

Friendship Centres on the Front Lines:

Housing & Homelessness Solutions
for Urban Indigenous People



OFIFC

Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

Friendship Centres

- Emerging from a nation-wide, grass-roots movement dating back to the 1950's, Friendship Centres are community hubs where Indigenous people living in towns, cities, and urban centres can access culturally-responsive programs and services every day
- Friendship Centres have grown to become dynamic hubs of economic and social convergence that create space for Indigenous communities to thrive. They are:
 - idea incubators for young Indigenous people attaining their education and employment goals,
 - sites of cultural resurgence for Indigenous families who want to raise their children to be proud of who they are,
 - safe havens for Indigenous community members requiring supports



OFIFC

Friendship Centres

- Today there are 31 member Friendship Centres across Ontario offering programs and initiatives that span across sectors including:
 - Justice
 - Health
 - Family support
 - Long-term care
 - Healing and wellness
 - Employment and training
 - Education
- In Ontario, more than 88 percent of Indigenous people live in urban communities.
- Friendship Centres receive their mandate from their communities, and they are inclusive of all Indigenous people



The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC)

- Founded in 1971, the OFIFC works to support, advocate for, and build the capacity of member Friendship Centres across Ontario.
- The OFIFC is the largest urban Indigenous service network in the province supporting this vibrant, diverse, and quickly growing population



Issues & Challenges

- Intersecting cost of living and housing availability crisis'
- Local competition for homelessness funding
- Racism and/or NIMBYism
- Federal investments often ignored urban Indigenous communities
- Lack of recognition that:
 - Shelter services involve a high degree of risk and require significant capacity
 - The high rate of Indigenous homelessness is a violation of the right to housing
 - The disproportionate rate of Indigenous homelessness is a lasting effect of colonization



Friendship Centre Housing Engagements

- Many Friendship Centres have affordable or transitional housing units for community members with more developments underway
- Affordable, culture-based housing programs and services are critical community self-determined interventions in the homelessness crisis.
- Some Friendship Centres have specific homelessness programming either through the Reaching Home program or through local partnerships with municipalities
- With the rise of encampments across communities in Ontario, Friendship Centres have found themselves providing services and essential items and food to those living in encampments.



Friendship Centre Supports

- Friendship Centres provide housing and homelessness supports through:
 - Reaching Home
 - Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound (UIHB)
 - Affordable Housing Projects
 - Wraparound, cultural supports
 - Partnership development



Friendship Centres and Housing

Affordable, culture-based housing programs achieve better outcomes than mainstream approaches through:

- Built-in supports
- Connections to culture and community
- Intergenerational options
- Access to childcare, etc.



UIHB Program Activities

- Housing stabilization supports
- Access to culture
- Childcare supports
- Life skills resources and post-secondary educational opportunities
- Transportation
- Case coordination
- Health access and mental health supports



Reaching Home Program Activities

- Supporting community members in finding appropriate housing
- Advocacy with landlords
- Supports with food and household items
- Referrals and systems navigation
- Assisting community members in accessing education, employment, or income supports
- Cultural and social integration



Supports for Encampments

- Encampments are a failure of current housing policy and disproportionately affect Indigenous people
- Friendship Centres provide food, essential items, and other supports to those living in encampments
- Friendship Centres provide wraparound supports including social inclusion and access to culture to all community members in need

Affordable Housing Projects

- Friendship Centres pursue housing projects that reflect the needs of the populations they serve
- Housing projects range from single occupancy to family homes
- Some housing is tied to a specific Friendship Centre program
- Friendship Centres often have to use a transitional housing model due to high need in the community
- Partnerships are critical for success

Friendship Centre Success Stories



Ininew Friendship Center

- Four apartment units renovated into affordable housing options
- Tri-partnership between the Friendship Centre, DSSAB, and a private landlord to secure transitional housing



Dryden Native Friendship Centre & Indigenous Friendship Centre of Sault Ste Marie



- Both centres secured 15 units designated for the Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound program
- Provide four years of subsidized housing for single mothers and children while they work on their education and employment goals
- This project was completed with the support and partnership of OAHS

Odawa Native Friendship Centre

- The Odawa Bannock Bus delivers outreach support services to the homeless population including:
 - Hot meals
 - Water
 - Clothing & blankets
 - Hygiene supplies
 - Social integration

Odawa presents...

The Bannock Bus

Serving our community's homeless population.

Delivering breakfast and lunch, Monday to Friday.



The Future of Friendship Centre Housing

- Friendship Centres with the support of the OFIFC continue to meet the needs of their communities and are always exploring new ways to ensure access to safe and affordable housing
- Our unhoused neighbours are still important and valued members of our communities and Friendship Centres will continue to provide all available supports as we combat the ongoing housing crisis



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