

4. Appointments

- Stephanie Ellens-Clark, Executive Director: Social Planning Council Oxford (25 mins)

Stephanie Ellens-Clark, on behalf of Oxford Housing Action Collaborative addressed the committee and commented on the organization's goals and current challenges as follows:

Goals:

- Obtaining a count of the number of people experiencing homelessness;
- Improving the local emergency shelter system
- Increasing transitional and supporting housing
- Understanding housing needs in each municipality
- Developing a community awareness strategy – community awareness and targeted communication
- Advocacy – to engage all levels of government (promote conversations with landlords within the community)
- Increasing availability of supports for obtaining housing and maintaining housing (eviction preventions, access to housing)

Challenges:

- Capacity
- Buy-in and ownership – ebbs and flows
- Need to narrow scope of priorities
- Need to acknowledge and recognize existing strengths in the community
- Need assistance with getting key messages out to the public, local governments

It was discussed that the Safe and Well Oxford Steering Committee may be able to assist with respect to advocacy and communications (education and awareness). It was encouraged that local municipalities join in with existing ongoing campaigns in relation to rent control (Hamilton).

It may also be beneficial to continue and further develop partnerships with local developers for small housing projects locally (i.e. mini homes projects in Waterloo Region). It is anticipated that there will be increased demand for housing for youth with complex needs and supports.

Various levels of 'not in my backyard' exist at the local level. Voices in support of development applications to address the need are required when these applications come forward to local Councils. Council often doesn't hear about the need and support for development; they hear opposition to development. It may be helpful for Safe and Well Oxford to be made aware of development applications that come forward to address housing challenges and needs within the community (affordable

housing, supportive and transitional house, emergency shelters).

- Diane Harris, Executive Director: Domestic Abuse Services Oxford (25 mins)

Executive Director Diane Harris, on behalf of Domestic Abuse Services Oxford, address the committee in relation to the organization's current goals and challenges, as follows:

Goals:

- Provide emergency 24/7 emergency shelter for women fleeing intimate partner violence (stays generally from 2 weeks to 6 months long depending on needs). Congregate living facility (17 spaces) – they are full almost every night.
- Operate the only crisis line within Oxford County. Receive over 2,800 calls annually – 7 calls for help every day.
- Partner with Ingamo – provides transitional housing for stays from 1 year to 4 years. Average stay is 20 months.
- Offer counselling, risk assessment, court support and advocacy.
- Violence against women is directly related to mental health well-being and housing insecurity. Violence leads to mental health disorders.

Challenges:

- Capacity is low – women and children are turned away daily.
- There is a serious lack of adequate and affordable housing available locally – housing costs are too high. This means longer stays at shelters. Creates a lack of hope.
- Financial barriers don't all to provide for the basics of living.
- Lack of transportation services within the County, women are isolated on farms and in rural areas which makes it difficult for them to reach out and get support. Women in rural areas are at a greater risk of harm.
- Women feel shame of violence; they want the abuse to stop and to keep their families together.
- There is a lack of knowledge and awareness in relation to the services that are available in the community.
- Lack of gender-based violence lens (lack of public education).
- There is a lack of legal support for women – fewer than three lawyers accept legal aid. Most women have to represent themselves.
- Education system doesn't allow prevention programs to take place for youth (i.e. gender/sex violence, consent, healthy relationships). SWPH provides a healthy relationships program for grades 7 and 8. Advocacy to the school board is needed to include more educational opportunities/programs for youth.
- Human trafficking and sexual exploitation occur in this area – highway 401 corridor is primary route (intersection of highway 401 and 403).
- Underfunded – must fundraise over \$300,000 annually to maintain current programs. There has been no increase in provincial funding for over 10 years. They are at risk of losing funding. Letter of support for increased funding is

needed.

- Exploitation is on the rise – the housing crisis is making it impossible for people to go anywhere else.

It was discussed that a delegation will be coming forward to Oxford County Council in July to declare violence against women as an epidemic to raise awareness of this issue locally.

The Committee will consider how these challenges can be incorporated into the goals and objectives of the Safe and Well Oxford Plan.

