WETASKIWIN

2023 Alberta Provincial Housing & Service Needs Estimation

COMMUNITY REPORT

RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
NETWORK

The
Open
Doors

opening doors to a brighter future

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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 were made possible through the efforts of many dedicated individuals and groups. We wish to thank the front-line staff at The Open Doors and the residents of Wetaskiwin 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 Wetaskiwin's results within the provincial estimation, highlighting the number of residents who are housing insecure and their experiences with homelessness. 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 Wetaskiwin. 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.

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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).

Insecure Housing: For this report, the term housing insecure, or insecure housing, will be used to encompass the entire spectrum of homelessness which includes unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at risk of homelessness.

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 conducted the 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 housing insecurity and 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. Wetaskiwin was one of the 20 communities that participated in the 2018 estimation, where they surveyed 26 community members, 13 of which were determined to be housing insecure.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this Housing and Service Needs Estimation comes from the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness, 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 Wetaskiwin to advocate for better resources for their residents.

The guide is unique in that it tackles the issue of housing insecurity and homelessness from a rural perspective, and recognizes the difficulties that come with conducting a 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 or housing insecure, 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 housing-unstable. 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 Wetaskiwin's location parameters.

Figure 1: Wetaskiwin Location Question on Survey

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

○ City of Wetaskiwin

○ County of Wetaskiwin

○ Maskwacis

○ Other (please specify)

RDN worked with The Open Doors Wetaskiwin to develop a survey administration process that would ensure the greatest level of participation possible. For Wetaskiwin, surveys were advertised at known encampments in the area 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 10 to April 10, 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

ANONYMOUS UNIQUE IDENTIFIER

As an example, we will use John Smith, who was born on November 15th, 1964.

PLEASE NOTE: This is not a real person and any similarities to any respondent are purely coincidental

* 2. What are the **last two letters** of your **FIRST NAME?** For example, John would be **HN**.

[   ]

* 3. What are the **last two letters** of your **LAST NAME?** For example, Smith would be **TH**.

[   ]

* 4. What is the **DAY** you were born? For example, November 15th would be **15**.

[   ]

Wetaskiwin collected 160 survey responses during the four weeks. Of the 160 surveys, 34 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, 126 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 or housing insecurity 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 Wetaskiwin 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. Of the 126 survey respondents, 66 self-identified as housing insecure and 12 indicated "I'm not sure". Through further analysis, it was determined that 95 survey respondents are housing insecure according to the national definitions of homelessness. An additional 62 dependents and 144 adults reported as living with housing-insecure survey respondents. Therefore, based on survey results, there are at least 301 community members experiencing housing insecurity in Wetaskiwin.

The top three reasons for housing insecurity in Wetaskiwin, as reported by survey respondents, are:
1. Low wages
2. Inability to afford rent or mortgage payments
3. Poor credit makes it difficult to secure housing

Additionally, many 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 their difficulties in paying for food and groceries as a result of their work being negatively impacted by COVID-19.

Exploring the Spectrum of Homelessness in Wetaskiwin

Recognizing that the national definition of homelessness is complex, encompassing various housing situations across a continuum, it is important to better understand what housing insecurity looks like in Wetaskiwin. This can be achieved by exploring the experiences of the 95 housing-insecure respondents.

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 housing insecurity 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 housing insecurity 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. As a result, we have highlighted every incident of insecurity respondents experienced in the past month to understand the journey of housing insecurity in Wetaskiwin.

Table 1: Respondents by Housing Situation in the Homelessness Spectrum

Place on the Homelessness Spectrum	# of Respondents in Each Category
Unsheltered	11
Emergency Sheltered	33
Provisionally Accommodated	18
At-Risk of Homelessness	17

This table demonstrates the diversity of respondents' experiences with housing insecurity in Wetaskiwin 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 having 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 for the number of bedrooms in the home.

Respondents who indicated they experienced being provisionally accommodated noted stays in units owned by their employer or by an Indigenous government. 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.

Wetaskiwin Population Overview

According to Alberta's Regional Dashboard (Government of Alberta, n.d.), the City of Wetaskiwin and Wetaskiwin County No. 10 cover a combined 3,341.2 square km geographical land base with a population size of 24,001; making up 0.53% of Alberta's total population.

52% (12,489) of Wetaskwin's combined population is reported as female, while 48% (11,512) reports as male. Additionally, Wetaskiwin has a fairly even distribution of age across its population, as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Wetaskiwin Population Age Breakdown (2022)
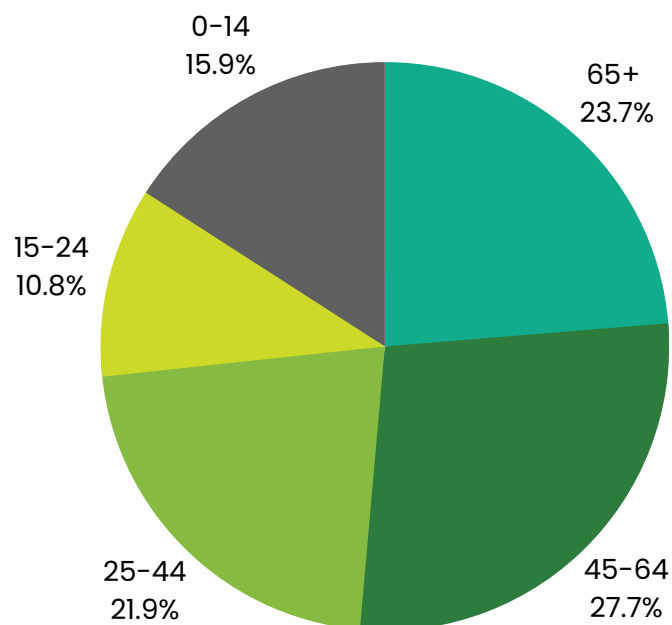
The average age of the population in the City of Wetaskiwin is 42.4 years and 44.9 years in the surrounding County.

According to Statistics Canada Census numbers in 2021, 9.1% (2,175) of the population immigrated to Canada and 7.9% (1,885) of the population identify as a visible minority. Further, 12.2% (2,910) of the population identified as Indigenous; 64.4% (1,875) of whom are First Nations, 1.9% (55) of whom are Métis, and 0.5% (15) of whom noted multiple Indigenous ancestries.

