



CLICKABLE!

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Listen to what persons in need have to say about their housing concerns.

Connect persons in need with community housing services, and help them navigate those services effectively.

Advocate for change among government and other service providers.

Create solutions to fill gaps in services.

Become agents of positive change with regard to our own work, so that we are an effective part of the solution to our housing crisis.

Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing is a Human Right



NATIONAL HOUSING CAMPAIGN

CHAIR REPORT

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul launched this year's national housing campaign on February 7, 2021. This is also the Feast day of Sr. Rosalie Rendu. The official theme is "Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing is a Human Right." Everyone deserves to have safe and adequate housing for their families. This is their right and certainly one that every Vincentian should support. I would encourage all Society members to consider one or more of the various actions we have outlined in the action plan.

When we first began the process of selecting an issue for a national campaign, housing and homelessness was at or near the top of the list for anyone we consulted. One question some members have raised was, since there are so many other organizations already addressing this same issue, why does the Society need to do so?

I think a valid reply is to first explain that, for people living in poverty, housing and homelessness is such a vital component preventing them from ever reaching a point where they can feel a sense of human dignity, that we simply cannot decide not to take actions and advocacy that enable our neighbours in need to find a home and have real hope for a better future. Secondly, as we see so many injustices and the need for systemic changes in structures that keep people living in substandard housing, we must do our part. Finally, I doubt if anyone has the same level of trust and understanding of poverty and housing issues that we are able to achieve through our engagement with those in need via our home visits, food banks, soup kitchens, thrift stores and shelters. We have an opportunity to use these engagements to listen and learn more about the challenges faced by many in finding adequate housing.

While the **housing action plan** is rather extensive, we shall also be providing a **pamphlet** and an **executive summary** (shortened version of the action plan) online to allow more members to access the basic components of the campaign. There will also be a **bookmark** available online which conferences can have copied for distribution to its members. The bookmark has the campaign prayer on one side and several simple actions members can undertake during the Lenten season. It is hoped that many will take on one or more of these actions as a Lenten exercise and then discuss results at a future conference meeting.

As we enter the hoped-for COVID-19 recovery period, there is an opportunity to build on a number of housing and homelessness initiatives conducted during the pandemic. There have been a number of communities doing this as well as the federal housing program. We can have a positive effect on housing and homelessness.

One of the major components to having a successful campaign will be gaining the support of members at their local community levels, where they likely know more about what is happening regarding housing than our committee does. They may know a city councillor or city staff member, which can enhance our ability to collaborate on local efforts. Our members are encouraged to join any community groups that are involved in the housing issues. Please enjoy the articles in this edition of *Vincenpaul*. We have tried to place a focus on the effect that lack of adequate housing has on families by providing some personal stories and relevant information. Please join us during this national campaign and may our working together result in helping our neighbours in need find the housing they so desperately seek and deserve. **Subscribe to the Social Justice newsletter** on our website www.ssvp.ca.

*Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee*

CAMPAIGN PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we come to you out of care and concern for especially the poor and those struggling to find adequate shelter.

Though he was divine, Your Son Jesus did not cling to his divinity, but humbled himself to pitch his tent among us. He was loved and cared for by Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. He invited the first disciples to spend time with him in his home, yet often had no place to lay his head during his ministry.

He taught us to love you above all, then others, ourselves, and all of creation which he often used in his parables to convey his message of new life. Help us to love and serve him in the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and especially in the poor.

Grant us wisdom to make good decisions in our ministry to the poor, strength to carry out those decisions, humility to accept the ideas of others, and joy in striving to alleviate poverty in our society and to provide adequate housing as a basic human right for all.

Inspire landlords to devote greater care and attention to the maintenance of their facilities, making life better for their renters. Fill the minds and hearts of the wealthy with an openness to be partners in finding and creating adequate housing for those most in need.

United with our Blessed Mother, and relying on the intercession of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam, we ask this of you through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen

Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavie, OMI



[Click here to watch the campaign video](#)

TESTIMONIES - A's STORY

“A SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOME ALLOWS US TO THINK CLEARLY AND NOT BE OVERWHELMED.”

A had an extensive background in forensic psychiatry in Colombia, which had provided professional opportunities in Europe and elsewhere.

Encouraged by his wife's sister who already lived in Canada, **A** and his wife applied for a working class visa and were granted it in 2008 and, after a lengthy delay caused by a misdirected e-mail, arrived in Canada as Permanent Residents in 2013. They had the benefit of staying with his wife's sister in Milton for 18 months. They were welcomed with open arms and it was a huge weight off their shoulders to have a safe, secure environment to call home. **A** was able to secure a job with the Milton Public Library and, following his father advice, leveraged his musical skills and joined a rock band and did studio work for additional exposure and connections.

