



# Our Social Capital

Magazine of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa Vol. III, No.1 May 2003

## A City For All



## Families and Households

Human Services Plan Consultations

75 Years of Social Planning

Obstacles to Housing



# The Social Planning Council of Ottawa

Bridging the Information Gap  
with Quality Research, Analysis and Dialogue

In 1928, on the eve of the Great Depression, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (SPC) was created by local churches and community groups to coordinate efforts and build new services to meet the needs of the city's residents. Over the years, the SPC was the place where many ideas took root, and where new services and programs became a reality. . . . the United Way (Community Chest), ParaTranspo, the Volunteer Centre, the Council on Aging, Line 1000 and the Community Information Centre, to name a few.

Today, the SPC uses modern research and communication methods and works with Ottawa's social agencies, concerned residents and decision-makers to understand and advocate the social needs of our new city. The SPC is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, charitable organization. The Board of Directors of the SPC is elected by and from the community. There are also hundreds of volunteers who have given their time and talent to the SPC.

We invite you to join the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, to volunteer your time and talent and/or make a generous charitable contribution to help us bridge the Information Gap.

## Social Planning Council of Ottawa

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as well as Ottawa-based Social Research Projects on a multitude of issues



# Contents

## **A Profile of Ottawa's Families and Households**

Hindia Mohamoud, page 4

## **Summary of Consultation Meetings on Ottawa's Draft Human Services Plan**

Theresa Dostaler, page 10

## **Obstacles to Securing and Retaining Housing for Recipients of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program**

Marie-Josée Legault, page 12

## **Improving Access to the Ontario Disability Support Program**

page 13

## **A Place for Everyone The Hidden Crisis of Housing Vulnerability in Ottawa**

page 16

## **We would like to thank the United Way of Ottawa for its' generous support of our community building and research.**

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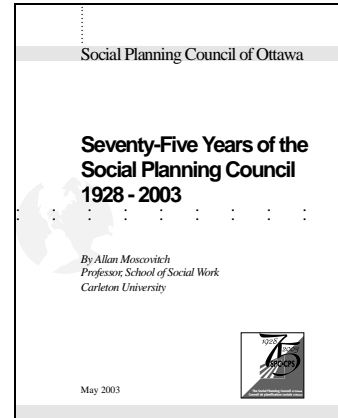
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Hindia Mohamoud and Dianne Urquhart

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## **The Social Planning Council is 75 years old!!**



Through 75 years of planning, co-ordinating, and supporting the development of new services, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa has made a rich contribution to the growth of our city. Many of the organizations which make this City a good place to live were begun through the initiative and support of the SPC.

The SPC's social planning work today emphasizes social research, the participation of residents, and collaboration with the social sector, funding bodies, and governments as major stakeholders. As always, we maintain a particular concern for marginalized members of the community. After 75 years, the SPC continues to be respected as a unique resource for the community. We look forward to many more years of building strong communities with plans that work.

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# A Profile of Ottawa's Families and Households<sup>1</sup>:

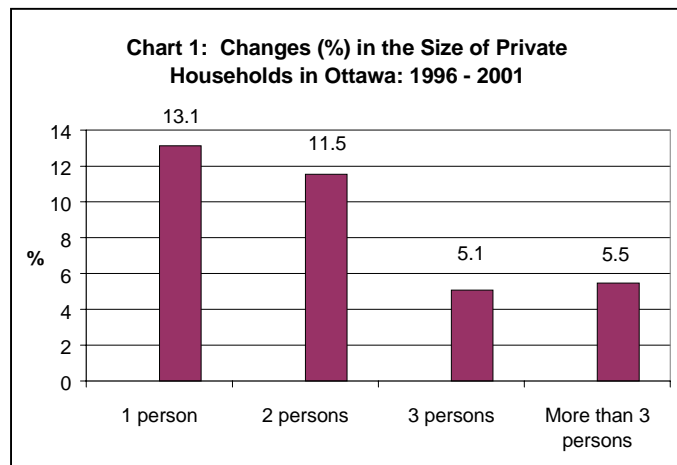
Hindia Mohamoud

The recent 2001 census data on families and households has revealed several new and continued trends, which are of interest to all of us and particularly to social planning stakeholders such as agencies serving families and children, social policy makers, city councilors, researchers, and funders of social programs. This spring, the Social Planning Council will release a report on families and households, sketching how the types, composition, structure, and residential conditions of Ottawa's households and families have changed since 1996. Below are some of the findings of you will be able to read in this report.

## 1. Residents' Living Arrangements

### *Household growth outpaced population growth and living alone is on the rise*

The number of households in Ottawa is growing faster than the city's population. Between 1996 and 2001, households in Ottawa have increased by 25,640 units to 301,770, equivalent to a 9.3 percent growth rate. Over the same period, the size of the city's population has grown by 52,936 persons, i.e. 7.3 percent. Over 75 percent of the new households comprised either one or two persons, indicating a continuation of the trend towards smaller household sizes. The average number of persons in private households in Ottawa fell from 3 persons in 1996 to 2.5 persons in 2001.



The one-person household is the fastest growing household type in Ottawa: 13 percent compared to the 5.1 percent growth rate registered for three-person households. It is also noteworthy that households containing more than three persons are both more numerous and growing faster those than those with 3 persons: 5.5% vs. 5.1%.

The declining size of households and the disproportionate prevalence of one- or two-person households in the recently created households stem from a variety of factors including the declining fertility rate and the aging of the population, leading to a considerable rise in the number of people living alone and in the number of couples without children at home. In fact, seniors (individuals aged 65 or over) represented 29 percent of persons living alone and as the proportion of seniors in the city's population increases, the number of one- and two-person households will continue to increase. Other factors that may have contributed to the observed smaller-sized households include an increase in individual disposable incomes, higher union dissolutions, and the inflow of young professionals, attracted by the recent economic boom.

<sup>1</sup> Data used in this report are from Statistics Canada, 1996 and 2001 census. The 1996 data refer to the Ottawa Carleton Region.

The trend towards smaller and increasing number of households will impact on the City’s consumption patterns, housing and energy demand, urban/rural landscape and, through these, the economy.