The 2021 Census also reports that the City of Wetaskiwin and Wetaskiwin County have a combined 9,675 private households with an average of 2.4 people per household. Of the 9,675 private households, 75.6% (7,310) own their home, while 11.9% (1,150) rent their home with the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom dwelling listed at $1,052. Additionally, single-family houses make up 42% of all housing units in the City and 88.5% of all housing units in the County. Further, 27.8% (2,690) of households in Wetaskiwin 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 the City of Wetaskiwin is $35,600 for individuals and $63,200 for households; in the County of Wetaskiwin median after-tax income is $36,000 for individuals and $75,500 for households. According to the Economic Research Institute (2023), the cost of living in the City of Wetaskiwin is 3% higher than the national average and 3% lower than the provincial average for Alberta.

Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Respondent Population Overview

126 community members responded to the Wetaskiwin survey; 60% (76) of whom identified as female, 35% (44) as male, 2% (2) as trans-male, and 2% (2) as gender non-conforming. 2% (2) preferred not to answer. Additionally, 82% (103) of respondents identified as straight, 2% (2) as lesbian/gay, 9% (11) as bisexual/pansexual, 2% (2) as two-spirit, 1% (1) as unsure, and 6% (7) preferred not to answer.

Of the 126 respondents, 2% (3) are between the ages of 0-18; we know from their unique identifier, which asks for their birth year, as well as our ethical standards on the age of consent when administering the survey that these respondents are between 14-18 years old. Additionally, 44% (56) are between the ages of 20-39, 38% (48) are between 40-59, and 15% (19) are 60 years or older.

94% (117) of respondents were born in Canada (Turtle Island), while 2% (2) reported being born outside of Canada and 4% (5) preferred not to answer.

53% (63) of respondents are white, while 40% (48) identified as racialized, all of whom noted that they are Indigenous only. An additional 5% (6) of respondents noted their identity was not listed among the options and 3% (2) preferred not to answer. Further, 52% (65) of respondents self-identified as Indigenous; 88% (57) as First Nations, 8% (5) as Métis, and 4% (3) as having other Indigenous ancestry.

26% (31) of respondents stayed in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth/young adult agreement in the past and 3% (4) 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), Foreign Police Service, or local or foreign Emergency Services (EMS, Police, Fire Department). Of the 126 respondents, 2% (3) indicated they serve(d) in local or foreign Emergency Services.

Housing Secure vs. Housing Insecure Survey Respondent Population Overview

Table 2: Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Population Overview Comparison by Housing Stability

Demographic Characteristic	Housing Secure	Housing Insecure
# of Survey Respondents	31	95
Gender	Male: 11	Male: 33
	Female: 18	Female: 58
	Trans-male: 1	Trans-male: 1
	Trans-female: 0	Trans-female: 0
	Gender non-conforming: 0	Gender non-conforming: 2
	Don't know: 0	Don't know: 0
Sexual Orientation	Straight: 28	Straight: 75
	Gay/Lesbian: 0	Gay/Lesbian: 2
	Bisexual/Pansexual: 0	Bisexual/Pansexual: 11
	Asexual: 0	Asexual: 0
	Two-spirit: 0	Two-spirit: 0
	Don't know: 0	Don't know: 0

Age	0 – 19 years: 1	0 – 19 years: 2
	20 – 39 years: 12	20 – 39 years: 44
	40 – 59 years: 13	40 – 59 years: 35
	60+: 5	60+: 14
Immigration Status	Born in Canada: 28	Born in Canada: 89
	Born outside of Canada: 0	Born outside of Canada: 1
Racial Identity	White: 28	White: 35
	Visible minority: 2	Visible minority: 46
Indigenous Identity	First Nations: 3	First Nations: 54
	Métis: 0	Métis: 5
	Inuit: 0	Inuit: 0
	Other Indigenous ancestry: 1	Other Indigenous ancestry: 2
Time in Foster Care, Youth Group Home, or Youth/Young Adult Agreement	Spent time in care: 2	Spent time in care: 29
Served in Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, Emergency Services	Canadian Armed Forces: 0	Canadian Armed Forces: 0
	RCMP: 0	RCMP: 0
	Emergency Services: 0	Emergency Services: 3

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 housing insecure
- 64% of housing insecure respondents are Indigenous
- 94% of respondents who spent time in foster care, a youth group home, or youth/young adult agreement are housing insecure and 86% of those respondents are Indigenous

Note that the rest of the reported results and analysis will focus on housing insecure respondents unless otherwise indicated.

Education, Employment, and Income Sources

Respondents indicated various education levels when responding to *"What is the highest level of education you've completed?"* 1% (1) of respondents have no formal education, 18% (20) have completed some grade school, 26% (28) have completed some high school, 17% (19) have completed high school or received their GED, 5% (5) have an apprenticeship, trades certificate, or diploma, 15% (16) have a college certificate or diploma, 4% (4) have some post-secondary, 6% (6) have a Bachelor's degree, 4% (4) have a Graduate or Professional Degree (Master's, PhD, MD, JD, etc.), and 2% (2) were unsure of their education levels. This can also be seen in Figure 4, below.