- Brooke Boersen, Health Promoter, Chronic Disease Prevention & Well-being, Substance Use & Injury Prevention: Southwestern Public Health (25 mins)

Brooke Boersen, on behalf of Southwestern Public Health, addressed the committee in relation to substance use and prevention within Oxford as follows:

Goals:

- Ensure coordinator sustainability
- Explore consumption and treatment services locally
- Strengthen the continuum of housing
- Expand treatment services
- Improve care pathways/system navigation for users
- Enhance sexual assault services

Southwestern Public Health's goal align with Safe and Well Oxford in relation to substance misuse, harm reduction and prevention. It was stated that currently the community is more reactive rather than preventative and this needs to shift.

Southwestern Public Health is engaging in conversations with the school board to allow for more education and prevention programs to take place in school to become more proactive.

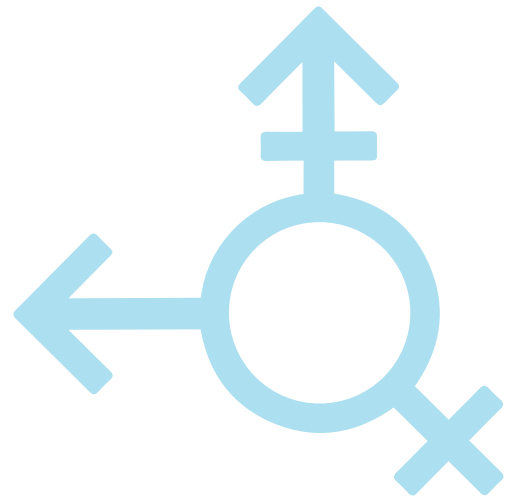
The committee may consider ways going forward that they can help in terms of public education and awareness and advocacy for more funding locally.

5. Next Steps:

a. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – draft Terms of Reference

Meeting will take place to discuss finalization of Terms of Reference for Diversity, Equity and Inclusions Action Coalition and committee composition. Ayesha will bring forward an update in relation to the establishment of the Action Coalition to the committee at the next meeting.

WHY PRONOUNS MATTER



Some people don't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and choose to be identified differently. Gender identity is about how someone *feels*, not how they *appear*, so it is important to recognize which pronouns people use instead of making assumptions based on their name, hair, clothing choices, etc. It helps to view gender as a spectrum, whether male, female, both or neither – often referred to as non-binary.

There are many variations of gender pronouns, but the three most common are:

- He/him:** For someone who identifies as male or masculine.
- She/her:** For someone who identifies as female or feminine.
- They/them:** For someone who doesn't identify with male or female pronouns and feels they fall somewhere in the middle of the gender spectrum.



Why do people share gender pronouns?

Providing your pronouns in an email signature is seen as a sign of respect, understanding and inclusivity. Stating your own pronouns is a way to normalize the conversation surrounding gender and identity. Including gender pronouns in your email signature can be additionally helpful for those that have a gender-neutral name.

How do I use they/them correctly?

While it may take practice, you could already be using “they/them” correctly without noticing. For example, consider the following:

“I received a call from a resident who says their garbage bin is missing. They know they left it at the curb for morning pickup and usually walk it back down the driveway with them at the end of the day, but now they don’t know where it is.”

or

“A client left us a voicemail message and asked that we call them back on their cell number.”



Using “they/them” is a good alternative if you are unsure of someone’s pronouns and can be particularly helpful in a public setting when working with residents, clients, etc.

What if I accidentally “mis-gender” someone?

If you believe you may have used the wrong pronouns, apologize and correct the error. The most important thing is that you recognize and respect someone’s preferred pronouns, even if it takes some time. If you are in a private setting and you’re unsure of what pronouns to use, ask. If you’re with a group, you could start by stating your pronouns, allowing everyone to re-assert their own. This is why including gender pronouns in email signatures is an easy step in making our workplace more comfortable for everyone. The intent is to have gender pronouns become part of the routine of introducing ourselves to each other; the more it is practiced, the easier it becomes.

Where can I learn more?

NPR: A guide to gender identity terms

Egale: Inclusive and affirming language

Egale: Pronoun usage guide

M.I. Understanding: Pronouns – How to start a conversation