## 2. Families in Ottawa

The 2001 census counted 206,530 families<sup>2</sup> in Ottawa, which account for 68.4 percent of all households, slightly up from 67.4 percent in 1996. The intercensal growth rate of the number of families has been higher than that of both the city’s population and households (11 percent versus 7.3 and 9.3 percents, respectively) and Ottawa families currently accommodate eight out of 10 Ottawa residents. These numbers underpin the continued importance attached to families in individuals’ everyday lives and the central relevance of issues concerning families.



Although the share of family households in all households has been rather stable since 1996, the structure, composition, and living arrangements of the Ottawa families have changed significantly. For example, Table 1 below shows the distribution of Ottawa households by family status. The reported data indicate that in Ottawa there exist a few thousand households that contain more than one census families and that, although small in number, these families (the multiple-family households) are growing at a startling 33 percent growth rate. The rapid growth of multiple-family households explains the higher growth rate registered for households containing more than three persons with respect to those containing three persons (see Chart1). The following paragraphs describe some of the changes in the size and composition of couple and lone-parent families.

Table 1: Ottawa Households by the Number of Census Families

Types of Households	1996	2001	Change		% Distribution	
			Absolute	Percentage change	1996	2001
One-family households	183320	202305	18985	10.4	66.3	67.0
Non-family households	89605	95235	5630	6.3	32.4	31.6
Multiple-family households	3175	4225	1050	33.1	1.1	1.4

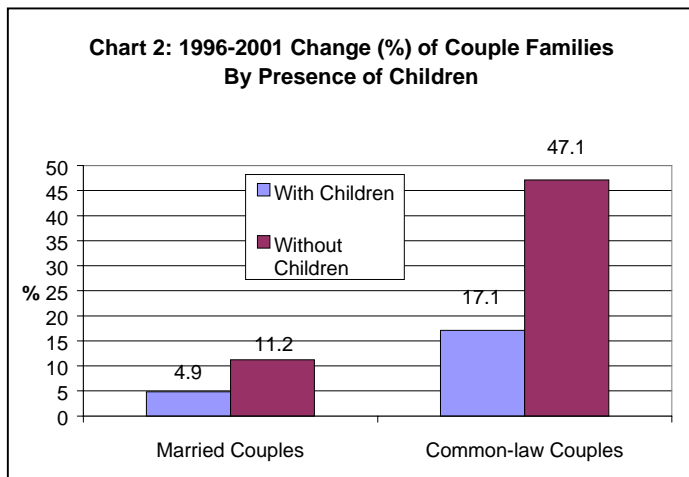
<sup>2</sup> This article uses the Statistics Canada’s definition of a ‘census family’, as ‘Married Couple (with or without children of either of both spouses), a couple living in a common-law (with or without children of either of both partners) or a lone parent of any marital status with at least one child living in the same dwelling. A couple living in a common-law situation may be of opposite or same sex.’

Table 2: Ottawa Families by Structure

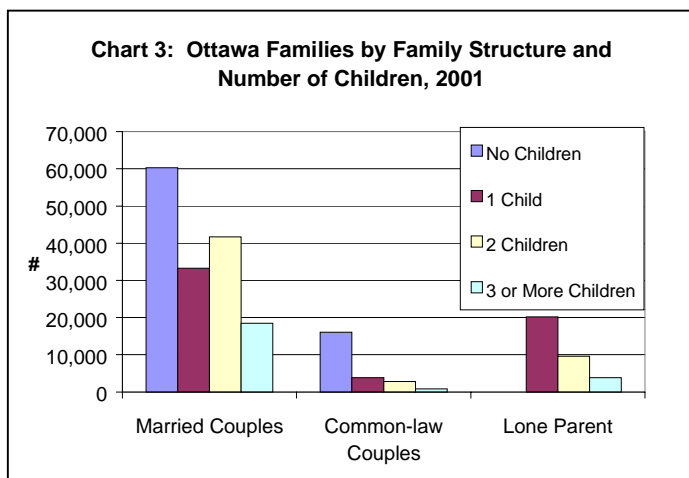
Structure of Census Families	1996	2001	Changes since 1996		% Distribution of Families by Type	
			Absolute Change	Percentage Change	1996	2001
Married Couples	143150	153650	10500	7.3	75.3	72.9
Lone-parent Families	29560	33610	4050	13.7	15.5	15.9
Common-law couples	17325	20480	6290	36.3	9.1	11.0
Same-sex Couples <sup>3</sup>	--	3135	--	--	--	1.5
Total couple families	160475	177265	16790	10.5	84.1	84.4
Total	190180	210880	23835	10.9	100	100

*Couple Families: common-law couples are increasing at a much faster pace than married couples*

Couple families accounted for 84 percent of all census families in Ottawa. Couples families include families formed by married couples, opposite-sex common-law couples and same-sex common law couples, irrespective of whether they have children or not. The share of married-couple families among all families is in decline (down from 75.3 in 1996 percent to 72.9 percent in 2001), while that of common-law couples is on the rise (up from 9.1 percent in 1996 to 11.2 percent in 2001).



Moreover, the number of couples who reported to be living a common-law relationship has increased by a staggering 36 percent since 1996 (from 17,235 to 23,615 couples) compared to only 7 % increase for married couples. The rapid growth in the number of common-law couples stems from an equalization of policies pertaining to married couples and those pertaining to common-law couples, over the nineties. Common-law partners are now generally recognized on an equal footing in terms



<sup>3</sup> 1996 Data are not available on same-sex couples.

of rights and obligations upon ‘union dissolution’ and in terms of benefits (e.g., coverage under spousal insurance policies). This equalisation of policies has removed the economic incentive for couples to marry.

Among common-law couples, the census enumerated same-sex partners for the first time in Canada’s census taking history. Precisely 3,136 same-sex partners have identified themselves to be living in a common-law relationship<sup>4</sup>. Male same-sex partners outnumbered female same-sex partners, and constitute 58.5 percent of all the gay couples living in common-law relationship.

The proportion of couples without children<sup>5</sup> at home has increased from 40.5 in 1996 to 43.1 in 2001. This percentage includes both couples who do not have children and those, whose children have left home, i.e. empty nesters.

Common-law couples are less likely to have children than married couples. In fact 68 percent of common-law couples do not have children at home, compared to 39 percent for married couples. Chart 3 shows that the number of common-law couples without children at home has increased by a startling 47 percent compared to 11.2 percent increase for married couples without children. Married couples who do have children are most likely to have two children, while lone parents and common-law couples (with children) tend to have one child.