A's wife heard of the Transitional Housing program offered by Halton Multicultural Council that would provide them with a home for a reduced rent (30% of their household income) while they worked on their studies and accreditation. They applied to the Transitional Housing program and were selected for an apartment in Burlington. This allowed **A** and his wife to have their own home and independence. They were able to focus on their studies while **A's** wife also took a job in retail. The income wasn't much but it helped offset some of their monthly expenses. They still had to reach out to food banks to get by each month but had peace of mind and stability in their new home. They were able to think clearly and not be overwhelmed.

Without a business network to reach out to, **A** followed his sister-in-law's recommendation, used today's technology, and networked on LinkedIn and other online platforms. Through these contacts, he was offered a fellowship at McMaster University in Hamilton in forensic psychiatry. In **A's** words, “It was like winning the lottery.”

The next move was totally unscripted when a forensic psychologist based in Kingston, Ontario mentioned to **A** that he could apply for a permit to work in his profession in Alberta. Sure enough the source was correct and in one interview **A** was offered a position and he and his wife moved in late 2016.

Since arriving in Alberta, **A's** practice has progressed well and **A's** wife secured a fellowship to study mood disorders at a Calgary university. After realizing the fellowship would not be considered ‘Canadian experience’ for her license, **A's** wife is now completing her final year of a social work degree with her goal to be a Psychiatric Therapist.

Both **A** and his wife are shining examples of how their desire to succeed, even against the odds at time, has opened doors and changed their lives and futures! **A** now wants to help other newcomers who are facing the same challenges.

Egality works with homeowners and developers to create kind and inspired places that enhance wellbeing. If you have a part of your property or home that can be used to provide a home for a family in need, please contact us at 416-459-2730 or 1-844-342-5489 or e-mail info@equality.ca. We will be happy to meet with you virtually or in person in your home and discuss your interest in creating bright futures for everyone! We look forward to your call.

*Garth Brown, Housing Campaign Champion for the Halton/Hamilton Region &
Member of the National Campaign Committee*



TESTIMONIES - P's STORY

“WITHOUT A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD...IT'S THE HARDEST THING.”

In a perfect world, marriages are perfect. But our world is not perfect.

P stepped onto Canadian soil several years ago after her marriage. She arrived as a permanent resident to join her husband who was following his dream to build a better life for himself and his future children. Unfortunately, things did not work for P as she discovered that her spouse was abusive, which made it impossible for her to stay. She was forced to leave, escaping her abusive relationship with her newborn child, in order to build a better future for herself and her child, and to find peace of mind.

When she realized she needed additional documents for them to stay in Canada, P quickly learned that her ex had taken legal steps to prevent her from getting the paperwork.

P decided to contact a social agency for help after finding it very hard for her and her child to survive until her paperwork was completed. The social agency had no option but to move P and her child to a shelter, but it was overwhelming for her when she found that the two-month time limit for living in a shelter was not long enough to get all her paperwork done. P was determined to stay focused on her goal of independence. It was a matter of survival.



P's journey introduced her to Halton Multicultural Council and the opportunity to be selected for one of their subsidized apartments. P would pay 30% of her household income and Halton Region would pay the balance. With a fixed address, P could now apply for all of her certificates and keep her child.

It took P over a year to obtain her paperwork and to get through her legal separation case, but having a place to live, a roof over her head, allowed P to keep her child. She thanks God each and every day for the gift of housing. And she has created a career that now serves those in need.

P decided to enroll full-time at College to become a Social Service Worker. This was possible only through the provision of her rent subsidy that allowed her to focus on her studies. Her ambition was rewarded with an honours degree and subsequently a placement at a prominent agency in Halton Region serving families and individuals in need. P now meets and helps to support clients with whom she has a shared journey. She has greater empathy and understanding of their struggles because of the challenges she faced. She encounters people paying \$650 per month for a couch (with no allowance to use the kitchen in the next room); \$700 for a room (with no bathroom or kitchen privileges); people living in their vehicles. She sees the injustice and does whatever she can to find ways to help those in need of housing and dignity.

Throughout her journey, P has grown an inseparable bond with her child who is now in grade one. Happiness abounds and her child thinks mother P is a princess (that's why this is "P's Story"). We believe her child is right.

Every family deserves a home. **Egality** works with homeowners and developers to create kind and inspired places that enhance wellbeing. If you have a part of your property or house that can be used to provide a home for a family in need, please contact us at 416-459-2730 or 1-844-342-5489 or e-mail info@equality.ca. We will be happy to meet with you virtually or in person in your home and discuss your interest in creating bright futures for everyone. We look forward to your call.

*Garth Brown
Housing Campaign Champion for the Halton/Hamilton Region &
Member of the National Campaign Committee*

TESTIMONIES - ROBERT's STORY

A STORY OF ADDICTION AND RECOVERY SUPPORTED BY AND WITH THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

My name is Robert, I am 45 years old now and I am alive. I was born in Quebec and lived a relatively normal life with my family. I had lots of friends and I was considered a leader in my school. After high school, I moved to Toronto to attend university and that is where my story took a deep dive into a world I never knew and certainly didn't plan on knowing. Drinking, drugs, crime, all became part of this life. Crime was mostly to support my habit but sometimes was just for a lark, to see if I could get away with it.

