DRAYTON VALLEY

2023 Alberta Provincial Housing & Service Needs Estimation

COMMUNITY REPORT

RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

DRAYTON VALLEY

Prepared By:
Rural Development Network
(780)-964-2736
11443 - 143 Street, NW
Edmonton, AB

Acknowledgements

RDN's physical office is located on the Traditional Territories of Treaty 6 and is home to many Métis and Inuit Peoples. As a national organization, we also acknowledge that RDN staff and the communities we support, live, gather, and organize across Turtle Island.

Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples are experiencing homelessness at disproportionately high rates compared to non-Indigenous people in Canada. Unlike the common, colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not simply defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully understood as a loss or breakdown of relationships between individuals, families, and/or communities and their land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages, and identities. RDN recognizes the ways in which settler relationships to both the land and the Peoples of this land have been broken and misused, causing and contributing to Indigenous homelessness. We also recognize the ways in which our presence on this land continues to uphold colonialism and reproduces dispossession and violence for Indigenous people, further perpetuating experiences of Indigenous homelessness.

In an ongoing effort to support Indigenous communities in addressing issues of housing, homelessness, and service needs, we are committed to working to decolonize homelessness research and advocate to funders for Indigenous self-determination in the housing and social sectors.

We share this acknowledgement to reaffirm our responsibility and commitment to reconciliation.

We also recognize that this land acknowledgement is just that, an acknowledgement; it is but one step in our journey. We commit to working to uphold the conditions of the treaties that govern this land.

We thank you.

This report and the information within was made possible through the efforts of many dedicated individuals and groups. We wish to thank the front-line staff at participating service agencies in Drayton Valley and the residents of Drayton Valley for their support, dedication, and commitment to this project.

About this Report

In 2023, the Rural Development Network (RDN) partnered with 22 organizations representing 45 communities across Alberta to conduct the third iteration of the provincial-wide housing and service needs estimation.

This report outlines Drayton Valley's results within the provincial estimation, highlighting the number of residents who are experiencing homelessness and their experiences. This report is complimented by the Alberta Provincial Report which highlights the combined results of all 45 communities across the province.

This report is intended to support decision-making across organizations, funders and multiple levels of government around housing and homelessness by providing reliable and up-to-date data on housing and service needs in Drayton Valley. It can also be used and referred to in the community for program and advocacy purposes related to housing, homelessness, and service needs.

Contact info@ruraldevelopment.ca for more information on Housing and Service Needs Estimations.

Table of Contents

Definitions

What Does Homelessness Mean?

Homelessness
According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2012), homelessness is the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability to acquire it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, domestic violence, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination.

Further, Indigenous homelessness considers the traumas imposed on Indigenous Peoples through colonialism. It is defined as a "human condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing...Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews" (Thistle, 2017).

Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful, and distressing. The national definition of homelessness notes that individuals who become homeless experience a range of physical living situations, including:

Unsheltered: Absolutely homeless, living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation (e.g. living on sidewalks, squares, parks, vehicles, garages, etc.).

Emergency Sheltered: People who are staying in overnight shelters due to homelessness as well as those staying in shelters due to family violence.

Provisionally Accommodated: People with an accommodation that is temporary or that lacks security for tenure (e.g. couch-surfing, living in transitional housing, living in abandoned buildings, living in places unfit for human habitation, people who are housed seasonally, people in domestic violence situations, etc.).

At Risk of Homelessness: People who are not yet homeless but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards (e.g. people who are one rent payment missed from eviction, people whose housing may be condemned for health, by-law, or safety violations, etc.).

(Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Canadian Definition of Homelessness, 2012).

Introduction

When it comes to homelessness and understanding its causes, the urban experience tends to dominate the conversation, mainly due to the "visibility" of individuals experiencing homelessness in urban centres. The issue of homelessness in rural and remote areas is far less understood and acknowledged because of its "hidden" nature. Further, recent data suggests that rural homelessness is prevalent at rates equivalent to or greater than urban per capita rates (Schiff, et al., 2022).

Recognizing this, RDN is conducting a 2023 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation with 22 organizations representing 45 rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta in an attempt to better understand what homelessness looks like in each community and across the rural provincial landscape. Specifically, the purpose of this estimation is to:

1. Develop a contextually relevant process for local service providers to engage and collect informed data with those who are at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.
2. Provide a comprehensive picture of homelessness in Alberta, including demographic information on who is experiencing homelessness, and which services are being accessed, and which services are missing.
3. Help inform service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal policies, practices, and funding decisions on homelessness, housing, and support services.
4. Develop recommendations and next steps for service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal governments.
5. Elevate and incorporate the voices of people experiencing homelessness in the solutions to end homelessness.

This is the third iteration of the Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation; it was also conducted in 2018 and 2020 with 20 and 24 communities respectively. Drayton Valley was one of the 20 communities who participated in the 2018 estimation, where they surveyed 35 community members, 33 of which were determined to be experiencing homelessness.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this Housing and Service Needs Estimation comes from the <u>Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness</u>, published by the Rural Development Network. RDN initially developed the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness due to the lack of available, accurate, and current data on rural homelessness. A lack of data limits the ability of rural communities like Drayton Valley to advocate for better resources for their residents.

The guide is unique in that it tackles the issue of homelessness from a rural perspective, and recognizes the difficulties that come with conducting standard Point-in-Time (PiT) counts in rural and remote areas. It instead uses a service-based population estimation approach, which allows for anyone, including small nonprofits and local front-line agencies, to gather data on gaps in local housing and service needs without adding additional strain to workloads and organizational capacities.

Following the model proposed in the Step-by-Step Guide, RDN worked with communities and academics across Canada to develop a survey that reflected rural and remote community contexts. The survey was developed in accordance with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' definitions of homelessness. However, the survey itself was advertised as a Housing and Service Needs survey; this is a result of feedback from multiple service providers who are committed to minimizing the stigma associated with homelessness that could cause distress to their clients. By re-framing the language of the survey, service providers were able to encourage all clients to participate, instead of pointedly targeting certain individuals.

To further minimize stigma throughout the survey, rather than asking respondents to identify themselves as homeless, they were asked whether they consider their living conditions to be secure or insecure and to fill out checkboxes that determine their objective housing situation. Based on responses to the latter survey question along with subsequent data analysis, RDN

was able to determine which respondents were experiencing homelessness . As shown in the results, below, some individuals who don't consider themselves to be homeless or at-risk of homelessness actually qualify based on the national definitions of homelessness.

The same survey was used across all communities participating in the 2023 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation project, with one exception; each community's survey was customized to meet their location parameters. Figure 1 showcases Drayton Valley's location parameters.