Figure 4: Respondents' Education Levels Breakdown
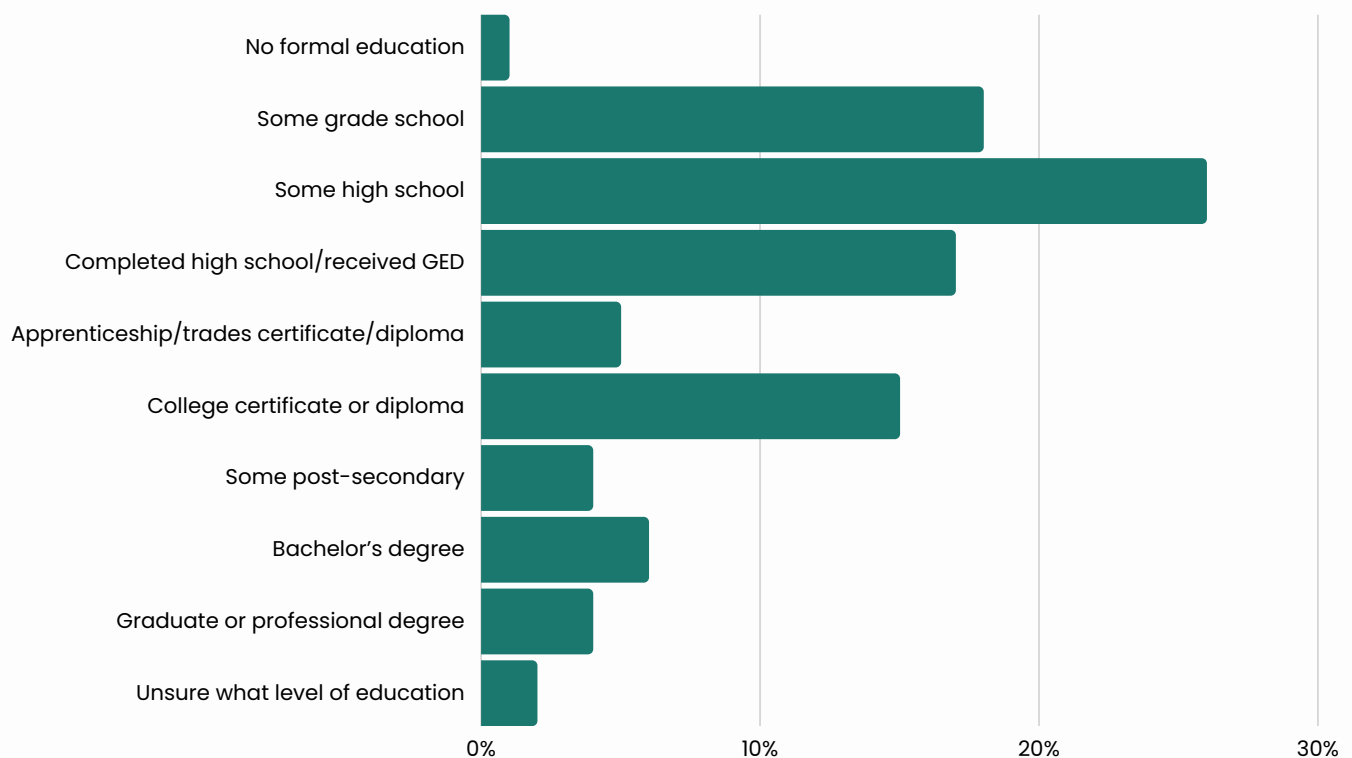
Additionally, 33% (33) of respondents are employed; 73% (24) of those employed are full-time, 15% (5) are part-time, and 3% (1) are casual.

Recognizing that many respondents 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 noted 55 times that they receive job-related income, 36 times that they receive government-related income, 29 times that they receive tax-related income, and 11 times that they receive informal income. Additionally, respondents noted 11 times that they have other sources of income or no source of income at all.

Further, respondents were asked to disclose their approximate household income for the previous year. Responses varied widely, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Respondents Approximate Household Income in 2022

Total Household Income in 2022	# of Respondents Per Income Level
$30,000 or less	44 (51%)
Between $30,001 and $49,999	8 (9%)
Between $50,000 and $69,999	9 (10%)
Between $70,000 and $89,999	4 (5%)
Between $90,000 and $109,999	1 (1%)
More than $110,000	4 (5%)

This can be broken down further to understand household income level by housing security status, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents' Household Income in 2022 by Housing Status

Total Household Income in 2022	# of Housing Secure Respondents Per Income Level	# of Housing Insecure Respondents Per Income Level
$30,000 or less	1 (4%)	44 (51%)
Between $30,001 and $49,999	3 (13%)	8 (9%)
Between $50,000 and $69,999	3 (13%)	9 (10%)
Between $70,000 and $89,999	1 (4%)	4 (5%)
Between $90,000 and $109,999	3 (13%)	1 (1%)
More than $110,000	4 (17%)	4 (5%)

Of the housing insecure respondents, 51% reported a household annual income of $30,000 or less compared to 30% of housing secure respondents who reported an annual income of $90,000 or more.

Living Situation

Residents from the City of Wetaskiwin, County of Wetaskiwin, and Maskwacis responded to the survey, as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Breakdown of All Survey Respondents by Location
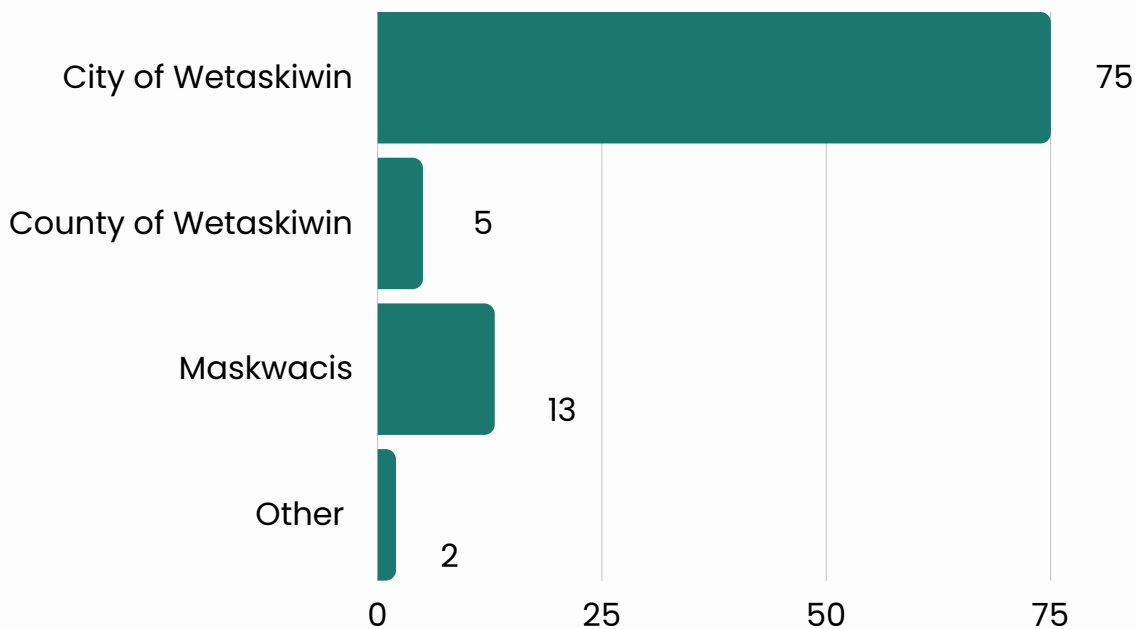
To better understand respondents' current living situations, respondents were asked to indicate if they rent or own their home (or if neither is true for them). 21% (20) of housing insecure respondents indicated that they own their home, 27% (25) indicated that they rent their home, and 48% (45) noted that they neither own nor rent. An additional 4% (4) preferred not to answer. Comparatively, 80% (20) of housing secure respondents own their home, 12% (3) rent their home, and 8% (2) indicated that they neither own nor rent. Based on this, it can be concluded that respondents who rent their homes or who neither rent nor own

