others.*

The Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group has already accomplished successes through the community's advocacy. Noteworthy accomplishments to date include the following:

- Amplifying the voices of women with lived and living experience.
- The commitment of two emergency units from Fresh Start Support Services.
- Short-term funding to support the YWCA STE staff position, Poverty Interventions and Family Coordinator.
- The YWCA Family Supportive Transitional Home (one year pilot project).
- The dedication of 50% occupancy of women and women-led families within the upcoming build of the YWCA STE's Project Tiny Hope of 40-units.
- Receiving a donation of transportation support and food security funds to support women-led families accessing the service model.

The Women and Family Housing Stability Advisory Group is invested in the ongoing work of creating systematic change through advocacy work, and the community plan for St. Thomas-Elgin – Preventing & Ending Women-led Family Homelessness.

## **Education**

*Education is the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life.*

Ongoing learning and education are critical to a community's ability to respond to social issues. WFHSAG members have committed to increasing their knowledge on an ongoing basis through professional development on gendered issues of housing insecurity. WFHSAG members have also committed to resource sharing and offering training opportunities to build common knowledge whenever possible.



*'Family homelessness (and therefore homelessness amongst dependent children and youth) is a significant, yet hidden, part of the homelessness crisis. Some researchers have identified visible homelessness as only the "tip of the iceberg" of what is a much larger and critical, affordable housing problem in Canada.'* (Gaetz et al., 2013, p. 27).

WFHSAG members have had access to the following professional development and/or training opportunities:

- [Gender-Based Analysis Plus \(GBA+\)](#)
- OrgCode Consulting Inc. – Excellence in Housing Based Case Management
- OrgCode Consulting Inc. – The Art and Science of Homelessness Prevention & Shelter Diversion
- Organizational in-services have also taken place from: Changing Ways, and Violence Against Women Services Elgin County (VAWSEC), Tracy Flaherty-Willmott (OrgCode Consulting Inc.), and Marie Morrison (Director, Built for Zero Canada, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness).
- The Elgin Alliance to End Violence Committee (EAEV) has invited WFHSAG Member to attend an orientation session on the 'Be Safer' app in the Fall of 2023.

Family & Children's Services of St. Thomas-Elgin has confirmed that their agency will commit to providing educational opportunities for community members on an annual basis sharing knowledge around crucial project topics. These topics including supporting women-led families to safety, trauma-informed supports/services, and gender-based and intimate partner violence to the public and community partners.

The WFHSAG members have also committed to sharing across all sectors (touch and access points) via electronic communications and at community tables to ensure opportunities and learnings reach broadly in our community.

The YWCA STE will maintain a strong social media presence on topics related to Gender-based Violence (GBV), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Women's Rights, Women & Family Homelessness and topics relating to housing stability for women and their dependents. These social media post and platforms will be shareable and circulated for all WFHSAG members to post and spread awareness, advocacy, and educate the community in which to work.

*'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.'* Margaret Mead



## SECTION 3 - HOUSING STOCK

One of the top priorities outlined in our research is the addition of new affordable, community, supportive and transitional housing options for women-led families.

We are pleased to have three new housing options in the future for our community.

**YWCA Family Transitional Home.** This three-bedroom home will open September 2023 and be available to multiple families for temporary respite, up to three months. Each family will be paired with a YWCA support worker.

**Fresh Start Support Services House of Homes** planned for 2024 will include two designated apartments within a three-story dwelling consisting of twelve apartments, a large communal space, and some office spaces. These [Emergency Housing Units](#) will be available to women-led families who are referred the community's STE Coordinated Access. These units will serve women-led families needing an emergency support for up to three months. There is the possibility that some women-led families could make the transition from the Emergency Unit to Fresh Start's Transitional Housing Program, therefore extending their stay. The WFHSAG eagerly awaits these respite accommodations.





The YWCA STE's Project Tiny Hope will proceed with building 40 tiny homes in 2024, with a commitment of 50% of these tiny homes being dedicated to women and women-led families. The Tiny Hope community will provide stable housing with personalized supports to build life stabilization as the foundation to build upon other goals such as economic security, wellness, and community connectedness. The YWCA STE will offer case management, system navigation, life skill development, community building events and opportunities to participate in group-based programming such as: financial literacy, food security or skills training.

## Housing Stability Resource Development

To accompany the community plan and further support the service model, the following resources will be made available as funding exists for women-led families:

**YWCA STE Family Rent Bank** – Support for families with rental arrears to maintain housing, first & last's month's rent to secure housing, means to couch surf (informal rent to families and friends), grocery/restaurant gift cards for food security support, transportation support, travel outside of area/re-location in emergency situations and to support achieving a family's basic needs for housing security. Hotel accommodations may also be covered to prevent literal homelessness.

**Transportation Resources** – Taxi vouchers and bus tickets will be accessible to community supports and women-led families to support a variety of activities including fleeing violence, accessing supports, re-locating through diversion efforts, house viewings, etc.

**Grocery Cards** – In promoting food security, the WFHSAG will work towards ensuring that no women-led family will have to choose between paying rent or putting food on the table for her dependents. Grocery cards will be made available whenever possible, and other food resources will continue to be sourced out.

**Child Development Checklists** – When navigating through housing stability with a women-led family, the WFHSAG is holding true to a family-centred approach. Wanting to ensure that women have access to child development checklists we have attached them [here](#). These checklists are easy-to-use developmental tools that feature a short list of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions about children’s abilities with tips to help them grow and thrive.

### **Central Community Health Centre (CCHC)**

*‘People living in poverty have a lower life expectancy and higher rates of illness across a wide spectrum of diseases. Poor health predisposes individuals and families to homelessness, and homelessness exposes them to particular health problems.’ ([Homeless Hub, About Homelessness: Supporting Communities to Prevent and End Homelessness](#))*

Central Community Health Centre (CCHC) has committed to supporting women-led families to acquire a family doctor. If a women-led family identifies that any member of the family does not have a primary healthcare provider and/or has an immediate non-emergent healthcare need, the referral source can contact the Director of Primary Care at CCHC to initiate the following:

- Rostering any members of the family without a primary healthcare provider
- Scheduling an appointment for member(s) of the family to be seen by a Primary Care Provider
- Provide continued advocacy and support on behalf of women-led families in collaboration with the referral source and/or case management supports to connect with the family’s current primary healthcare provider and/or to connect to a provider in another community.

This commitment from CCHC to the women-led family community plan is a substantial success in connecting families to healthcare which as described previously will positively impact all areas of their lives.

## CONCLUSION

A Place Called Home – A Community Plan for St. Thomas-Elgin will be launched locally in September 2023. This newly established collaborative approach will support women-led families when at risk or experiencing homelessness. From September 2023 to January 2024 data will be collected, with consent, through intake, assessments, surveys, and participant feedback. The impact of our community plan will be evaluated in collaboration with OrgCode Consulting Inc. and shared at a final community symposium in March 2024. Upon project completion, we will share a report on the impact and opportunities of this community plan and service model for women-led families.



**YWCA St.Thomas - Elgin**

16 Mary Street West, St.Thomas, ON, N5P 2S3

(519) 631-9800 [info@ywcaste.ca](mailto:info@ywcaste.ca)

Follow us [@YWCAStThomas](https://www.instagram.com/YWCAStThomas)

[info@ywcaste.ca](mailto:info@ywcaste.ca)