Figure 1: Drayton Valley Location Question on Survey

Q2. Where do you currently live (or which community do you live closest to)?

☐ Drayton Valley
☐ Brazeau County
☐ I am not sure
☐ Other: _____
☐ Prefer not to answer

RDN worked with the Town of Drayton Valley to develop a survey administration process that would ensure the greatest level of participation possible. For Drayton Valley, surveys were advertised at service provider locations and online as an open Survey Monkey link across the community. Surveys were available through these locations and online for a period of four weeks: from March 1 to March 31, 2023.

Before the survey period began, RDN conducted orientation and training sessions with staff from participating agencies. During the training, emphasis was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and

securing participants' informed consent. During each training session, resources were provided to staff to improve their understanding of the project and increase comfort in administering the survey. Training and resources also included the various ways to administer the survey in an open, non-intrusive manner, placing extra importance on meeting the individual's reasons for visiting the agency before offering the survey.

Important to note about the survey; to ensure the trust and anonymity of participants, each respondent was asked to give consent at the beginning of the survey, and create a unique identifier. The unique identifier allows RDN to maintain the integrity of the data without knowing respondent identities. The unique identifier is a combination of letters and numbers from a participant's name and birthdate.

Figure 2: Unique Identifier Question on Survey

Q1. Anonymous Unique Identifier (ex. John Smith, born on 15th November 1964)

H	N	What are the last two letters of your FIRST name?
T	H	What are the last two letters of your LAST name?
1	5	What is the DAY you were born?
6	4	What are the last two numbers of the YEAR you were born?

Drayton Valley collected 198 survey responses during the four weeks. Of the 198 surveys, 59 were excluded. Surveys were deemed unsuitable and excluded for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Survey respondent(s) declined to give consent.
2. Survey respondent(s) declined to provide the unique identifier or provided improper unique identifier information (i.e. characters instead of numbers, etc.).
3. Survey respondent(s) submitted multiple surveys (determined based on unique identifier(s).

Based on this, 139 were determined to be suitable for further analysis and will be the focus of the results outlined below.

Limitations

Despite our best attempts to reduce stigma and increase the accessibility of the survey, not all clients who were offered a survey chose to participate. Additionally, staff at participating agencies were informed that participants under the age of 14 years old required guardian consent to participate in the survey. While this is inherently problematic and exclusionary, as most youth experiencing homelessness would not have a guardian present to provide consent, to maintain survey ethics, this requirement is in compliance with the Alberta College of Social Workers. Worth noting here is that not everyone who filled out the survey responded to every question.

As a result, there remains a portion of people experiencing homelessness whose voices and lived experiences were not captured in this project. Therefore, while the trends, highlights, and recommendations made are very informative, it is important to remember that this report presents a conservative picture of the housing and services needs in Drayton Valley as a whole.

Results & Analysis

Objective Housing Situation

As part of the survey, participants were asked the following question: "Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?" Respondents were given the options "yes", "no", and "I'm not sure" to guide their responses. 56 respondents self-identified as homeless and 13 indicated "I'm not sure". Through further analysis, it was determined that 92 survey respondents are experiencing homelessness according to the national definitions of homelessness. An additional 76 dependents and 99 adults reported as living with survey respondents who are experiencing homelessness. Therefore, based on survey results, there are at least 267 community members experiencing homelessness in Drayton Valley.

The top three reasons for homelessness in Drayton Valley, as reported by survey respondents, are:
1. Low wages
2. Inability to afford rent or mortgage payments
3. Mental health issues

Additionally, 23% (22) of respondents indicated that COVID-19 affected their housing security. Specifically, respondents noted the pandemic affecting their financial situation in terms of job loss, reduced hours, and needing extended sick time off work. As a result of this, several respondents reported being unable to pay increased rental rates, receiving eviction notices, and being unable to pay mortgage rates and/or utilities associated with home ownership. Respondents also indicated that their social life and relationships were negatively impacted by COVID-19.

Exploring the Spectrum of Homelessness in Drayton Valley

Recognizing that the national definition of homelessness is complex, encompassing various housing situations across a continuum, it is important to better understand what homelessness looks like in Drayton Valley. This can be achieved by exploring the circumstances of the 92 respondents experiencing homelessness.

To accurately place respondents along the spectrum of homelessness, a series of measures were used to understand their situations, including their self-identified housing stability response, their calculated housing stability, their current housing situation, the amenities they lack in their current home, and others. Early in the survey, respondents were asked to outline their current housing situation and were able to choose all situations that applied to them from a variety of statements that ranged from "I own the house I am currently in" to "I lived in supportive housing" to "I slept in a public space" and more. To accurately present what a journey of homelessness might look like for respondents over a month, we have included all responses, as respondents were able to select more than one statement.

An important thing to consider when reading this table is that people experiencing homelessness often fluctuate in and out of their situation; therefore, someone who was unsheltered one night might have been emergency sheltered or provisionally accommodated the next night. As a result, we have highlighted every incident of insecurity respondents experienced in the past month to understand the journey of homelessness in Drayton Valley.

Table 1: Respondents by Housing Situation in the Homelessness Spectrum

Place on the Homelessness Spectrum	# of Respondents in Each Category
Unsheltered	28
Emergency Sheltered	25
Provisionally Accommodated	83
At Risk of Homelessness	140

This table demonstrates the diversity of respondents' experiences with homelessness in Drayton Valley and outlines that homelessness presents itself in more ways than simply sleeping outside. Respondents that have been identified as "At Risk" emphasized their difficulty in being able to afford their rent/mortgage and/or have stayed in a home with unsafe conditions such as physical construction hazards, no windows, no electricity, etc. Many of these respondents also live in overcrowded housing, where there are too many people compared to the number of bedrooms in the home.

Respondents who indicated they experienced being provisionally accommodated noted stays in jail/prison/remand centre, medical/detox facilities, and transitional housing units. Some respondents also indicated staying in a home where they experience violence because they have nowhere else to go, staying with a stranger because they have nowhere else to go, and/or enduring unwanted sexual activity to have a place to stay.

Drayton Valley Population Overview

According to Alberta's Regional Dashboard (Government of Alberta, n.d.), the Town of Drayton Valley covers a 30.7 square km geographical land base with a population size of 6,802; making up 0.15% of Alberta's total population.

