

On Wednesday, November 22, 2023, the Living Space Relocation Review team from Third Party Public Inc. and Eagle Cree Consulting held a focus group with clients of Living Space to introduce the Relocation Review and seek feedback on factors to consider when contemplating the relocation of the Living Space emergency shelter.

The focus group was convened by Meagan Baranyk, Community Programs Manager, City of Timmins. The conversation included 11 men and 1 woman who are clients of Living Space, along with one facilitator with lived experience. Thank you to all participants for the excellent discussion.

The meeting was facilitated by Third Party Public Inc., the organization leading the Living Space Relocation Review, in collaboration with Eagle Cree Consulting. This summary was written by Nicole Swerhun and Ruth Belay, with contributions from Jean Sutherland. As facilitators that are not advocating for any particular outcome of the Relocation Review, the intent is to capture the perspectives shared during the discussion, not to assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives. This summary does not indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of Third Party Public or Eagle Cree Consulting.

A draft of this summary was subject to participant review before being finalized. No suggested edits were received. If you have any questions about this summary, please contact Nicole Swerhun at Third Party Public at nicole@thirdpartypublic.ca. For more information about the Relocation Review see www.livingspacereview.ca.

Note that points are numbered in this summary for ease of reference only and are not intended to imply that some points are more important than others.

Focus Group with clients of Living Space

Living Space Relocation Review – Part 2

Wed, Nov 22, 2023

1:30 – 3 pm at Living Space

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

What does an emergency shelter that's working well look like to you?

- We're accepted and supported.** There is a community and family at Living Space supporting and loving each other. For most of us, we are all the family we have. "Relationships here are like nothing you will ever see." Out of Living Space, we aren't accepted, we are outcasts." At Living Space, we wake up and we have support from other homeless individuals. People ask how we are and people listen. We're thankful to have a hug in the morning. We are strong together and we can be an example of being and doing better.
- Neighbours support the shelter and get to know the people staying at the shelter.** We need to work to create unity.
 - Residents are having trouble with people hanging around outside Living Space. Some people think we're all the same, but that's not true. Not all people experiencing homelessness are criminals. It's not right for people to damage property, but only a few people are doing that.
 - There are neighbours who are harassing people experiencing homelessness. Residents are almost running people over (physical aggression) or saying hateful things on social media (Facebook). They are also making celebrities of people by invading their privacy and posting videos online.
 - There's a reason we're here. Get to know us. Come have a Q & A with us. Some people are here because their houses burnt down or they had a bad divorce or a bad friendship. This can happen to anybody.

- Instead of coming up with solutions, neighbours are coming up with problems. They should be thinking about “how could we be a solution to help the homeless?” Mental health, addiction, and depression go hand-in-hand. “This is more about how to deal with the haters. We’re not here to please them, we’re here to figure out our lives.” “There are always people that want to bring other people down because it makes them feel important. We’re not here for you, we’re not living for you.”
- People are upset that the City is using tax dollars to help people. “People posting on social media have nothing to do with Living Space, they’re just upset. We’re easy targets.” People need to treat people how they want to be treated. Public humiliation is bad. They need to think about how they can help, and “they can start by not kicking us while we’re down”.

3. **It doesn’t mix “lambs, lions, and coyotes”.**

Right now, Living Space mixes everyone. It’s like being in “gen pop” at the jail (general population).

- There’s a difference between people that are homeless and people with addictions, and it’s important to keep these groups separate. One suggestion was to separate people with addictions issues from those that don’t use. The first location would be for no drugs, and the second would allow for the safe consumption of drugs. Right now, people with addictions have to go outside or go to the Safe Injection Site (when it’s open).
- “A lot of us are in danger because of 2 or 3 individuals who act inappropriately, it’s not fair, can’t lock us in with potentially homicidal person.” Some people need to be in the MHU (mental health unit). We need to bring stress levels down.
- We need more support in-house to deal with bullies.

4. **It’s safe for clients, neighbours, and staff.**

Clients have been assaulted on the Living

Space property and police did nothing. The people here are not criminals.

- There are hardened criminals in town, but it’s safer here because there’s a lock and key. The homeless people running the streets are the ones doing the crime – they’re operating with impunity. But you can’t guarantee anyone’s safety. A person was shot 3 feet from me.
- Our safety is at risk when we’re monitored all the time by residents – we’re on social media and on their Facebook pages. Living Space creates celebrities. When there’s screaming outside, everyone is traumatized.

5. **There are services.**

- Make sure medical professionals are ensuring follow up – right now they come once and then don’t come back.
- Other services needed include mental health, dental, optometrist, health unit, life skills, taxes, psychiatry, counsellors (trauma, drug, and alcohol are just hiding the issues).
- There needs to be access to employment opportunities. There’s a stigma at Living Space and everyone thinks we are drug addicts, but that’s not true. The reputation of Living Space prevents employers or even other agencies from coming to Living Space.
- Sometimes when we hang out outside the offices of service providers (i.e., downtown), they call the cops instead of talking to us.

6. **We need a quiet room and spaces to resolve conflicts.**

There’s nowhere to go in the shelter to be separate from others; to take a moment to calm down. This would also allow for better sleep.

7. **It provides good information to the people using the shelter.**

For example, when the shelter moved from Cedar Street to Spruce Street, we weren’t told in advance. At some point we were also told that we were getting individual rooms, but that wasn’t the case.

What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of in-town and out-of-town potential locations for the emergency shelter?

1. **If the shelter is too far out in the boonies, how will we eat, get medical services, etc.?** Who would provide transportation? If it's out of town we would need bus passes.
2. **“Living Space needs an internal shake-up and a great PR policy.”** No matter where you put us, people will complain. Any location needs a proper public relations (PR) policy.
3. **The current Living Space emergency shelter is already a good space.**

Other thoughts:

- It is right that society abandons people that are not taxpayers paying bills? Society already abandons people when they become homeless. You don't have to pay taxes to qualify as a person.
- The Mayor should visit Living Space.
- This consultation ends in February, but it will take years to end homelessness so why would the consultation end?
- Thank you for caring and listening to us. You genuinely care. We are usually looked through and not looked at.

The Relocation Review team observed that the participation of Indigenous voices in the focus group was limited and seemed to be limited to one of the 12 participants. In response to a question from the Relocation Review team, a participant mentioned that there hasn't been much Indigenous representation at Living Space.

Next steps:

The Third Party Public team committed to sharing a draft summary of the feedback from participants for their review to confirm nothing major from the discussion was missing or off-base. The same process will be followed for all working sessions held, with final summaries posted on the Relocation Review website. That way people can review all summaries and see the same inputs as the Relocation Review team.

In addition to in-person working sessions, there is an online feedback form at www.livingspacereview.ca that asks the same questions. That gives an opportunity to people who are unable to attend working sessions to share their thoughts and/or those who have additional perspectives to share either before or after the working sessions. All feedback is important. Anything received before Friday, December 8, 2023 will be included in our Part 2 Feedback Summary, with any comments received after that point being captured in our final Relocation Review Report.