

The SSVP LONDON HOMELESS CIRCLE MEETING #2

Zoom Meeting January 20, 2026

ATTENDANCE: Sam Armstrong (London Cares); Allison DeBlair (519 Pursuit); Bernie Gilmour (St. George Conference); Cassandra Harris (Atlohsa); Rachel Lane (YOU); Jim Paddon (Chair – SSVP Social Justice Committee); Brad Stone (Atlohsa); Lorraine Thompson (LPC Co-President)

REGRETS: Tracey Morton-Sader (St. Joe's Café); Hailey Brooks (YOU); Dania Parker-Smilth (Ark Aid Mission)

WELCOME (Jim P)

INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT Read by Jim P

GOAL OF MEETING:

- to learn from people directly involved with homelessness
- consider follow-up meeting
- ask how SSVP can be more active in London and area initiatives around homelessness

1) Report of Association of Municipalities on Homelessness (42/47 communities reporting)

- In 2025, (estimated) 84, 973 people knowing homelessness – 7.8% increase from 2024
- In rural communities 31 % increase
- Indigenous (representing 2.9% of province population) 13.2 % experience homelessness
- Encampments – 2000 site-based encampments

2) Report from *Maytree Foundation*

- July 2025 – over 30,000 people receiving Ontario Works or ODSP experienced homelessness
- 72% increase from July 2019
- Number of people on OW and unhoused more than doubled July 2019 - 4200 to July 2025 - 10,000
- Of note - groups more vulnerable to homelessness include racialized, Indigenous, those with disabilities

Allison DeBlair, Executive Director of **519 Pursuit**

- Community outreach Mon – Fri
- 2025 official number of people supported expected to show increase
- May 2025 – increase from 2 day/week to 5 days/week
- Increase in meals from 125 to 225
- Working with mobile depot meals
- Encampment Strategies – 1 year contract
- Working with community partners
- Organization working to fundraise to continue services currently in place
- First year operating as a charitable organization
- 1st fundraiser dinner April 23, 2026 @ Boler Mountain
- Official sock campaign 2025 – 117, 040 pairs of socks delivered weekly

Jim: Over half of 84, 000 people experiencing homelessness experience chronic homelessness

Allison: of the 220 meals served, approximately 180 are to the same people in same spaces

Brad Stone & Cassandra Harris, **Atlohsa**

Brad Stone (English name)

- Introduced himself in his Dakota language, remembering who he is and where he comes from
- “Hello, my relatives (all greeted as relatives). Thank you very much creator. It is a good day today.”
- 4 months at Atlohsa as Community Capacity Builder
- Much frontline experiences include housing outreach, case management, youth engagement, recreation coordinator

Cassandra Harris

- Settler, mostly Irish heritage
- Joined Atlohsa in 2021 as Community Care Worker as part of winter response team
- Part of cultural and safety training/education team

Atlohsa main office - 343 Richmond St.

- Non-profit charitable organization
- Recognizes social inequities faced by Indigenous as a direct result of settler colonization
- Services work to connect people back to culture, belonging, positive self-identity

Giwetashkad team started in 2020 – in partnership with city of London came up with a strategic plan

- after 3 years of community-based research learning of experiences, community gaps

Findings included

- In London Indigenous represent 2.6% of population
- 30% of people experiencing homelessness in London are Indigenous
- Shows need for culturally safe Indigenous-led services

Giwetashkad has 5 street outreach workers who focus on paper readiness (e.g., ID) and address any immediate needs

Dec 5 – big give-away of food and warm items helping over 100 people

Wiigiwaaminaan Indigenous-Led Hub - the “Lodge” 550 Wellington Rd

- Overnight and daytime respite
- 18 long-term stays 10 respite beds (planning extra 5 during this cold weather)
- 9-5 stays include meal, shower, rest
- Housing crisis drop in -one worker who connects people with immediate support

Biigajiisakaan - Mental health care offered, including psychiatrist for youth and one for adults

Ndakiimnaan Healing Lodge - team who work at Pearce Williams camp, one week at a time

- Harm reduction requirement one week without substances
- Mandate - gender-based violence and addiction

Zhaawanong 24-hr emergency Shelter for women fleeing violence

Kizhaay Anishinabe Niin – I Am a Kind Man

Transitional housing for 11 for women for one year securing personal housing

Okaadenige Anti-Human Trafficking team

Cultural justice worker

Many other programs including:

- Craft Fridays (& lunch) open to everyone
- Youth drop-in programs
- Tuesday Youth drum and drop in (ages 16-29)
- Thursday Men drum group
- Newly released from custody support programs

With so many services offered - Wraparound care can be provided

To make a cultural connection/referral - meeting can be scheduled with visiting elders

Funding - Charitable organization; some provincial and municipal funding; donations

Important: Discuss cultural goals – meet people where they are at, e.g., invitation to discuss Intergenerational trauma

Jim: During SSVP visits, members can connect Indigenous people to Atlohsa services

What role can SSVP play as non-Indigenous organization?