54% (3,676) of Drayton Valley's population is reported as female, while 46% (3,126) reports as male. Additionally, Drayton Valley has a fairly even distribution of age across its population, as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Drayton Valley Population Age Breakdown (2022)
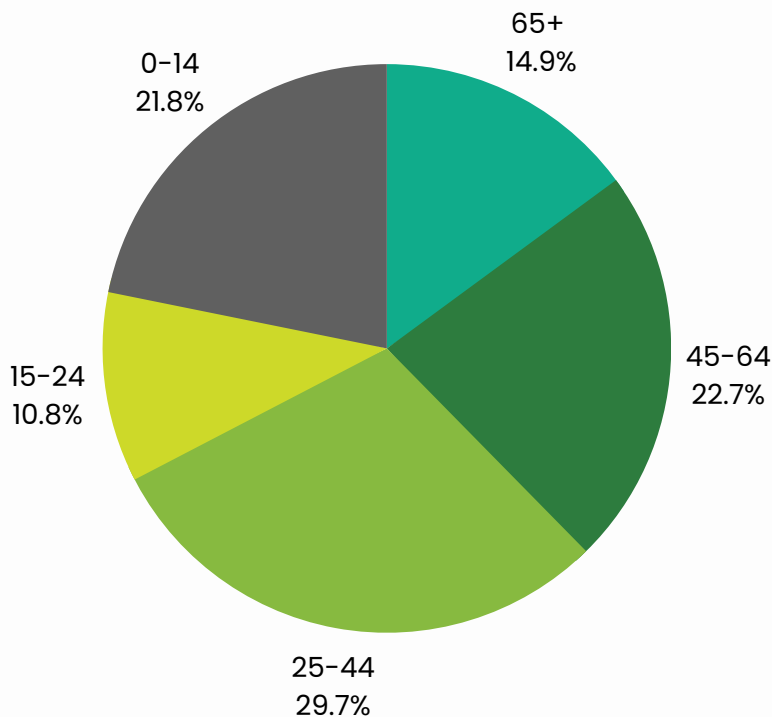
As shown in Figure 3, the average age of the population in Drayton Valley is 38.8 years.

According to Statistics Canada Census numbers in 2021, 8% (570) of the population immigrated to Canada and 10% (720) of the population identify as a visible minority. Further, 8.3% (590) of the population identified as Indigenous; 35% (205) of whom are First Nations, 61% (360) of whom are Métis, and 3% (20) of whom noted multiple Indigenous ancestries.

The 2021 Census also reports that Drayton Valley has 2,895 private households with an average of 2.4 people per household. Of the 2,895 private households, 71% (2,065) own their home, while 29% (830) rent their home with the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom dwelling listed as $871. Additionally, 72% (2,080) of occupied private dwellings are houses, 50% of which are single-family houses, and 19% (540) of occupied private dwellings are apartments. Further, 28% (810) of households in Drayton Valley report one or more of the following:

- Spending more than 30% of their income on shelter costs,
- That their dwelling is "not suitable"; and/or,
- That their dwelling has "major repair needs."

The median after-tax income in Drayton Valley is $39,200 for individuals and $75,500 for households. According to the Economic Research Institute (2023), the cost of living in the Town of Drayton Valley is 5% higher than the national average and 1% lower than the provincial average for Alberta.

Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Respondent Population Overview

92 community members experiencing homelessness responded to the Drayton Valley survey; 61% (54) of whom identified as female, 36% (32) as male, and 2% (2) as gender non-conforming. 1% (1) of respondents noted their identity was not listed in the options provided. Additionally, 86% (77) of respondents identified as straight, 1% (1) as lesbian/gay, 4% (4) as bisexual/pansexual, and 2% (2) as unsure. 7% (6) preferred not to answer.

Of the 92 respondents, 49% (45) are between the ages of 20-39, 41% (38) are between 40-59, and 10% (9) are 60 years or older.

93% (86) of respondents were born in Canada (Turtle Island), while 4% (4) reported being born outside of Canada and 2% (2) preferred not to answer..

75% (67) of respondents are white, compared to 12% (11) of respondents who are racialized. 2% (2) of respondents noted their identity was not listed in the options provided and 10% (9) preferred not to answer. Racialized respondents identified as Arab, East Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Black, Latin American, and Indigenous. 33% (30) of respondents self-identified as Indigenous and 8% (7) preferred not to answer; 47% (14) as First Nations, 37% (11) as Métis, and 17% (5) as having other Indigenous ancestry.

29% (26) of respondents stayed in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth/young adult agreement in the past and 1% (1) preferred not to answer.

Lastly, in terms of demographics, respondents were asked to indicate if they have ever served in the Canadian Armed Forces/Foreign Military Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) or Foreign Police Service, or local or foreign Emergency Services (EMS, Police, Fire Department). Of the 92 respondents, 1% (1) indicated they serve(d) in the Canadian Armed Forces or Foreign Military Service, 1% (1) in the RCMP or Foreign Police Service, and 2% (2) in local or foreign Emergency Services. An additional 3% (3) preferred not to answer.

Based on this survey population overview breakdown, we can determine the following:

- Respondents identifying as women are 1.7x more likely than their male counterparts to be homeless
- 100% of respondents who spent time in care are experiencing homelessness and 58% of those respondents are Indigenous

Education, Employment, and Income Sources

Respondents experiencing homelessness indicated various education levels when responding to "What is the highest level of education you've completed?" 4% (3) of respondents have completed some grade school, 29% (25) have completed some high school, 15% (13) have completed high school or received their GED, 12% (10) have an apprenticeship, trades certificate, or diploma, 20% (17) have a college certificate or diploma, 7% (6) have some post-secondary, 9% (8) have a Bachelor's degree, and 2% (2) have a Graduate or Professional Degree (Master's, Ph.D., MD, JD, etc.). 1% (1) preferred not to answer. This can also be seen in Figure 4, below.