are significantly more likely to be housing insecure than respondents who own their homes.

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 5: Rent or Mortgage Costs per Month by Housing Status

Rent/Mortgage Cost	# of Housing Secure Respondents Paying Rent/Mortgage Costs	# of Housing Insecure Respondents Paying Rent/Mortgage Costs
Less than $500	0	11 (9%)
Between $500 to $999	4 (16%)	13 (11%)
Between $1000 to $1499	8 (32%)	23 (19%)
Between $1500 to $1999	1 (4%)	8 (7%)
Over $2000	1 (4%)	7 (6%)
I don't pay rent or a mortgage	10 (40%)	47 (40%)
Prefer not to answer	1 (4%)	8 (9%)

Among housing insecure respondents, whether they rent, own, or are in a different situation entirely, 11% (16) do not have sufficient and affordable heating and 12% (17) do not have access to safe drinking water.

Table 6: Breakdown of Respondents' Missing Amenities

Missing Amenities	# of Respondents Missing Amenities
Indoor plumbing/bathing facilities	10 (7%)
Sufficient and affordable heating	16 (11%)
Safe drinking water	17 (12%)
Refrigeration	11 (8%)
Electricity (or equivalent - i.e. solar power)	9 (6%)
Cooking facilities	10 (7%)
Fire protection (smoke alarms, fire extinguishers)	16 (11%)

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 stable, 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. Important to consider here is that by law, landlords are required to provide fire protection in their rental units, yet 11% of respondents, many of whom rent, are lacking fire protection in their units.

24% (29) of all respondents, 24% (23) of which are housing insecure, have always lived in Wetaskiwin and 1% (1) preferred not to answer. Of the housing insecure respondents who were not born in the area, 37% (35) have lived here for more than 8 years. Interestingly, 44% (31) of housing insecure respondents who were not born in Wetaskiwin came to the community from a First Nation. Respondents who are not from Wetaskiwin were also asked to indicate why they came to this community. The top five reasons respondents came to the Wetaskiwin are:

1. To find housing (13%)
2. To follow family (12%)
3. To look for work (11%)
4. For fear of safety/to flee from violence (9%)
5. To access supports and services (7%)

Noteworthy here is that 24% (22) of housing insecure respondents have moved between three and six times in the past 12 moves and 9% (8) have moved more than six times in the past 12 months.

Additional analysis also discovered that 9% (9) of respondents are experiencing domestic/intimate partner violence in their current living situations; 89% (8) identify as female and 11% (1) identify as male. 100% (9) are Indigenous, 78% (7) First Nations, 11% (1) Métis, and 11% (1) other Indigenous ancestry. The top two reasons these respondents are housing insecure are mental health issues and low wages; only 11% (1) of respondents are employed full-time; the other 89% (8) 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. The top two reasons respondents came to Wetaskiwin were fear for safety/attempting to flee violence and to access services. Further, 100% (9) of respondents are accessing basic needs supports on a regular basis, and 89% (8) access health and wellness supports regularly.

Community Supports

In an attempt to better understand service needs and gaps in Wetaskiwin, respondents were asked: "*Which support services do you access?*" The main reasons all respondents access support services are to help with basic needs (24%), health and wellness (17%), and support services (14%).

Table 7: Reasons Why Respondents Access Support Services

Services Accessed	# of Housing Secure Respondents who Accessed these Services	# of Housing Insecure Respondents who Accessed these Services
Basic Needs – Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	0	48 (27%)
COVID-19 – PPE, information, supports	0	5 (3%)
Crisis Financial Support – Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	0	5 (3%)

Family/Parenting - Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	3 (12%)	5 (3%)
Financial - Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	0	11 (6%)
Health and Wellness - Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	5 (20%)	28 (16%)
Legal - Separation/divorce/custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanor, etc.	0	7 (4%)

Support Services - Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	1 (4%)	26 (15%)
Transportation - Access to basic services/education/ employment, medical transportation	0	16 (9%)

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 were most likely to access basic needs, health and wellness, and support services in Wetaskiwin. Interestingly, there was a very even spread of respondents accessing services outside of Wetaskiwin, and basic needs and health and wellness services were both also accessed frequently outside of the community.

Table 8: Services Accessed by Housing Insecure Respondents by Location

| Services Accessed in Wetaskiwin	# of Respondents who Accessed these Services	Services Accessed Outside of Wetaskiwin	# of Respondents who Accessed these Services
Basic Needs - Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	65 (22%)	**Basic Needs -** Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	34 (20%)
COVID-19 - PPE, information, supports	22 (8%)	**COVID-19 -** PPE, information, supports	14 (8%)
Crisis Financial Support - Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	22 (8%)	**Crisis Financial Support -** Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	14 (8%)
Family/Parenting - Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	25 (9%)	**Family/Parenting -** Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	14 (8%)

Financial - Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	25 (9%)	Financial - Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	18 (11%)
Health and Wellness - Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	40 (14%)	**Health and Wellness -** Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	22 (13%)
Legal - Separation/divorce /custody, wills/estates, employment/ labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/ misdemeanour, etc.	28 (10%)	**Legal -** Separation/divorce/ custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/ misdemeanour, etc.	15 (9%)

Support Services - Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	35 (12%)	**Support Services -** Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	18 (11%)
Transportation - Access to basic services/education/employment, medical transportation	25 (9%)	**Transportation -** Access to basic services/education/ employment, medical transportation	21 (12%)

Respondents noted travelling an average of 30 minutes one way to access services. Time and distance to access services outside of the community are significant barriers for respondents; while 16% of respondents travel by vehicle to get to these services, 14% rely on a family member or friend, 44% rely on a non-profit to arrange them a ride, and 5% resort to hitchhiking or catching a ride from a stranger. An additional 16% noted walking or biking to access services but specified not accepting rides from strangers.