## 2.1. Single Parent Families

There are 33,610 lone-parent families in Ottawa, 4,050 more than were counted in 1996. More than eight out of ten lone-parent families are lead by women. However, although small in number, male single parents are increasing at more than twice the pace of their female counterparts: 24.9 percent and 12.0 percent, respectively.

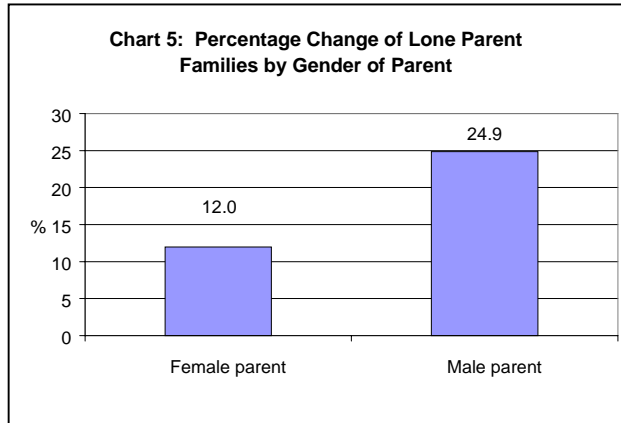
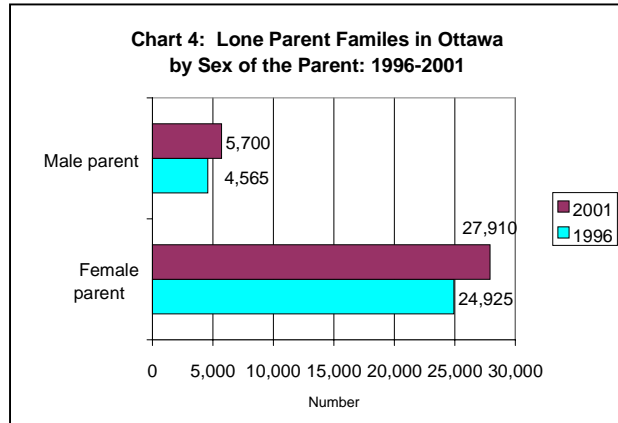
Table 3: Distribution of lone-parent families by sex of the parent

Lone-parent Families by gender of the parent	1996	2001	Percentage Change
Female parent	24,925	27,910	12.0
Male parent	4,565	5,700	24.9
Total Lone-parent Families	29,560	33,610	13.7

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that this figure does not represent the size of the gay and lesbian community, some members of who may be living alone, with relatives, or with their parents.

<sup>5</sup> “Children refer to blood, step- or adopted sons and daughters (regardless of age or marital status) who are living in the same dwelling as their parent(s), as well as grandchildren in households where there are no parents present. Sons and daughters who are living with their spouse or common-law partner, or with one or more of their own children, are not considered to be members of the census family of their parent(s), even if they are living in the same dwelling. In addition, those sons and daughters who do not live in the same dwelling as their parent(s) are not considered members of the census family of their parent(s)” Statistics Canada.

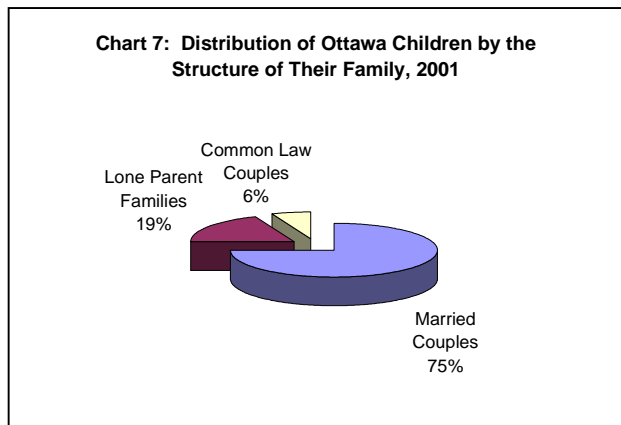
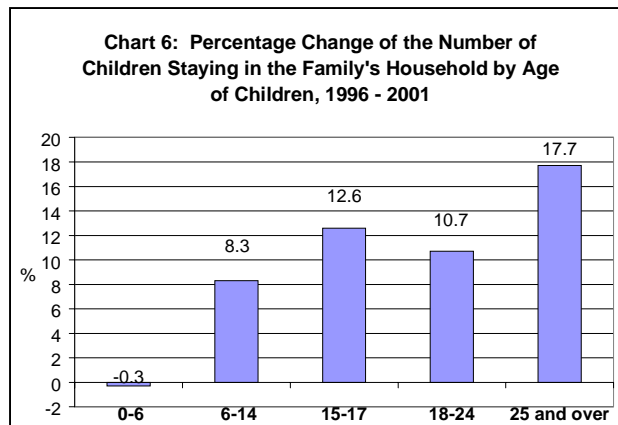
60% of lone-parent families have only one child. Together, lone-parent families are currently raising 38,405 children aged between 0-19 years. Almost a quarter (22%) of these children are between 10-14 years. There is often an emphasis on delivering programs for single parents with young children, but the numbers would indicate that there may also be an increased need for services for older children (e.g., recreation programs), especially given the higher poverty rates among single-parent families.



## 2.2. Children in Families: more young adults are staying home longer

Overall, the number of children living with their parents has increased for all age groups except for those aged 0 to 6<sup>6</sup>. This decline of the number of the 0-6-year-olds who are staying home with their parents is due to decline in the size of the youngest of children's cohorts by 7 percent<sup>7</sup> over the 1996-2001 period.

Three out of four (75 percent) children (0-9 year-olds) in Ottawa live in married-couple families, 19 percent in lone parent families and only 6 percent live in common-law couple families<sup>8</sup>.



<sup>6</sup> These data refer to the Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau metropolitan area.

<sup>7</sup> Social Planning Council (2002): 'A Profile of Ottawa's Population - a Demographic report: 1996-2001'.

<sup>8</sup> These data refer to the Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau metropolitan area.

Despite the recent economic boom, increasingly more and more young adults are staying at their parents' households. Chart 6 shows that the number of 18-24-year-olds who are staying home with their parents has increased by 11 percent. Similarly, 18 percent more of Ottawa's 25-and-above-year-olds are saying home. A combination of factors have prompted this trend:

- Youth unemployment. In period of economic downturns, youth are more susceptible to suffer unemployment than older workers are. And as the economy turns upward, youth employment may be slower to recover than that of older age groups.
- Increased number of youth pursuing higher education and increasing debt loads for those who do. This is aggravated by increasing educational requirements in the labour market, and loss of unskilled jobs from Canada
- Increased union dissolutions (no-fault divorces is allowed in Canada under the Divorce Act since 1986)
- Increased cost of rental housing, which may be prohibitive for the seasonally employed and low-wage earning workers: a category where youth are over represented.