Figure 4: Education Levels Breakdown for Respondents Experiencing Homelessness
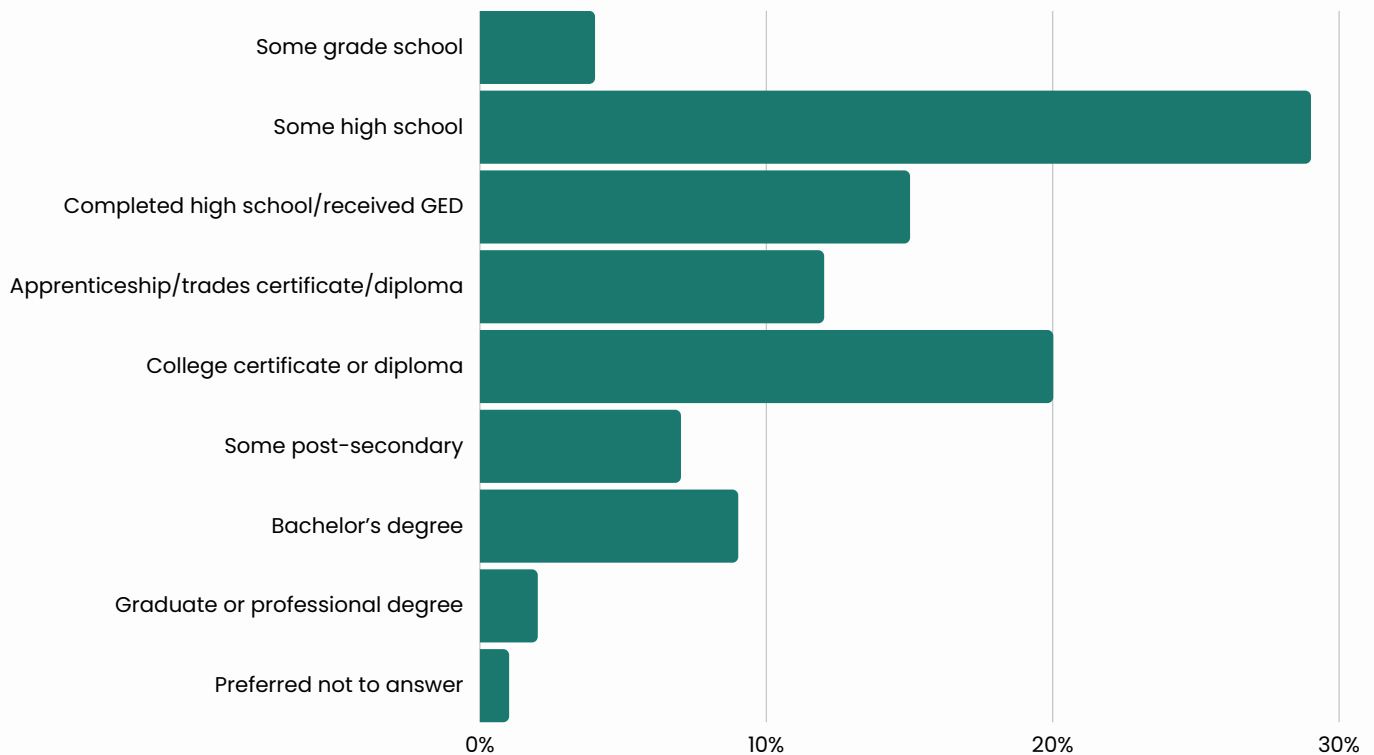
Additionally, 47% (40) of respondents experiencing homelessness are employed and 2% (3) preferred not to answer; 68% (27) of those employed are full-time, 25% (10) are part-time, and 1% (1) are casual.

Recognizing that many respondents experiencing homelessness are not full-time employed, we asked them, "What are your sources of income?" Respondents were encouraged to check all that apply from the following list of options: Job-related (e.g. employment, partner/spouse's income, alimony/child support, etc.), Government-related (e.g. Seniors Benefits, Veterans' Benefits, Disability Benefits, Employment Insurance, Student loans, etc.), Tax-related (e.g. child and family tax benefits, GST refunds, etc.), or Informal (e.g. bottle returns, panhandling, money from family and friends, etc.).

Respondents experiencing homelessness noted 65 times that they receive job-related income, 26 times that they receive government-related income, 37 times that they receive tax-related income, and 38 times that they receive informal income. Additionally, respondents experiencing homelessness noted 19 times that they have other sources of income including credit card loans.

Further, respondents were asked to disclose their approximate household income for the previous year. Responses varied widely, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Approximate Household Income in 2022 for Respondents Experiencing Homelessness

Total Household Income in 2022	# of Respondents Per Income Level
$30,000 or less	37 (44%)
Between $30,001 and $49,999	16 (19%)

Between $50,000 and $69,999	9 (11%)
Between $70,000 and $89,999	4 (5%)
Between $90,000 and $109,999	7 (8%)
More than $110,000	5 (6%)
Prefer not to answer	7 (8%)

Of the respondents experiencing homelessness, 44% reported a household annual income of $30,000 or less.

Living Situation

To better understand respondents' current living situations, respondents were asked to indicate if they rent or own their home (or if neither is true for them). 33% (30) of respondents experiencing homelessness indicated that they own their home, 34% (31) indicated that they rent their home, and 29% (27) noted that they neither own nor rent.

Further, respondents were asked, "If you pay rent or a mortgage, how much do you pay per month?" Of the responses, rent and mortgage prices varied.

Table 3: Rent or Mortgage Costs per Month for Respondents Experiencing Homelessness

Rent/Mortgage Cost	# of Respondents Paying Rent/Mortgage Costs
Less than $500	3 (3%)
Between $500 to $999	21 (23%)
Between $1000 to $1499	16 (17%)
Between $1500 to $1999	11 (12%)
Over $2000	11 (12%)
I don't pay rent or a mortgage	27 (29%)
Prefer not to answer	3 (3%)

Among respondents experiencing homelessness, whether they rent, own, or are in a different situation entirely, 16% (40) do not have sufficient and affordable heating and 14% (35) do not have access to safe drinking water.

Table 4: Breakdown of Missing Amenities for Respondents Experiencing Homelessness

Missing Amenities	# of Respondents Missing Amenities
Indoor plumbing/bathing facilities	28 (11%)
Sufficient and affordable heating	40 (16%)
Safe drinking water	35 (14%)
Refrigeration	26 (11%)
Electricity (or equivalent - i.e. solar power)	28 (11%)
Cooking facilities	28 (11%)
Fire protection (smoke alarms, fire extinguishers)	34 (14%)

This breakdown highlighted respondents who lack basic amenities and is one of the ways in which respondents' objective housing situation is calculated. Some respondents self-identified as housing secure but lacked amenities that would consider their housing situation stable according to the Canadian definition of homelessness, including indoor plumbing, heat, electricity, and access to safe drinking water.

19% (17) of respondents experiencing homelessness have always lived in the Drayton Valley area (including Brazeau County) and 8% (7) preferred not to answer. Of the respondents experiencing homelessness who were not born in the area, 40% (36) have lived in the Drayton Valley area for more than eight years. Respondents experiencing homelessness who are not from Drayton Valley were also asked to indicate the reasons why they came to this community. The top five reasons they came to the Drayton Valley area are:

1. To start a job (17%)
2. To be closer to family (15%)
3. To look for work (14%)
4. To find housing (13%)
5. To access supports and services (7%)

Other reasons respondents experiencing homelessness moved to the Drayton Valley area include fear for safety/fleeing from violence (6%), to move in with a spouse/partner (6%), for the lifestyle the community offers (4%), to follow a spouse/partner's family (3%), to reconnect with culture and community (2%), environmental displacement (2%), to access emergency shelter (1%), to attend school (1%), and 1% preferred not to answer.