- Educating our members (e.g., homelessness stats)
- Education and training for non-Indigenous available at Atlohsa

Rachel Lane, Team leader at Community youth hub, YOU

Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), 333 Richmond corner of York & Richmond

- YOU started in 1982 as employment agency; career & employment services still provided
- Target age groups 16 – 24; employment being the exception ages 18 - 30
- Employment counselling – walk-in to connect with employment services
 - Job development
 - Pre-employment workshops
 - Paid work experience
 - Training (e.g., first aid, safe food handling)

Agency offers variety of services to youth

4 Social enterprises

- Clean Space – paid work experience - Downtown team works for clean space picks up litter
- Café at York & Richmond –
- Made by YOU - jams and jelly
- Workshop – construction workshop - As needed, transportation provided

YOU Strathroy, 32 Front St. W

- Transitional housing; Diversion services; Employment counselling; Job development; Access to technology; Food bank and basic needs; Drop in centre

YAC (Youth Action Centre) for youth ages 16 – 24 Mon – Fri 10 – 6

- drop in space for anyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- Housing support
- Referrals
- Basic needs (e.g., food, access to laundry, shower)
- Justice Centre
- Legal diversion and court support for youth facing charges in city of London
- Legal diversion – possibility of programming rather than e.g., incarceration

YWHO - Youth Wellness of Ontario site – connected to YAC

- Partnered to offer help for ages 12 – 25
- Provides mental health and substance abuse services, primary care, programming groups (e.g., arts & craft, soccer – see monthly calendar)
- Partnered with CMHA

YOU has 2 shelters:

YOU shelter on Clarke Rd

- Pet-friendly 31 – bed emergency shelter for youth (ages 16 – 24)
- Case workers on site

Community Youth Hub (ages 16 – 24)

- Low barrier – designed for high acuity use
- 15 beds located at Vicotria hospital property – building 16 - in partnership with LHSC
- LHSC health support also offered at downtown site
- Hubs created because of shelter restrictions (structure, rules, expectations), e.g., behaviour, substance abuse, irregular schedules (e.g., sex workers) which excludes many people
- Much support to youth experiencing chronic homelessness

Residential housing program, York & Richmond

Cornerstone and 340 project - temporary transitional housing for youth (ages 16 – 24)

Cornerstone Suites - In partnership with CAS supportive, transitional housing

Cornerstone Apartments and 340 Housing, York & Richmond

- 35 portable housing units to transition into independent living
- Young mothers and families priority
- Employment services; outreach program

Housing, Partnership with St. Leonard community services

Provide rental supplement matched through City of London coordinated access

Youth in transition provincial program for youth transitioning out of CAS care

- Goal-oriented program not just for youth experiencing homelessness

- One position within program dedicated to youth who are at risk of trafficking

Project Phoenix in partnership with LAW (London Abused Women's centre)

- One worker supports youth at risk of/experiencing trafficking

Diversion Program – entry point to services

- 3 workers who provide support and outreach work 7 days/week
- Divert from shelter, direct them to shelter,
- Can work in youth in their homes to facilitate communication

No fixed address for youth program

YOU (2024) annually supports over 3600 youth in London and Middlesex County

Sam Armstrong, **London Cares**

- In 2025 - spike in demand for service, including many new faces
- Chronic homelessness – same people year to year
- Last year reported 81,000 people experiencing homelessness was shocking
- This year less surprising as alarms were sounded last year
- Through all levels of government movement not seen to adjust those numbers

Plans for this year - Maintain consistency in services provided

- Note since services mostly municipally funded, difficult to commit to what will remain and what will change over the year; funding renewed each March
- London Cares in midst of renewing strategic plan for next few years
- Currently busy with winter response
- London Cares runs drop in space, not typically open for overnight
- Working with City of London and in collaboration with Ark Aid and St. Joe's Café to open spaces during tier 3 cold weather response (-15 & windchill -20)
- Open every night with 20 spots available
- Ark Aid will also open with extra capacity in January

Cover Me with Love (Lorraine T) Jan. 18, 2026

- Much winter wear given, e.g., coats (new & used), clothing, boots, hats & mitts
- Successful event - approx. 130 attended
- Free hot lunch provided by food truck
- Positive connection made with London Cares and 519 Pursuit who let people know of event
- Learned some people afraid to leave encampment
- Extra clothing given to London Cares and St. Joe's Café
- Possibility of spring event, as suggested by Allison DeBlair, 519 Pursuit
- Active youth conference, many supported event

Jim: Effective homeless photo display set up two weekends at St. Andrew the Apostle during clothing drive
With meeting #2 summary, consider when we will meet again, perhaps quarterly.

Thank you everyone for your contributions today, and for the inspiring work you do