## Conclusion

This article covered only some aspects of the structure, composition, and types of households and families. We need to know more about the economic and housing conditions of families as well as how families juggle work and home responsibilities. The upcoming SPC report on families will address some of these issues, however, more detailed data will be required to do an in-depth analysis of the overall social and economic conditions of families.



The Social Planning Council is organising a local consortium of organisations that would jointly purchase data through a Community Social Data Strategy initiative brought forward by the Canadian Council on Social Development (SSCD).

Consortium members will be able to access a variety of data at a much lower cost. This economic access to data is expected to enable all of us to understand better the social and economic conditions of Ottawa residents.

If your organisation is interested in participating in this consortium, please do not hesitate to contact Hindia Mohamoud (Phone number 236-9300, extension 307; email: [hindiam@spcottawa.on.ca](mailto:hindiam@spcottawa.on.ca)).

**Coming June 12, 2003**

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# Summary of Consultation Meetings on Ottawa's Draft Human Services Plan

*Theresa Dostaler*

The Social Planning Council of Ottawa and the City of Ottawa have undertaken a joint community consultation process on the Human Services Plan (HSP), one of five plans being developed within the Ottawa 20/20 growth planning process. The Human Services Plan is intended to deliver focused, flexible and sustainable Human Services aimed at protecting the City of Ottawa's human strengths while addressing human needs.

## **Purpose and Method**

Through January and February, 2003, the Social Planning Council and City of Ottawa collaborated to create a consultation process which would provide opportunities for input from residents from all parts of the City, including historically marginalized groups. To this end, nine consultation meetings were held. The SPC and City of Ottawa jointly hosted an urban meeting, a suburban meeting, and a rural meeting. As well, three groups were identified by the City and the community as under-represented in the Ottawa 20/20 consultations. Meetings were held for each of these three identified groups; low income residents, residents with disabilities, and residents from diverse cultures. Three additional meetings were held by the Social Planning Council with the help from Master's of Social Work students at Carleton University. These meetings focused on the perspective of families, seniors, and the Aboriginal community.

A total of 327 participants in the 9 consultations represented a broad cross section of the community and included both

people experienced with consultations and people who had never before participated in public consultation. Shortly following each meeting, a summary of input and recommendations from participants was provided to the City.

## **Feedback**

Overall, there was a notable degree of common ground expressed in each of the consultation meetings, with the exception of the Aboriginal consultation which addressed a different set of questions. The main themes consistently focused on:

- Affordable housing
- Adequate incomes
- Affordable, accessible public transportation
- Opportunities for healthy living and meaningful participation in the community
- Structures for local decision making on priorities and implementation
- Implementation and accountability

There were elements of the Human Services Plan that participants particularly liked, including the holistic approach taken in the plan. Participants appreciated the focus on the local community being in the best position to determine their own needs and priorities, and the community capacity building/community development approach taken in the plan. Additionally, participants liked the inclusion of affordable housing, the support for a strategy for workforce development to achieve meaningful employment for all, the shift to prevention strategies where intervention services are currently adequate, and the focus on

successful aging, public safety and disease prevention. Participants were pleased with the emphasis on increased partnerships, and the willingness on the part of the City to work with existing infrastructures created by individual communities before amalgamation.

There were also elements of the draft Human Services Plan that participants did not like recommendations for improvement were provided in several areas. In general, while the general direction of the Human Services Plan was considered adequate, participants in the consultations felt that the draft was too ambitious to realistically be implemented. The consultation identified the need for the Human Services Plan to set fewer strategies, have a clear implementation plan for each strategy, and clear monitoring mechanisms.

In addition to clearer priorities, a realistic outline for financing the draft Human Services Plan was stressed. Participants also felt that the plan must be better co-ordinated with the budget and with other Ottawa 20/20 plans.

Participants also recommended that the Partnership Policy Statement needed more clarity and there should be less of a focus in the draft Human Services Plan on cost efficiency. Additionally, it was thought that a greater emphasis should be placed on addressing the barriers people with disabilities face in accessing every aspect of city life. Finally, some language (i.e. “Doing more with less” was found to be offensive) and it was felt that the plan should use more action-oriented language.

Due to the volume of feedback provided by participants at the meetings, it was important to identify specific areas where the City should take action. The feedback provided at

the consultations indicated a high demand for the City to take action in the areas summarized below:

1. Development of a strong plan to create quality affordable housing in all neighbourhoods
2. Reduction of poverty, including adequate incomes for people who cannot work, and increased supports to the poor.
3. Focus on access to employment at livable incomes for marginalized workers
4. Development of a public transportation system that is efficient and affordable
5. Maximize opportunities for inclusion and for a healthy, active lifestyle
6. Support a comprehensive regulated childcare system
7. Establish mechanisms for communities to determine local priorities
8. Achieve high standards for emergency and protective services
9. Provide strong supports for community infrastructure (including community centres, libraries, resource centres, meeting places, etc)
10. Include an additional Ottawa 20/20 principle: official bilingualism
11. Create a policy statement building accessibility for people with disabilities into every aspect of the Human Services Plan
12. Keep the diversity policy statement and address cultural diversity issues through economic strategies as well as in relation to services
13. Work with rural communities to respond better to rural issues
14. Establishment of clear monitoring measures and means of accountability
15. Continue to consult extensively with the community and be responsive.

The Consultation on Aboriginal concerns focused on different questions than the other meetings. Participants in this session developed recommendations to approve the Aboriginal People Strategic Action Plan and direct its' implementation within all departments, including to establish an Aboriginal Strategic Action Planning Council.

### **Limitations**

There were several factors that limited the meaningful participation of participants in the consultations. Views of the target population may have been missed due to; the fixed timeline of the consultations, general fatigue related with Ottawa 20/20 consultations, location of the consultations (particularly for rural residents), and the exclusion of participants due to cost of hosting the meetings. Additionally, most participants did not have a chance to study the draft Human Services Plan and their comments were based on the information they received in a brief oral presentation at the start of consultation meetings. Finally,

due to the breadth of the draft Human Services Plan, it was impossible for participants to discuss more than a small portion of the plan at each consultation meeting.