Noteworthy here is that 17% (15) of respondents experiencing homelessness have moved between three and six times in the past 12 moves and 10% (9) have moved more than six times in the past 12 months.

Additional analysis discovered that 11% (10) of respondents experiencing homelessness are also experiencing domestic/intimate partner violence in their current living situations; 70% (7) of whom identify as female and 30% (3) identify as male. 70% (7) of respondents identify as straight while 30% (3) preferred not to answer, 60% (6) are white, while 40% (4) are Indigenous, and all were born in Canada. The top two reasons these respondents are experiencing homelessness, on top of violence, are low wages and family rejection; only 30% (3) of respondents are employed full-time; the other 70% (7) are all unemployed, relying on informal income and government income assistance. A lack of

consistent income is often a reason why people are unable to leave their abuser. Further, 90% (9) of respondents are accessing basic needs support on a regular basis, and 20% (2) of them rely on hitchhiking as their main mode of transportation.

Community Supports

In an attempt to better understand service needs and gaps in Drayton Valley, respondents were asked: "Which support services do you access?" The main reasons respondents experiencing homelessness access support services are to help with basic needs, health and wellness, and financial.

Table 5: Reasons Why Respondents Experiencing Homelessness Access Support Services

Services Accessed	# of Respondents who Accessed these Services
Basic Needs – Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	34 (23%)
COVID-19 – PPE, information, supports	9 (6%)
Crisis Financial Support – Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	5 (3%)
Family/Parenting – Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	11 (7%)
Financial – Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	14 (10%)
Health and Wellness – Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	20 (14%)

Legal – Separation/divorce/ custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanor, etc.	10 (7%)
Support Services – Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	13 (9%)
Transportation – Access to basic services/education/ employment, medical transportation	2 (1%)

To further understand respondents' abilities to access the necessary support services, we asked: *"Which of these services were you able to access in your community?"* and *"Which of these services did you have to access in another community?"* followed by, *"If applicable, how long did you travel to access these services (one-way)?"*

Respondents experiencing homelessness were most likely to access basic needs, legal, financial, and health and wellness services in Drayton Valley. Interestingly, there was a very even spread of respondents experiencing homelessness accessing services outside of Drayton Valley, and basic needs, legal, financial, and health and wellness services were all accessed frequently outside of the community. Specifically, respondents experiencing homelessness noted needing to leave the community for specialized medical services, emergency shelter services, and legal services. Respondents experiencing homelessness are likely accessing these services outside of Drayton Valley for one of two reasons: first, because these services are not offered in Drayton Valley and second, because respondents' are not aware that these services are offered in Drayton Valley.

Table 6: Services Accessed by Respondents Experiencing Homelessness by Location

Services Accessed	# of Respondents who Accessed Services in Drayton Valley	# of Respondents who Accessed Services Outside of Drayton Valley
Basic Needs – Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	48 (41%)	36 (36%)
COVID-19 – PPE, information, supports	16 (14%)	38 (38%)
Crisis Financial Support – Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	14 (12%)	38 (38%)
Family/Parenting – Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	16 (14%)	35 (35%)
Financial – Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	21 (18%)	38 (38%)

Health and Wellness - Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	21 (18%)	42 (42%)
Legal - Separation/divorce/custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanour, etc.	23 (20%)	37 (37%)
Support Services - Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	18 (16%)	38 (38%)
Transportation - Access to basic services/education/employment, medical transportation	12 (10%)	37 (37%)

Respondents experiencing homelessness noted traveling anywhere from 30 minutes to four hours one way to access services, though the average trip to access services one way is two hours. Time and distance to access services outside of the community is a significant barrier for respondents experiencing homelessness; while 50% of travel by vehicle to get to these services, 13% rely on a

family member or friend, 19% resort to hitchhiking or catching a ride from a stranger, and 19% of respondents experiencing homelessness simply don't access services anymore because it is too far or too hard to get there.

Worth repeating is that 19% of respondents experiencing homelessness rely on hitchhiking or catching rides from strangers to access services and 19% don't attempt to access services because they have no way to get there. This is significant as respondents who are unable to access the necessary support will continue to experience homelessness at much higher rates than those respondents who can access the support needed to stabilize their housing situation.

Shelter Use

33% (30) of respondents experiencing homelessness accessed an emergency shelter in the past 12 months; 83% (25) accessed a standard emergency shelter (including emergency weather shelters, also known as MAT shelters), 3% (1) a women's/domestic violence shelter, 13% (4) accessed an emergency shelter but are unsure what type of shelter it was, and 3% preferred not to answer. This can also be seen in figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Emergency Shelter Use

13%

3%

83%

- Unsure which type of shelter was accessed
- Women's/domestic violence shelter
- Standard emergency shelter
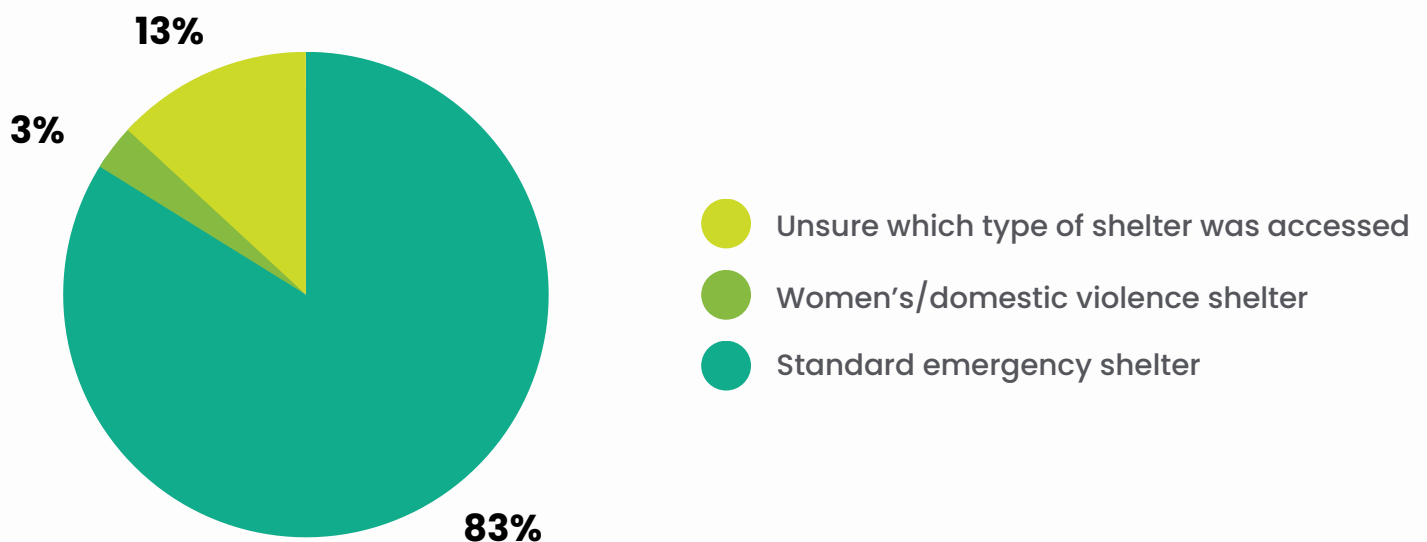
Of the respondents experiencing homelessness who needed shelter services but did not access them, several reasons were provided as to why, as outlined in Table 7. The top three reasons why respondents experiencing homelessness did not access shelter services when they needed them were because there was no shelter in the area, there was no transportation to get to the closest shelter, and the right kind of shelter wasn't available.