41% (39) of respondents accessed an emergency shelter in the past 12 months and 1% (1) preferred not to answer; 37% (35) accessed a standard emergency shelter, 3% (3) an emergency weather shelter (also known as a MAT shelter), and 1% (1) accessed an emergency shelter but are unsure what type of shelter it was. Additionally, 1% (1) stayed in a transitional housing unit. Interestingly, even though 9% (9) of housing insecure respondents are experiencing domestic/intimate partner violence, no respondents accessed a women's/domestic violence shelter in the past 12 months. This can also be seen in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Emergency Shelter Use

Emergency weather shelter
3%

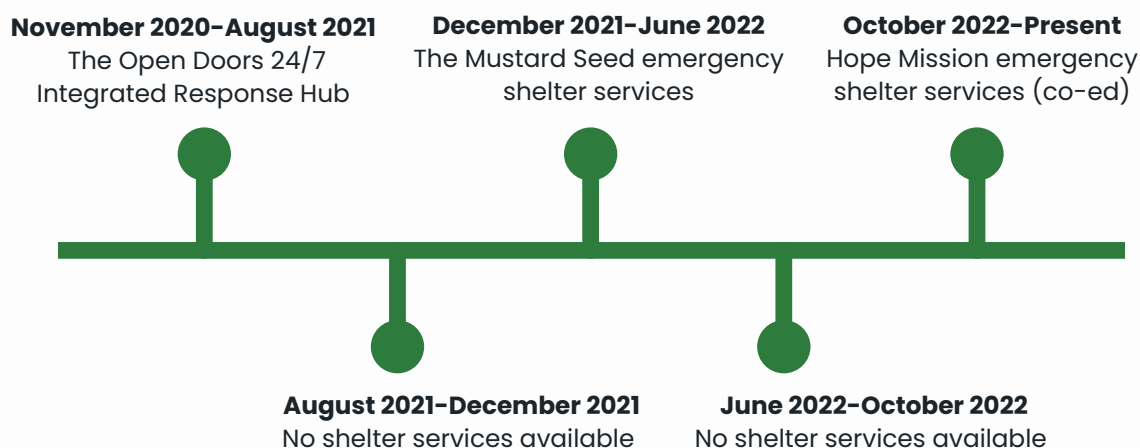Unsure which shelter type was accessed
1%

Standard emergency
37%
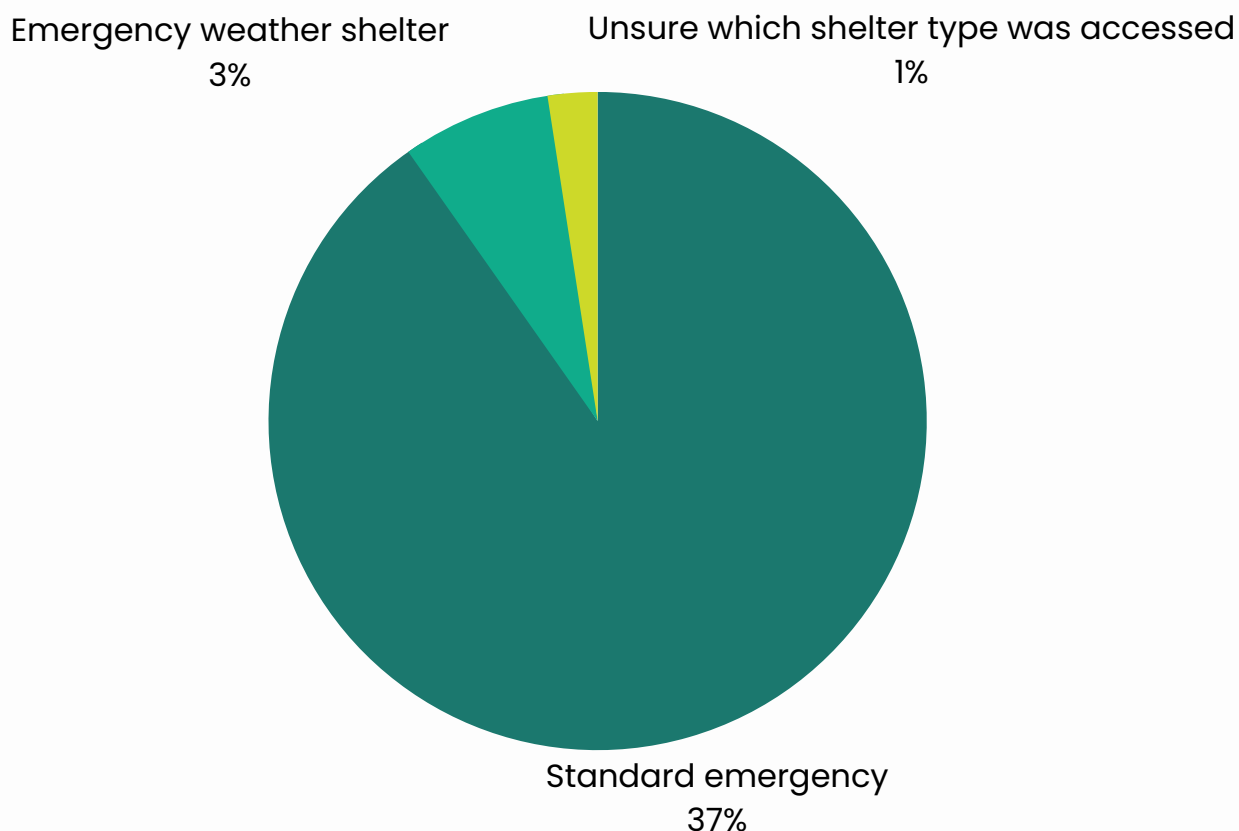
Of the respondents who needed shelter services but did not access them, several reasons were provided as to why, as outlined in Table 9. The top three reasons why respondents did not access shelter services when they needed them were because alcohol/substance use is not permitted on site, the shelter was full, and there are no shelters in my area.