### **Next Steps**

Due to the breadth of the plan, there was cynicism that the plan would not be attainable due to time and financial constraints. In addition to defining clearer goals and actions, participants suggested that monitoring implementation of the plan is the key to a successful process. Participants were somewhat skeptical of the degree to which the city would be responsive to community input, and recommended ongoing evaluation of the implementation progress. Residents hoped the revised draft would use clear action oriented language to answer, “what is wrong, how it can be fixed, how it will be done, the cost, timeline, and how change will be monitored in an accountable way.”

## **OBSTACLES TO SECURING AND RETAINING HOUSING FOR RECIPIENTS OF ONTARIO WORKS AND ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM**

*Marie-Josée Legault*

In Nov.2000, the SPC held a public forum entitled “The experience of people with disabilities in Ottawa and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)”<sup>1</sup>. Participants identified many needs. Housing issues were identified as critical. Many ODSP recipients and community workers reported that recipients of financial support programs, such as Ontario Works (OW) and ODSP, face obstacles in securing and retaining housing, raising the risk of homeless<sup>2</sup>. Following this forum, community agencies expressed the need for further research into this issue. Recently, Housing Help and the SPC collaborated to address the housing obstacles by organizing a forum and focus groups that were held in March 2003.

The goal was to provide opportunities for people directly involved in the OW and ODSP process to share their experience. OW and ODSP recipients participated in 2 focus groups. The forum was composed of homeless service providers, non-profit and private housing market landlords, representatives of the Employment and Financial Assistance Branch (EFA) of the City of Ottawa's People Services which administers Ontario Works, as well as representatives of Essential Health and Social Services (EHSS),

Participants openly shared ideas for the improvement of the programs. Here are three of the barriers identified by both forum and focus groups participants: (1) program information is inadequately distributed and is written in formats incomprehensible to many recipients; (2) EFA and ODSP caseworkers' have insufficient knowledge of the eviction process; (3) the Community start-up benefit (CSUB) is largely unknown and its administration is not consistent<sup>3</sup>.

Recipients and community service providers spoke of the lack of comprehensible, recipient oriented information. Recipients must often rely on information heard from others in similar situations, which may or may not be accurate. It is essential for recipients to know and understand the information in order to make proper decision that will not jeopardize their benefits. Recipients, receiving considerable amounts of information during the intake process, may neglect to remember benefits they are entitled to receive or their responsibilities as recipients. Lack of documentation in a language the recipient can read and comprehend, and a failure to communicate with illiterate or mentally ill recipients compounds the information barrier.

*"There should be regular information sessions to inform us".*

*Focus group member*

As an example, recipients who live in social housing are often confused or ill informed regarding the monthly income verification form. Recipients are often not aware that the income verification form they send to the EFA office every month must also be sent

## **Improving Access to the Ontario Disability Support Program**

In November 2000, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa and the Financial Assistance Committee of the Canadian Mental Health Association (Ottawa-Carleton) held a public forum and companion focus group sessions on the Ontario Disability Support Program. A detailed report was produced entitled The Experience of People with Disabilities in Ottawa and the Ontario Disability Support Program. The report catalogues problems confronted by ODSP recipients in accessing the program, problems with program delivery, the program's failure to accommodate applicant disabilities, inadequacies of the Employment Supports program, gaps in the Ontario Drug Benefit Plan, and the hardships for applicants and recipients caused by the crisis in affordable housing in Ottawa.

Inspired by the work done in Ottawa and recognizing the systemic nature of many of the problems identified in the Ottawa report, the Steering Committee on Social Assistance (SCSA) which represents social assistance advocates in community legal clinics around the province, launched a concerted public campaign in the fall of 2001 to work for changes in the ODSP disability determination process.

The SCSA asked clinics, either on their own or in conjunction with other community groups, to hold

to the Social housing registry. Recipients believe since EFA and the Social Housing registry are both City of Ottawa services one copy will suffice, which is incorrect. The form must be sent to both services. When an income verification form is not sent to the Social Housing registry, rent is raised to market rate. Recipients, unaware that this can be corrected by sending an income verification form to the Registry, become at risk of rent arrears, eviction, and homelessness. Since policies and procedures differ with each service or program, EFA and ODSP caseworkers are unlikely to be knowledgeable of what the Social Housing registry requires of its tenants.

Another identified obstacle is the inconsistencies and the lack of information within EFA and ODSP offices regarding the eviction process. Currently, many recipients are not able to access potential resources to pay their arrears after receiving the initial *Notice to Terminate a Tenancy for Non Payment of Rent* (N4). An N4 notice is the first step in an eviction process. Arrears paid during this period avert further legal action and helps recipients maintain a good relationship with their landlord<sup>4</sup>. Recipients are informed by their caseworker that they must wait to receive eviction papers from the Ontario Housing Rental Tribunal before arrears will be paid. This being one of the last steps in the process, an eviction is the likeliest outcome. Evictions, which can often be prevented, are very costly for recipients who often lose all their possessions in the process and find themselves homeless, and for landlords since the legalities of an eviction cost several hundred dollars.

*“I see people within their homes. There is a lack of food in all the homes. That creates a lot of mental health stress. What happens is that priorities change when it’s time for the rent to come up. The money goes for lunches, Christmas presents. This creates arrears in which people can’t catch up”*

*Comment from a forum presenter*

Many participants expressed their discontent with the Community Start-Up Benefit. CSUB is a benefit that can be offered to recipients in order to cover the costs

public forums, focus groups, or inter-agency meetings on the theme of “Access to ODSP”. At the same time, the SCSA joined forces with other concerned organizations, including the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHC), Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Coalition of Family Practitioners, and CONNECT/Canadian Hearing Society, to develop recommendations and discuss lobbying and media strategy aimed at raising public awareness of the issues and potential solutions. This expanded “Access to ODSP” committee took on a new name – the ODSP Action Coalition.