I nearly died from an opioid overdose a few times, but the last time finally woke me up. I ended up in the hospital in Calgary and from there to Calgary Correctional Centre. At the correctional centre, they had weekly prayer services led by members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. I started to attend and at times thought it was a great opportunity to connect with my friends in other cell ranges. Some of the words did sink in and I did start to think about life after jail. I was released after 18 months and decided that I needed to move to a new town and new adventures. I found my way to Kelowna and soon was into the old lifestyle, but mostly without drugs. In Kelowna, if you have an address, the Saint Vincent de Paul group brings food hampers. The volunteers were friendly and seemed to not judge; they even worked with our weird and wild party hours! They gave us information about how to access services such as food, welfare, clothing, shelters, etc.

One day, one of the Saint Vincent ladies asked me if I ever thought about recovery. I said no. She left a brochure anyway about some place called Ozanam House. A few weeks later, after a very, very, bad binge, I saw that brochure and decided to at least call. I met with a staff person and he encouraged me to clean up, go to detox and then call him. It took a few months, but eventually I did call back and I was accepted into a two-year residential recovery program for men. It isn't all easy, lots of deep dives into my story, frustration with some of the guys, frustration and boredom, but eventually I began to feel like I was getting my life back. The staff encouraged me to go back to music, one of my lifelong passions. I got a guitar and I started to play. Soon, that was all I wanted to do: music was becoming my new addiction! So, with support and caring people around me, I learned how to set some boundaries and how to organize my thoughts and my life. I graduated about six months ago! I have my own place; I do still have supports through Ozanam House available to me; and I am playing a few gigs in local bars. The Saint Vincent de Paul people visit the house and bring us home cooked meals and visit, creating a sense of belonging and not being judged for my past.

Thank you to all of you. My life is indeed back on track!

Sincerely,

Robert



SOCIAL ASSISTANCE - OTTAWA

IT BREAKS MY HEART!

Canada's social assistance incomes are unacceptably low. A couple on Ontario Works receives \$1,136 per month, with \$494 for shelter allowance and \$642 for basic needs. This is \$688 per month less than the 2018 Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), a commonly used measure of poverty.

The Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) calculation is made annually. People below this level of income struggle to live a life of health and dignity. People need adequate nutritious food, clothing, household supplies, telephone and transportation for daily life needs. We take these needs for granted and don't often think of what our neighbours might lack.

How would you live on \$1,136 per month?

Let me tell you about David and his wife Stephanie who arrived within my conference boundaries last March at the beginning of the pandemic. They receive \$1,136 per month. Rent costs them \$1,000 and David says that he has not seen anything cheaper. According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Ottawa is \$1,178. They have \$136 left for all their basic needs. They pay \$15 for a telephone plan. They get help from the local food bank once a month and my conference gives them \$50 in food cards. Their gratitude for this pittance is heart-breaking. This is what they live on. They eat mostly pasta, rice and beans and are grateful for a few eggs or a litre of milk. They wish for more nutritious food, but that isn't possible.

Their furniture and household goods are cast-offs from neighbours and acquaintances. They went to the Saint Vincent de Paul store once and got winter clothing.

When they meet with their immigration lawyer, they walk to the office, which is fortunately only a half-hour walk. They are seeking refugee claimant status, which has been difficult because bureaucracy is moving so slowly during the pandemic. Without immigration status, they can't work.

David and Stephanie are worried about contracting COVID 19, so they stay home most of the time. Their concern is legitimate, considering their poor diet and that they live in a high-risk area. Isolation means that they have not been able to build a personal network to help them find other supports in the community.



Clearly David and Stephanie are in a hardship situation.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation states that if a household spends more than 30% of its income on shelter costs, which can include utilities as well as rent, they are in core housing need. David spends 88% of his income on rent, which costs \$178 per month less than the average rent in Ottawa. Clearly, the shelter allowance is grossly inadequate. Vincentians know that many low-income people spend an unacceptably high portion of their income on shelter and this is a major cause of hardship for them. Vincentians need to advocate for more reasonable shelter allowances in the social assistance calculations.

The October issue of the Vincenpaul has a table of the 2018 incomes for various households in all the provinces and territories. There is little difference in the social assistance incomes across Canada. We all need to work with our provincial and territorial governments to provide more humane benefits for people in need, especially for more adequate housing allowances.

*Corry Wink, Vice President, Social Justice & Advocacy
Ontario Regional Council*



MISSION

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a lay Catholic organization whose mission is:

To live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.

VALUES

The mission of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul implies that as Vincentians we:

- see Christ in anyone who suffers
- come together as a family
- have personal contact with the poor
- help in all possible ways

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