Table 9: Reasons Respondents 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)	1 (2%)
The shelter was full	10 (16%)
There was no shelter in my area	8 (13%)
I didn't meet the intake criteria to access the shelter	4 (6%)
I didn't feel safe	6 (10%)
The shelter was unclean	3 (5%)
The shelter did not welcome me because of my gender identity	0
Alcohol/substance use is not permitted on site	12 (19%)
Lack of disability accommodations	1 (2%)
Lack of transportation	5 (8%)
No pets allowed	0
Isolation from social support (family, partner, friends, etc.)	2 (3%)
Prefer not to answer	9 (14%)

Interestingly, two of the top three reasons for not accessing a shelter seem to be in direct conflict with one another; "the shelter was full" and "there was no shelter in the area". This is likely due to the somewhat inconsistent offering of emergency shelter services in Wetaskiwin since 2020:

November 2020-August 2021
The Open Doors 24/7 Integrated Response Hub

December 2021-June 2022
The Mustard Seed emergency shelter services

October 2022-Present
Hope Mission emergency shelter services (co-ed)

August 2021-December 2021
No shelter services available

June 2022-October 2022
No shelter services available

Wetaskiwin does not have a transitional housing program or a women's/domestic violence shelter.

Insights on Community Spaces

Wanting to ensure the 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 across both housing secure and housing insecure respondents in reference to what they love about Wetaskiwin, three themes emerged: community, culture, and services.

Community: Respondents repeatedly spoke of their love for the community; they love the community spirit, the kindness of community members, and the willingness of community members to help each other. Further, respondents emphasized their love for their "street family". Respondents also highlighted their love for the beautiful weather Wetaskiwin gets, and the community's proximity to many respondents' family, friends, and Nations.

Culture and Recreation: Many respondents indicated that they love the availability of recreation infrastructure and cultural opportunities in the community. In terms of recreation, respondents emphasized their love for Wetaskiwin's green spaces including the public parks, access to lakes, and wildlife. Additionally, respondents love the swimming pool. In terms of culture, many respondents noted their pleasure in seeing the celebration of Indigenous culture in Wetaskiwin. Several respondents spoke of their ability to hold ceremonies in the community, teach others about the culture, and gather together with other Indigenous community members to engage in cultural traditions.

Services: Respondents overwhelmingly spoke of their love for the Care Gateway Clinic and The Open Doors, and not only the services themselves, but the staff running the services. Respondents called out several staff members by name as they spoke of their love and appreciation for the services. Staff members' kindness and helpfulness were at the forefront of respondents' reflections.

In contrast, when asked what they don't love about the community, both respondents spoke mostly about crime, services, and exclusion in community spaces.

Crime: Almost all respondents spoke of the crime rate as their main dislike of the community. Many respondents highlighted their concerns with the amount of violence, gang activity, and drug use in Wetaskiwin. Others spoke of the high rates of theft and vandalism across the community. Overall, respondents fear for the safety of the community and wish to see lower crime rates in Wetaskiwin.
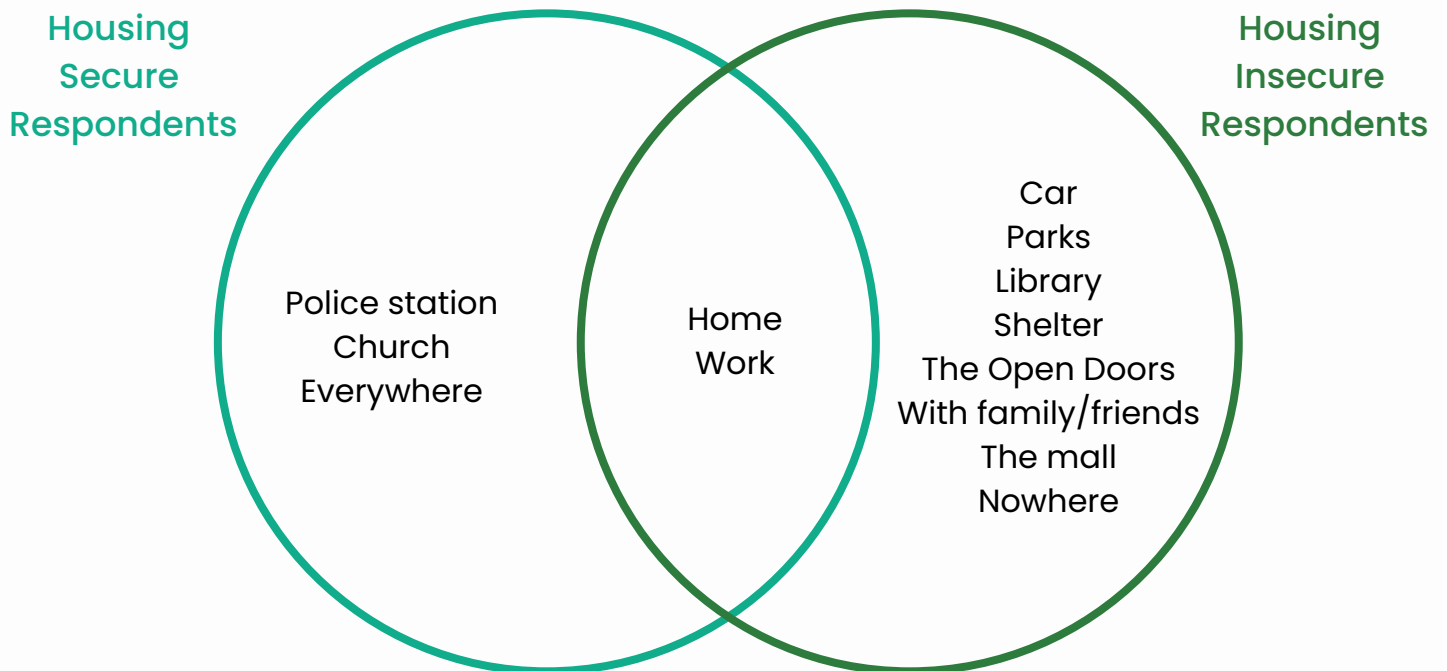
Services: While respondents love the Care Gateway Clinic and The Open Doors, they also noted the lack of other services available in the community. Many respondents noted the lack of accessibility across the community, both in terms of transit, road, and sidewalk maintenance, and business infrastructure, emphasizing the difficulty in getting around for wheelchair users and people pushing strollers or carts. Respondents also spoke to the lack of housing opportunities in Wetaskiwin in terms of both market rate and affordable housing. Additionally, respondents noted the lack of an Indigenous Friendship Centre and any kind of services to support women experiencing violence, including a women's/domestic violence shelter and a sexual assault centre. Some respondents also highlighted their frustration at not being able to afford the deposit needed to get their water turned on, speaking to a possible lack of financial and crisis financial support in Wetaskiwin. Also highlighting a lack of basic needs services, many respondents indicated the lack of support available for people struggling with alcohol and/or substance use and the lack of barrier-free food access.