Sixteen “Access to ODSP” forums were held in the province throughout 2002. The main themes that emerged from the “Access to ODSP” forums were:

- It’s too difficult to get information about ODSP benefits and programs and too difficult to apply for them
- The application forms don’t ask for enough information or the right information
- It takes too long to find out if a decision has been made and too long to get through the appeal process
- Individuals, especially those with additional needs, aren’t getting enough support at any stage
- ODSP administrative processes are designed to treat applicants and recipients as files rather than human beings
- ODSP benefit rates are too low

associated with the move to a new, permanent residence. Costs may include the purchase of furniture, kitchenware, curtains, etc. Although CSUB can be granted to OW and ODSP recipients who demonstrate need and meet the eligibility requirements<sup>5</sup>, the benefit is largely unknown among OW and ODSP recipients in dire financial situations and may be difficult to access. Also, many recipients having received CSUB benefits need the money for other purposes, such as securing housing by paying the first or last month's rent. This leaves them with little to purchase necessary household items. The utility of the benefit also suffers from inconsistent application. The amount awarded may depend on the caseworker's interpretation of the policy or of the recipient's needs. This may lead to one recipient obtaining sufficient funds to get established in new housing, and leave another recipient without enough to get by.

*"When you're living penny to penny, if anything upsets that flow, you're much more at risk of homelessness."*

*Focus group member*

During the forum and focus groups, participants had the opportunity to vote on the recommendations intended to improve services for OW and ODSP recipients by reducing obstacles to securing and retaining housing. The recommendations were: EFA should address an eviction at the N4 stage, and offer on-going training for caseworkers on the eviction prevention process; EFA should offer more comprehensible information that is recipient-oriented; Local EFA and ODSP branches should schedule meetings twice a year with community service providers to clarify policies; EFA should create a process in order to share information between EFA and the Ottawa Housing registry, e.g. a single address for recipients to send monthly income verification forms.

The forum permitted housing and homelessness service providers to speak out on obstacles encountered by recipients. The presence of employees from Ottawa's EFA Branch of the People Services Department allowed for a question period and a productive discussion that led to the identification of practical and realistic recommendations. Many of the forum's participants

These forums and the reports that were generated from them served as the practical underpinning for the ODSP Action Coalition's ultimate recommendations for reform of the ODSP disability determination process. The recommendations were endorsed by 83 organizations, including Ottawa City Council and the Social Planning Council of Ottawa.

On Friday, February 21, 2003, representatives from the ODSP Action Coalition and the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services (MCFCS) met to discuss a number of wide-ranging and topical issues concerning ODSP. The MCFCS and the ODSP Action Coalition agreed that they would work collaboratively at finding recommendations and solutions to improve ODSP service delivery.

The scope of the Committee's mandate will focus on issues and solutions related to program design and operational policy. The group agreed to focus their energies over the next six months to achieve positive outcomes. The key areas the working groups will focus on are:

1. Disability Adjudication Unit
2. Employment Supports / Earnings / Back to Work
3. The Application Process
4. Local Office Issues.

Four working groups were established to work on these issues. Membership for the working groups will be joint,

expressed a great interest in working with Housing Help throughout the next year to implement the recommendations. This group will be meeting together on a regular basis. Shortly after the forum took place, Bob Macdonald of Housing Help was invited to speak to EFA workers regarding the eviction process. These are positive steps in homelessness prevention.

A full report will be available from the SPC in May 2003.

with MCFCS and ODSP Action Coalition participating.

*Reprinted from Access to ODSP Campaign Summary of Forum Reports by the ODSP Action Coalition available at ([www.incomesecurity.org](http://www.incomesecurity.org)) with excerpts from a Joint Communiqué issued by the ODSP Action Coalition Committee and the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services.*

For more information on the Campaign, the Ottawa contact is Lisa Jameson at the Canadian Mental Health Association (Ottawa) 737-7791, ext. 125.

## A Place for Everyone

### The Hidden Crisis of Housing Vulnerability in Ottawa



One of the strongest themes in the consultations on the draft Human Services Plan was the importance of addressing the needs of the many people who face serious difficulties with their housing. In many of the discussion groups, the highest priority issue was the critical need to create affordable, accessible, quality housing in all parts of the City. Participants were very concerned about homelessness, and highlighted that homelessness is only one aspect, probably the most visible aspect, of a much wider problem. In all neighbourhoods in Ottawa there are people living in housing situations which are unsuitable to their needs for a variety of reasons. Many Ottawa residents are living in conditions which place them at risk of homelessness, health problems or serious isolation, which affect their ability to pay for other necessities such as food and utilities, and which increase the likelihood they will be placed into an institution unnecessarily.

#### **Affordable housing is the foundation for stabilizing people's lives<sup>9</sup>**

The serious shortage of affordable housing is perhaps the best known of the factors which lead to vulnerability in housing. The cost of housing has continued to rise, while incomes for many people have remained the same or dropped. The consultations highlighted just how many different groups are affected by this problem.

*Continued page 17*

<sup>9</sup> Participant, "Low Income Issues" consultation in Ottawa, Jan. 30, 2003

*Housing costs are so high it is beyond the affordability of many seniors. Affordable housing would promote independent living. Seniors need to be independent as long as possible. But if you don't have the money to stay independently, what will happen?*<sup>10</sup>

*Being a single person, and right now living with friends, I know that the salary I make is not going to be enough to get back into an apartment on my own or even shared. There are no apartments out here that I can afford to live in. We need low income housing for people who are working and not working.*<sup>11</sup>

*I was with Ontario Works - they gave me \$1000 a month. I have two children to feed. I had to take grocery money to pay for rent. How am I supposed to survive with that amount of money? If you have to take money away from food to pay the rent, you don't eat.*<sup>12</sup>

*What is affordable housing for the rural areas? We talk about affordable housing, but the City has to be very careful in the rural areas, because some of the land use issues are going to create problems. For example, the proposal is that farmers who depend on family members for help on the farm can't build a house for their son on the property. So they have to sell their farm.*



*There is a need for low-cost accommodation, housing in support of family unification, for seniors, and smaller units for downsizing families.*<sup>13</sup>

*People are being evicted because their high rents are beyond their income. If we want to prevent homelessness we have to have eviction prevention to help people stay housed.*<sup>14</sup>

In 2002, average rents went up across the Ottawa census metropolitan area by 1.3% overall. The rate of increase was highest for 3 bedroom plus apartments and lowest for bachelors (see Table 1).