Table 7: Reasons Respondents Experiencing Homelessness Did Not Access Shelter Services When Needed

Reason for Not Accessing Shelter Services	# of Respondents
The right kind of shelter wasn't available (for example, I needed a women's shelter and couldn't access one)	11 (14%)
The shelter was full	8 (11%)
There was no shelter in my area	18 (24%)
I didn't meet the intake criteria to access the shelter	1 (1%)
I didn't feel safe	8 (11%)
The shelter was unclean	1 (1%)
The shelter did not welcome me because of my gender identity	1 (1%)
Alcohol/substance use is not permitted on site	5 (7%)
Lack of disability accommodations	0
Lack of transportation	13 (17%)

No pets allowed	1 (1%)
Isolation from social support (family, partner, friends, etc.)	3 (4%)
Prefer not to answer	1 (1%)

Interestingly, though the top reason for not accessing a shelter was identified by respondents as "there was no shelter in the area," Drayton Valley has two shelter options available to community members in need of emergency shelter. There is a day program called Warming Hearts, open from 9 am to 5 pm which provides a safe space to hang out, stay warm, access showers, laundry, food, clothes, and support as needed. Complementing the day program is Drayton Valley's Shelter Pods program, which is an unmanned Night Emergency Shelter with 12 pods (rooms), each with a bed frame and mat in them. Community members can access a bed from 8 pm to 11 pm and stay overnight. This might indicate a gap in awareness of the shelter services available in the Drayton Valley area by respondents in need of emergency shelter.

Insights on Community Spaces

Wanting to ensure that respondents had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the community, they were asked; "What are two things you love about the community and what are two things you don't love about the community?" In analyzing responses from respondents experiencing homelessness in reference to what they love about Drayton Valley, three themes emerged; community, parks and recreation, and services.

Community: Respondents overwhelmingly spoke of their love of the community in terms of size, location, and feel. Respondents love how small and rural the community is with many respondents indicating a love for the "small town feel". Respondents also appreciate how close to the mountains Drayton Valley is, how easy it is to get around the community with or without a vehicle, and how close the surrounding towns and communities are. Some respondents also specifically mentioned how beautiful the town is and how many viewpoints there are. Respondents also spoke to the "feel" of the community, mainly attributing that to the people in the community. More than anything else, respondents emphasized over and over again their love for the people in Drayton Valley; how friendly people are, how supportive people are, how close-knit people in the community are, and people's community spirit. Many respondents noted their appreciation for community leaders and one respondent seemed to encompass the feeling all respondents were speaking to when they said, "It's the community love."

Parks and Recreation: Respondents spoke of their love for parks and green space in and around the community, for recreation opportunities and infrastructure, and for the social opportunities provided in the community. Respondents love the walking paths and other trails throughout the community, having access to the river, and the unofficial green spaces across the community where respondents can enjoy both trees and wildlife. Respondents also appreciate the more formal recreation opportunities and infrastructure, including the pool and all of the

amenities coming with it, camping facilities, the many parks and playgrounds sprinkled throughout the community, the availability of gyms, and the recreation centre. More than that, respondents love the formal opportunities to socialize in recreation spaces. Some respondents highlighted the community activities and events hosted in park spaces as being one of their favourite things about Drayton Valley.

Services: Respondents experiencing homelessness noted their satisfaction with the services available in Drayton Valley as one of the things they love about the community. Specifically, they focused their responses more on the emergency shelter and basic needs services available in the community. Respondents love the Warming Hearts program and the Shelter Pods. Additionally, respondents experiencing homelessness emphasized their love for the mental health and addictions services in Drayton Valley. Beyond the services though, respondents experiencing homelessness highlighted their love and appreciation for the staff providing these services.

In contrast, when asked what they don't love about the community, respondents experiencing homelessness spoke mostly about crime, affordable and accessible recreation, and services. Additionally, they spoke of their exclusion in community spaces.

Crime: Respondents experiencing homelessness noted their displeasure with the amount of crime in Drayton Valley. Specifically, respondents noted concerns with seemingly increasing incidents of theft in the community. Additionally, respondents indicated concerns with the amount of drugs being sold and used in the community.

