



## Pressures on homeless groups

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York Region is turning to Ottawa for help funding homeless initiatives, but even if approved, tackling the problem will require a great deal more, says a local expert.

Regional council authorized staff to apply for \$1 million from a new federal program, the Homeless Partnering Initiative. However, Jane Wedlock, public education co-ordinator for the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness, sees it as just a beginning.

"Any kind of funding that is available to serve the need is important ... but I have to say, it's a drop in the bucket," she said.

Since 1999, the Alliance has been an umbrella organization for agencies such as the United Way, Salvation Army and Yellow Brick House, all of which deal with the issue on the front line.

"As the community continues to grow, the pressures continue to grow," said the region's director of housing, Sylvia Patterson. "We continue to be underfunded in this region."

As a result, the region must rely on federal and provincial programs. In August, for example, the province unveiled the \$185 Rental Opportunity for Ontario Families program, providing a monthly housing allowance to low-income working families.

Those families must apply by contacting the government, but as with the federal program, it is not solving the affordable housing problem, experts agree.

The federal initiative is a two-year program that has replaced the previous government's homeless program.

That money is slated to go largely to capital projects such as transitional housing facilities, but Ms Wedlock said there is a long list of areas that need funding. There is no women's shelter in the southern half of York Region and she described the lack of emergency shelters as "profound".

Even the Alliance itself has an uncertain future beyond the new year. Ms Wedlock said the rotating series of short-term programs needs to be replaced by a comprehensive, long-term, federal strategy.

"Nothing short of that will do the job," she said.

In the meantime, the region has been working with agencies to update the Community Plan to Address Homelessness.

"We like to take a look at what are the things that have worked, but (also) where are the gaps?" Ms Patterson said.

The plan has been developed over the past seven years and outlines programs and initiatives in need. It is scheduled to be completed before the end of the year and brought before council early in 2008.