Exclusion in Community Spaces: Respondents overwhelmingly highlighted their experiences of being excluded from the greater community. Many respondents have faced racism and discrimination in Wetaskiwin whether while trying to access service, housing, or attending community events. Others noted that they experience homophobia and transphobia regularly in the community. Further, many respondents noted the stigma they face as someone who is housing insecure, noting that people are mean, neglectful, ignorant, and judgemental

towards them for their housing status. It seems that this behaviour also translates to systemic issues, with many respondents indicating that infrastructure throughout the community has been designed to exclude unsheltered residents. Lastly, several respondents noted the unfair treatment they have witnessed by city employees of vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities but did not provide examples.

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?*" There were few overlapping responses between housing secure and housing insecure respondents when answering the question of safe spaces, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Venn Diagram of Safe Spaces Responses by Housing Status

Housing Secure Respondents

Police station
Church
Everywhere

Home
Work

Housing Insecure Respondents

Car
Parks
Library
Shelter
The Open Doors
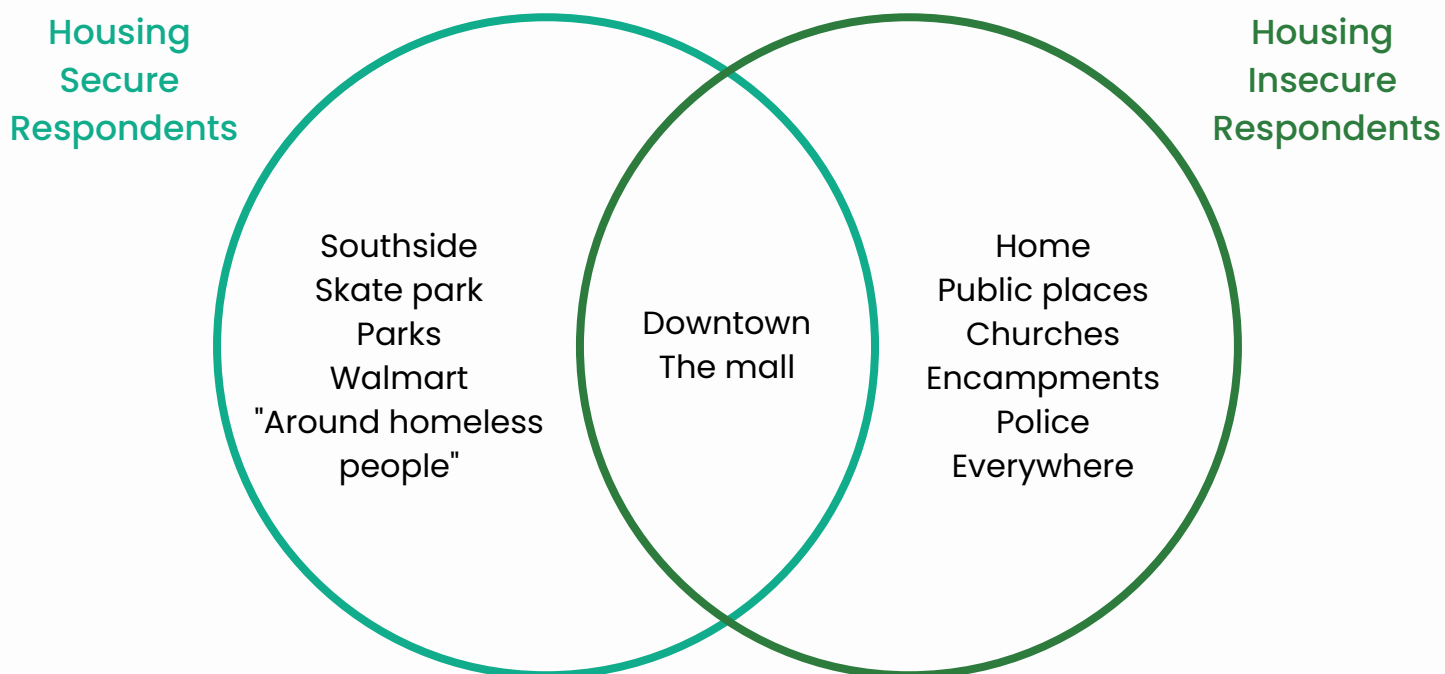With family/friends
The mall
Nowhere

The only commonality in responses between housing secure and housing

insecure respondents is that both groups feel safe at home and at work. In contrast, while many housing secure respondents noted that they feel safe everywhere in Wetaskiwin, several housing insecure respondents stated that they don't feel safe anywhere in the community.

In terms of unsafe spaces, responses varied much more between housing secure and housing insecure respondents. The only themes across both groups were feeling unsafe downtown and at the mall. Figure 8 showcases this below.

Figure 8: Venn Diagram of Unsafe Spaces Responses by Housing Status

Housing Secure Respondents

Southside
Skate park
Parks
Walmart
"Around homeless people"

Downtown
The mall

Housing Insecure Respondents

Home
Public places
Churches
Encampments
Police
Everywhere

Clear in Figure 8 is the difference in types of spaces housing secure versus housing insecure respondents feel unsafe. Housing insecure respondents feel much more unsafe when interacting with law enforcement. Several housing insecure respondents also noted feeling unsafe everywhere and/or feeling unsafe at home. In comparison, many housing secure respondents noted that they feel unsafe "around homeless people".