Affordable and accessible recreation: Respondents often noted the costs associated with formal recreation opportunities in Drayton Valley. Specifically, respondents highlighted that there are very few free or low-fee recreation activities across the community. Further, many respondents feel as though there are no recreational activities or opportunities for families with young children.
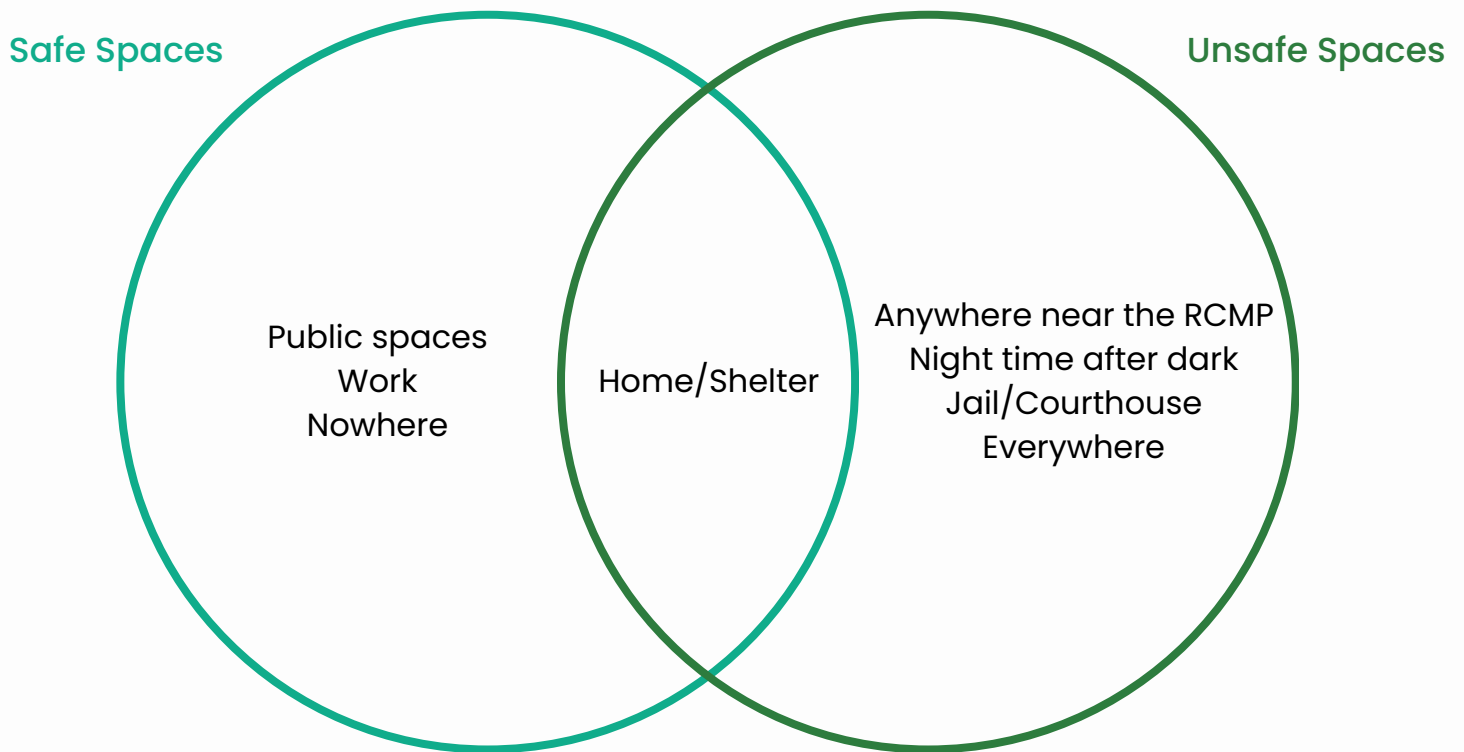
Nor is there childcare available in the community for when parents want to take part in recreational activities. Respondents also spoke to the lack of accessibility of public recreation facilities and community public spaces (like sidewalks, crosswalks, and location of recreation infrastructure) which creates barriers to their participation in recreation. Lastly, a few respondents noted the heavy focus on sport-type recreation activities and a lack of opportunity for community members to participate in cultural and art activities.

Services: Respondents often noted the lack of services available in Drayton Valley when discussing what they don't love about the community. Specifically, respondents are frustrated by the lack of childcare options in the community as well as the general lack of resources for young families. Many respondents also expressed their displeasure with how far away medical facilities are from the community. Additionally, many respondents spoke about the need for public transportation in Drayton Valley. Lastly, a few respondents noted that there is no support available for community members who have been sexually assaulted.

Exclusion in community spaces: Interestingly, though respondents experiencing homelessness spoke overwhelmingly of their love for the community feel in Drayton Valley, they also repeatedly mentioned their feelings of exclusion in the community. They spoke of feeling judged and discriminated against for their housing situation, often also noting that people get angry with them or gossip about them because of their housing situation. One respondent stated, "Nobody likes the poor here."

Respondents were also asked, "What are two places that make you feel safe in the community and what are two places that make you feel unsafe in the community?" Figure 4 highlights the similarities and differences in feelings of safety for respondents experiencing homelessness.

Figure 4: Venn Diagram of Safe and Unsafe Spaces Responses by Respondents Experiencing Homelessness

Safe Spaces

Unsafe Spaces

Public spaces
Work
Nowhere

Home/Shelter

Anywhere near the RCMP
Night time after dark
Jail/Courthouse
Everywhere

Responses vary among respondents but interestingly, while many people noted feeling safe in their home, others noted feeling unsafe in their home. Additionally, while many respondents suggested they feel safe in public spaces, most noted feeling unsafe in public spaces at night. What is really important to highlight in this figure though is that many respondents do not feel safe anywhere in Drayton Valley.

"What Would You Like to See More of in Your Community?"

Respondents experiencing homelessness outlined many things they would like to see more of in Drayton Valley. Upon further analysis, they can be categorized into three main themes: housing, support services, and recreation opportunities. Interestingly, these three themes align perfectly with respondents' answers to a previous question they were asked: *"Does Drayton Valley provide enough… employment opportunities; free/accessible recreational and social opportunities; social services; accessible and affordable housing; public transportation; access to food?"*

Table 8: Respondents Experiencing Homelessness Perceptions of Drayton Valley's Provision of Services

Does Drayton Valley Provide Enough:	# of Respondents Who Believe Drayton Valley Provides Enough…	# of Respondents Who Believe Drayton Valley Does Not Provide Enough…	# of Respondents Who Aren't Sure if Drayton Valley Provides Enough…
Employment opportunities	27 (34%)	42 (53%)	11 (14%)
Free/accessible recreational and social opportunities	17 (21%)	53 (66%)	10 (13%)
Social services	45 (57%)	30 (38%)	5 (6%)

Accessible & affordable housing	7 (9%)	62 (78%)	10 (13%)
Public transportation	5 (6%)	72 (91%)	2 (3%)
Access to food (grocery stores, markets, food banks, etc.)	58 (73%)	17 (22%)	4 (5%)

Of note in Table 8 is the significant discrepancy in respondents who believe there is enough accessible and affordable housing in Drayton Valley (9%) versus the number of respondents who believe more accessible and affordable housing is needed (78%) and the number of respondents who believe there is enough public transportation in Drayton Valley (6%) versus the number of respondents who believe more public transportation is needed (91%).

Housing: Respondents spoke often of their desire to see increased housing options in Drayton Valley. Many noted the need for affordable housing or below-market housing options. Similarly, respondents indicated their interest in seeing a transitional housing unit built in Drayton Valley to support residents who no longer need emergency shelter services but aren't yet able to live on their own and require additional supports. A few respondents also emphasized the need for more awareness surrounding the current available emergency shelter options so community members know what shelter options are available to them. Respondents who rent their home mentioned their wish to see policy change to introduce rent caps, which would see landlords limited on how frequently and how much they are able to raise rent per year. Many believe this would help to stabilize their housing situation. And lastly, respondents highlighted the need for affordable seniors housing and affordable independent living housing for people with disabilities.