*Continued page 18*

<sup>10</sup> Participant, "Seniors' Issues" consultation in Centretown, Feb. 12, 2003

<sup>11</sup> Participant, "Suburban Issues" consultation in Orleans, Jan. 20, 2003

<sup>12</sup> Participant, "Low Income Issues" consultation

<sup>13</sup> Participant, "Rural Issues" consultation in Metcalfe, Jan. 15, 2003

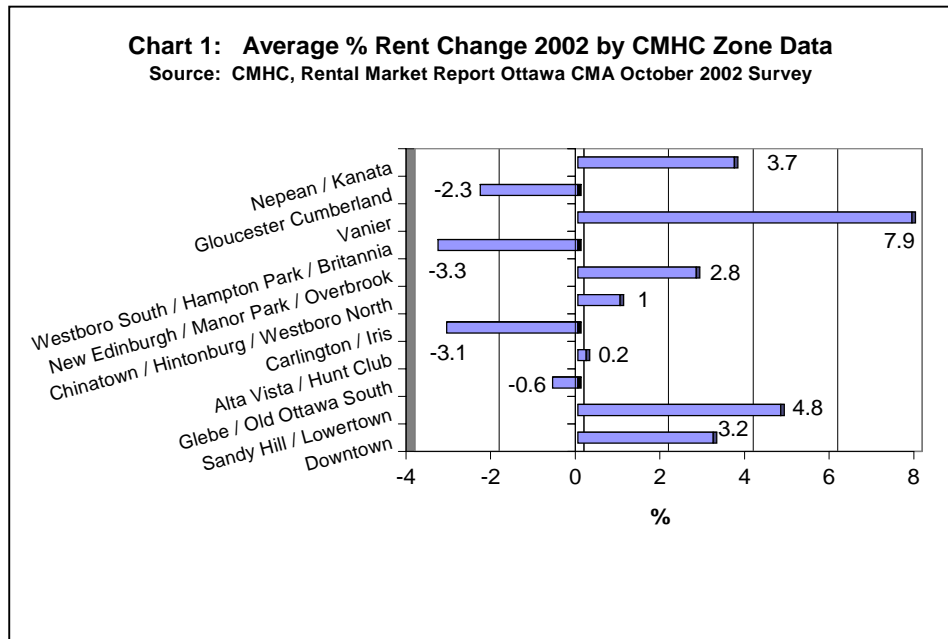
<sup>14</sup> Participant, "Urban Residents" consultation in Ottawa, Jan. 23, 2003

**Table 1: Average Rents in the Ottawa Census Metropolitan Area 2002**

Source: Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Fast Fax Rental Market Report Ottawa, November 26, 2002

Type of Unit	Average Rent 2002	Average % Increase 2001 - 2
Bachelor	\$624	.32
1 Bedroom	\$767	.66
2 Bedroom	\$930	1.8
3 or more Bedrooms	\$1129	2.7

The average rent increase, hides a very important and concerning reality at the neighbourhood level. The average rent change for private apartments in 2002 for each of the eleven zones which CMHA surveys ranges from an average increase of 7.9% to an average decrease of 3.3% (see Table 2). Several of the zones which experienced the highest rent increases have been considered in the past to be more affordable. In particular, Vanier experienced the highest average rent increase. CMHC suggests, "Many renters have likely selected this area due to its affordability, and this has pressured average rents higher."<sup>15</sup>



Affordability affects some groups in the City more than others. Although we do not yet have 2001 data for Ottawa, national data on housing affordability based on the 2001 census show that lone parent families, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, recent immigrants and seniors are more likely than the general population to have housing affordability problems.<sup>16</sup> It will be important to conduct research to confirm the degree to which Ottawa reflects the national trend. The same report notes that census information is not available with respect to housing affordability for farming households and for people in institutions, including residents of long term care facilities.<sup>17</sup> It will be necessary to measure housing affordability in Ottawa for these two groups in Ottawa, given the increasing age of Ottawa's population and the fact that we have the largest urban agricultural sector in Canada.

*Continued page 19*

<sup>15</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Rental Market Report Ottawa CMA, October 2002 Survey, pg. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Canadian Housing Observer 2003, pg. 43.

<sup>17</sup> CMHC, Canadian Housing Observer 2003, pg. 46.

The new census data shows that home ownership increased by 16.1% in Ottawa between 1996 and 2001, while renting decreased by .1%. As of 2001, 39.3% of Ottawa households were renters and 60.7% of households were owners, compared with 43% and 57% respectively in 1996. This reflects many trends, most importantly, that most of the new housing built in Ottawa over the last several years has been ownership properties. (In particular, the 2001 census shows single detached houses increasing the most of all housing types in Ottawa between 1996 and 2001.) Construction of rental housing is low – 1067 rental units started between January and October 2002.<sup>18</sup> Construction of affordable housing is even lower.

At the national level, affordability is greater on average among homeowners. There is a need for more research in Ottawa to understand the number of homeowners who are having difficulty with their housing costs. Certainly, new and resale house prices have been increasing in Ottawa. It would be important to know how this increase relates to homeowners' incomes. The census data which will be released this month will provide some information on this, but will reflect information from the period before the major layoffs in high technology.

*You can't assume needs. Even in our nice Kanata neighbourhoods, there are a lot of families that were laid off from high tech. Their employment insurance is running out and they can't find work. They are running out of money. In our middle class schools you have children whose parents are unemployed. ... It is even more stigmatizing because the belief is there are no needs.<sup>19</sup>*

**The word “quality” is important. If you take that word out you are talking about something completely different.<sup>20</sup>**

Many participants in the consultation process raised concerns about poor conditions in some of Ottawa's housing. They explained how housing in disrepair can have a negative effect on people's mental and physical health.

*If you knew what I am paying \$800 for you would die. It raises the whole issue of housing standards.<sup>21</sup>*

*If it is not safe it is not a good situation.<sup>22</sup>*

Continued page 20

<b>New At The Social Planning Council</b>		
<b>The Eastern Ontario Child Poverty Resource Network</b>	<b>The Ottawa Food Security Coalition</b>	<b>The Community Economic Development Website</b>
<i>Resources for people addressing child poverty.</i>	<i>Resources on Ottawa's food system</i>	<i>Take a look and let us know what you think!</i>
<a href="http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/eocprn">www.spcottawa.on.ca/eocprn</a>	<a href="http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/ofsc">www.spcottawa.on.ca/ofsc</a>	<a href="http://www.ced-dec-ott.net">www.ced-dec-ott.net</a>

<sup>18</sup> CMHC, *ibid*, October 2002 Survey, pg. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Participant, "Family Issues" consultation in Kanata, Feb. 6, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Participant, "Low Income Issues" consultation.