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

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

Table 10: Respondents' Perceptions of Wetaskiwin's Provision of Services

Does Wetaskiwin Provide Enough:	# of Respondents Who Believe Wetaskiwin Provides Enough…	# of Respondents Who Believe Wetaskiwin Does Not Provide Enough…	# of Respondents Who Aren't Sure if Wetaskiwin Provides Enough…
Employment opportunities	17 (16%)	76 (72%)	13 (12%)
Free/accessible recreational and social opportunities	30 (28%)	62 (58%)	15 (14%)
Social services	53 (50%)	43 (40%)	11 (10%)

Accessible & affordable housing	11 (10%)	79 (74%)	17 (16%)
Public transportation	7 (7%)	95 (89%)	5 (5%)
Access to food (grocery stores, markets, food banks, etc.)	77 (72%)	23 (21%)	7 (7%)

Of note in Table 10 is the significant discrepancy in respondents who believe there is enough public transportation in Wetaskiwin (7%) versus the number of respondents who believe more public transportation is needed (89%).

Housing: Respondents spoke often of their desire to see increased housing options in Wetaskiwin. Many noted the need for affordable housing or below-market housing options. Respondents also indicated the need for more emergency shelter services. Respondents who rent their home mentioned that they wish to see policy changes to introduce rent caps, which would limit landlords on how frequently and how much they are able to raise rent per year. Additionally, respondents want to see less discrimination play into decisions on rental applications. Many believe these two factors would help to stabilize their housing situation and also eliminate the number of predatory landlords.

Wrap-Around 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 supports, including emergency shelter options focused on hard reduction that allow for alcohol and substance use. Respondents also noted the need for a "barrier-free" foodbank and other food-specific supports and services.

A large portion of respondents also indicated their interest in seeing an employment services-type of office open 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, several respondents expressed interest in seeing more "life-skills" development courses, such as financial planning, offered locally. Additionally, respondents highlighted the need for accessibility-friendly public transportation in Wetaskiwin. 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, a few respondents also emphasized their need for help in obtaining 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. Similarly, respondents wish to see more recreational activities in public parks, specifically in Jubilee Park. Others indicated their desire for low-income swim passes. Respondents also mentioned wanting to see more farmer's markets, art displays in public spaces, an improved skate park, and more library services across Wetaskiwin.

Upon further analysis, an overall satisfaction score was generated to better understand respondents' perceptions of service provision in Wetaskiwin. It was determined that housing secure respondents are 47% satisfied, while only 26% of housing insecure respondents are satisfied with service provision in Wetaskiwin. Important to note here is that the satisfaction rates calculated above are speaking to the lack of available services in Wetaskiwin rather than satisfaction with currently available services in the community.

What Does Homelessness Look Like in Wetaskiwin?

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 a profile of a "typical" respondent facing housing insecurity.

In the case of Wetaskiwin, this is a First Nations woman, between the ages of 20 - 39, who is currently renting her home for between $1,000 and $1,499 a month. She has lived in the community for over 8 years and is currently not employed. Her unemployment status makes it difficult to consistently pay for rent, often relying on basic needs and support services to make ends meet.

The true diversity of respondents is illustrated in the Results & Analysis section, but this highlights what someone experiencing housing insecurity might look like in Wetaskiwin.

Opportunities Moving Forward

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

1. Increase community awareness and understanding of housing insecurity and homelessness. Community conversations around housing insecurity should have two goals: first, to broaden the general community's understanding of and empathetic reaction to community members experiencing housing insecurity, and second, to help general community members understand the various experiences of housing insecurity in Wetaskiwin. Of the 95 survey respondents who were identified as housing insecure, only 66 of them self-identified as housing insecure. It is possible then, that the 29 respondents who believe they are housing secure have never accessed supports that could help improve their current housing situation. Facilitating community conversations on housing insecurity and homelessness will help to ensure more people better understand their current housing status and at the same time, will hopefully encourage the community to show empathy and understanding towards housing insecure respondents. Considering 11% of respondents do not have sufficient heating and 12% 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 an analysis of emergency shelter services in Wetaskiwin and develop an action plan with the goal of providing consistent emergency shelter options to unsheltered residents. Two of the top three reasons for not accessing a shelter seem to be in direct conflict with one another; "the shelter was full" and "there was no shelter in the area". This is likely because of the gaps in emergency shelter services offered in Wetaskiwin over the past three years. Though there were only 10 months without emergency shelter services in Wetaskiwin over the past three years, many respondents noted "no shelter in the area" as the reason they are unsheltered. As a result, it is important to analyze past and current emergency shelter services in the community to develop an action plan to

ensure there is a consistent provision of emergency shelter services moving forward. This action plan could include information on how to find funding to support an emergency shelter, audit past and current shelter policies (such as substance use in shelters) and recommend updated and improved policies, and a long-term operational timeline. Several respondents also indicated the need for a women's/domestic violence shelter or day program. This information should also be included in the analysis of current emergency shelter services (i.e. the gaps).

3. Conduct a gap analysis and audit of service offerings in Wetaskiwin. Respondents indicated several services they would like to see in the community from basic needs to transportation to health services. Further, housing secure respondents are 47% satisfied and housing insecure respondents are only 26% satisfied with the provision of services in Wetaskiwin. Given the number of service gaps identified by residents of Wetaskiwin, it is critical to audit and map the availability of services in the community. If these services currently exist, 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. Food, employment and "life-skills" services are good examples of this; respondents repeatedly expressed their desire for "barrier-free" food support in Wetaskiwin even though there is at least one organization that provides emergency food support to community members. In addition, respondents overwhelmingly indicated the need for employment support services and skill development like financial literacy. Also worth noting is that 45% (49) of respondents have little to no education, having completed some years of high school at most. Conducting a gap analysis and audit of services, including employment, education, and food, in Wetaskiwin will help identify where new services are needed versus where increased awareness of currently available services would be most helpful.

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