Support Services: Respondents highlighted many support services they would like to see more of in the community, from addictions services to mental health services, to basic needs services, and more. Many respondents indicated the need for increased addictions and mental health supports; many noted that mental health services are often expensive, making them cost-prohibitive for respondents experiencing homelessness. Some respondents specifically mentioned wishing to see an addictions day support program in Drayton Valley. Several respondents also noted their desire for more physical health infrastructure in the community, including doctors offices, supports for people who are pregnant, and support for people who have been sexually assaulted at a specialized Sexual Assault Centre. Similarly, respondents would like to see more specific or targeted support for certain demographic groups including seniors, children/youth, people with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples.

A large portion of respondents also indicated their interest in seeing an employment services-type of office opened in the community. Many respondents noted their desire to get a job but also mentioned that they need help gaining interview and employment skills. Along the same line, many respondents expressed interest in seeing more post-secondary courses as well as "life-skills" courses offered locally. One respondent specifically stated, "I personally would love to have school options that can work around my parenting and financial obstacles."

Additionally, respondents highlighted the need for public transportation in Drayton Valley. Without public transportation, many respondents are unable to access services offered within the community, let alone those only available outside of the community. Of note, one respondent also emphasized their need for help in getting identification.

Recreation and Social Opportunities: Respondents spoke of wanting to see more organized sports for adults in the community with options for low-cost sporting activities for those who have lower incomes. Some respondents also reminisced about how there used to be concerts and other activities in the park, wishing those would be brought back to increase opportunities for socialization and

increase community spirit. Many also brought up their desire to see a community market of sorts, with local artists and Indigenous artists showcasing and selling their work in the park during the summer. In contrast, respondents also wished for an indoor recreation space for children and adults alike for off-weather conditions when people still want to get together and be active or socialize. Lastly, several respondents noted that they would like to see childcare options associated with organized recreation opportunities in the future so that they are able to participate.

Upon further analysis, an overall satisfaction score was generated to better understand respondents' perceptions of service provision in Drayton Valley. It was determined that 33% of respondents experiencing homelessness are satisfied with service provision in Drayton Valley. Important to note here is that the satisfaction rates calculated above are speaking to the lack of available services in Drayton Valley rather than satisfaction with currently available services in the community. Respondents overwhelmingly noted their pleasure with the services currently available to them and the staff offering those services when asked to identify two things they love about the community.

What Does Homelessness Look Like in Drayton Valley?

In a report that is composed of mainly quantitative data, it can be easy to overlook the humanity behind the numbers reported. Using the most common responses from the survey, we were able to compile two profiles of a "typical" respondent experiencing homelessness. The first focuses on the experiences of a respondent who is unsheltered or emergency sheltered and the second on the experiences of a respondent who is provisionally accommodated or at risk of homelessness.

Unsheltered or Emergency Sheltered:
In the case of Drayton Valley, this is a man between the ages of 20-39 who neither rents nor owns their home. He has lived in the community for over eight years and has spent the past year fluctuating between sleeping outside, in an emergency shelter, and couchsurfing with friends and family and in some cases, with a stranger because he had nowhere else to go. Currently unemployed and with an annual income of less than $30,000, he does not make enough money to secure stable housing. He is also currently struggling with substance use issues but notes that Drayton Valley does not have the supports necessary for him to address his substance use.

Provisionally Accommodated or At Risk of Homelessness:
In the case of Drayton Valley, this is a woman, between the ages of 20-39, who is currently renting her home for between $500 and $999 per month. She has lived in the community for over eight years and is currently not employed. Her unemployment status makes it difficult to consistently pay for rent, often relying on her partner's income and basic needs support services to make ends meet. Even with the additional support, the unit she rents requires major repairs. Despite these struggles, she enjoys the lifestyle that Drayton Valley offers.

The true diversity of respondents is illustrated in the Results & Analysis section, but these profiles highlight what someone experiencing homelessness might look like in Drayton Valley.

Opportunities Moving Forward

Based on the findings outlined in this report, RDN has identified three opportunities to support respondents experiencing homelessness moving forward. They are:

1. Increase community awareness and understanding of homelessness. Community conversations around homelessness should have two goals: First, to broaden the general community's understanding of and empathetic reaction to community members experiencing homelessness, and second, to help general community members understand the various experiences of homelessness in Drayton Valley. Of the 92 survey respondents who were identified as experiencing homelessness, only 56 of them self-identified as experiencing homelessness. It is possible then, that the 36 respondents who believe they are housing secure have never accessed supports that could help improve their current housing situation. Facilitating community conversations on homelessness will help to ensure more people better understand their current housing status and, at the same time, will hopefully encourage the general community to show empathy and understanding towards residents experiencing homelessness. Considering 16% of respondents do not have sufficient heating and 7% do not have access to safe drinking water in their current housing situation, community conversations should also include sharing information and resources on human rights, tenant rights, and homeowner rights.

2. Conduct a gap analysis and audit of service offerings in Drayton Valley. Respondents indicated several services they would like to see in Drayton Valley from basic needs and shelter to transportation to health services. Further, housing secure respondents are 50% satisfied and respondents experiencing homelessness are only 33% satisfied with the provision of services in Drayton Valley. Given the number of service gaps identified by residents of Drayton Valley, it is critical to audit the availability of services in the community. If these services currently exist in Drayton Valley, consider why respondents identified the service(s) as a gap. This might mean rethinking certain services, increasing access to these services, and/or looking for ways to better promote these

services to increase awareness across the community. Emergency shelter services and employment support services are both good examples of this. In the case of emergency shelter services, the number one reason respondents didn't access a shelter when they needed them was "there was no shelter in the area" even though there is an emergency overnight shelter and an emergency day shelter program in Drayton Valley. Similarly, respondents overwhelmingly indicated the need for employment support services when Drayton Valley has an Adult Education and Employment Information Centre. Conducting a gap analysis and audit of services in Drayton Valley will help identify where new services are needed versus where increased awareness around currently available services is needed.

3. Consider public transportation options in Drayton Valley. Respondents indicated a lack of transportation as being prohibitive to accessing support services, gaining employment, and accessing housing in the community. 19% of respondents in need of services resorted to hitchhiking to get the support they needed while 19% aren't able to begin accessing services as they lack transportation. To ensure respondents can get the support they need to stabilize their housing situation, whether that be access to medical or mental health supports, accessing the employment centre, getting a job, or even finding housing, transportation is crucial. Public transportation is often very difficult to provide in rural communities due to lack of infrastructure and costs associated with operations. Consider creative and/or alternative options to public transportation such as car share programs, taxi credits, volunteer ride share programs, or other options to ensure community members, specifically community members experiencing homelessness, can get around the community.

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Rural Development Network
(780)-964-2736
11443 - 143 Street, NW
Edmonton, AB