<sup>21</sup> Participant, "Low Income Issues" consultation.

<sup>22</sup> Participant, "Urban Residents" consultation.

The census tells us that in 2001, 20,780 private dwellings in Ottawa (6.7%) were in need of major repairs. This is a slight decrease from the 1996 census in which 6.9% of private dwellings in Ottawa were in need of major repair. Serious disrepair is often related to the age of the building, and the 2001 census confirms that older dwellings in Ottawa are more likely to be in need of major repairs than newer dwellings.

Serious disrepair can occur in rental or ownership housing. There are many policy issues related to disrepair, but there are three housing situations which raise particular concerns with respect to policy intervention. In many cities, the aging of the highrise rental housing stock is of particular concern because of the significant cost of major repairs in a highrise, and the number of people who can be affected by major disrepair in one building. Many of the Ottawa's highrises were built several decades ago. As these rental buildings age, increased maintenance will likely be required to ensure that health and safety standards are met. Secondary units (such as apartments in houses and granny flats) are another form of housing which can sometimes be of concern, as some of these units may not necessarily comply with building bylaws. The City estimates, "This informal part of the rental supply accounts for almost half (43%) of all rental units."<sup>23</sup> Finally, low income residents are more likely to live in sub-standard housing than the general population. This raises concerns with respect to supports for low-income tenants to address disrepair issues, and for low income homeowners whose properties are in need of major repairs.

*Continued page 21*

## Thank You for Your Donations!

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<sup>23</sup> Prepared for the City of Ottawa by Steve Pomeroy, Focus Consulting, Housing Backgrounder Ottawa 20/20 Draft Official Plan, 2002, pg. 4

## **By forcing people into institutions we are shooting ourselves in the foot<sup>24</sup>**

A common theme in the consultations was the serious need to create accessible housing for people with a range of abilities in all communities. As well, participants were particularly concerned about meeting the needs of people who require supports in their home in order to be able to remain healthy in their housing situation, including healthy "aging in place". Although there are support programs for some people and for particular needs, there was a high concern that many people are falling through the cracks for a variety of reasons.

*It makes me nervous as one little individual ... who is closer to perhaps having to change my lifestyle accommodations and when I see what isn't there for seniors, it is scary. Put more money into home care and community services for people a little less mobile. ... We're saving pennies by cutting back on home care and spending more by sending people to institutions.<sup>25</sup>*

*It's about keeping people in their rural community, where they know people. Why should a senior give up the family farm or home because you can't get support in your own home. I would get funding through the government but I'm not able to find a worker to come to my home - one and a quarter additional hours in travel time and extra cost of gas, etc. Is there any way to solve this?<sup>26</sup>*

*Building plans must consider needs of people with disabilities. We need more attention to things like accessible alarm systems, that is flashing lights to alert deaf people of a fire.<sup>27</sup>*

*If they believe they have covered "community places" for seniors under long-term care facilities, that is wrong. ... We need enhanced home care programs to keep seniors in their homes as long as possible, and we need community-based long-term care facilities and accessible housing options for seniors in their own communities when they can no longer maintain their home. Affordability and choice of location very important.<sup>28</sup>*

*We need accessible housing all across the City for all types of disabilities. People with disabilities have very little choice.<sup>29</sup>*

As Ottawa's population ages, and the numbers of residents with disabilities is expected to increase, there is a renewed level of activity with respect to creating accessible housing and appropriate supports in housing. To find out what is happening in Ottawa with respect to creating housing which is suitable for everyone, be sure to attend the two part conference being organized by the City of Ottawa's Accessibility Issues Advisory Committee (see advertisement). As well, please see the article at page 14 "Obstacles to Securing and Retaining Housing for Recipients of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program".

*Continued page 22*

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<sup>24</sup> Participant, "Suburban Residents" consultation.

<sup>25</sup> Participant, "Suburban Residents" consultation.

<sup>26</sup> Participant, "Rural Residents" consultation.

<sup>27</sup> Participant, "Issues Affecting People with Disabilities" consultation in Ottawa, Feb. 3, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Participant, "Urban Residents" consultation.

<sup>29</sup> Participant, "Issues Affecting People with Disabilities" consultation.

**The biggest barrier is people's sense of isolation and lack of sense of belonging.<sup>30</sup>**

Finally, many participants talked about the problem of people who have housing, but are isolated from the community in which they live. There was considerable discussion about the need for inclusion in community life as a critical element of suitable housing. Some spoke of the tragedy of people having to move from their housing unit because of social isolation.

*We choose to keep our disabled children living with us. But it is almost an emergency situation. You have to take them out of the community for work. There's no appropriate recreation. There is no possibility of a normal social life. We want them to be able to do things in the community they are raised in. You are in a Catch-22 position.<sup>31</sup>*

*Housing should focus on inclusion, all income levels living together in the community. The builders need to create more subsidized housing spaces in "regular communities" to avoid ghettos.<sup>32</sup>*

*A lot of supports that used to exist have degenerated. People need to be able to talk to someone, share, but you lose that because our systems have become bureaucratized - anonymity is everywhere. Society is becoming more impersonal - we need interchange. There is a need for more of those social supports to address alienation - otherwise it leads to medical issues, psychological problems, etc. We need places where people can have someone to talk to.<sup>33</sup>*



*Focus on keeping the community together, building a sense of community, which means accommodation for seniors near their communities.<sup>34</sup>*

Isolation and social exclusion affects many groups in our City. In September, residents will have an opportunity to share information and strategies on housing and how to build inclusive communities, at a conference hosted by the SPC. For information call 236-9300 ext. 303.

**"Housing for Everyone? What Will Ottawa Need In the Future?"**

A two part conference exploring the availability and design of housing in Ottawa. Part 1 will be held on May 12 from 9 - 3:30, and part 2 will be on May 23, from 9 - 12. The conference is organized by the City of Ottawa's Accessibility Advisory Committee. For more information call Patricia Kent at 580-2424 ext. 28936.

<sup>30</sup> Participant, "Low Income Issues" consultation.

<sup>31</sup> Participant, "Rural Residents" consultation.

<sup>32</sup> Participant, "Low Income Issues" consultation.

<sup>33</sup> Participant, "Family Issues" consultation.

<sup>34</sup> Participant, "Urban Residents" consultation.