

# 5 MYTHS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

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## “Homeless People are from Somewhere Else”

There is often a misconception that people move to Peterborough to access shelter and other social services, but data continues to show differently. According to the 2021 Point-In-Time count surveying people experiencing homelessness, only 10% of survey respondents had been in Peterborough for less than a year. Even if this were the case, **people of all income levels have the freedom to move between communities.** This language is often used negatively only for those who are experiencing homelessness to “other” them and justify us not taking responsibility to care for them.

## “Homeless People are Lazy and Don’t Want to Work”

**Surviving homelessness is anything but easy.** Finding where you are going to sleep, eat, clean up, etc. is a full time job. Despite this, many people who are experiencing homelessness have the desire to work, but may face many obstacles. Not having a cell phone or computer to access online job applications, not having access to a shower or clean laundry for interviews, not having transportation fare, or having a criminal background are some of these many challenges. Many find alternative forms of work that are outside of the mainstream workforce such as picking cans and panhandling. Though some may not like these strategies, what is very clear is they are not easy.

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## “People Become Homeless because of Mental Health and Addiction”

The topic of mental health and substance use often coincide with homelessness. We know that the majority of Canadians who struggle with addiction and/or mental health concerns are housed. Research shows that **addiction and mental health struggles are rarely the sole factors in a person becoming homeless,** and when people do lose their housing, the mental, psychological and physical challenges of being unhoused can increase the likelihood of someone developing mental health challenges or increase one’s substance use.

## “Homeless People can’t Handle their Money”

A common belief is that people experiencing homelessness will spend their money on what we perceive as “wasteful” things, such as drugs, alcohol or cigarettes. In reality, many people experiencing homelessness **utilize money given to them through panhandling to purchase necessities in the moment,** such as on food or clothing. One UBC study gave 50 people experiencing homelessness \$7,500 to do with whatever they want. The recipients increased spending on food, clothes, and rent as well as moved into stable housing and were able to save money toward maintaining financial security. They did not increase their spending on the “wasteful” goods most people would expect.

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## “People Choose to be Homeless”

When we hear folks talking about ‘choice’ in reference to homelessness, they speak as if people are choosing a tent over a 2 bedroom house. The reality is for many of our neighbours, their choice is between living outside, or in a shelter that feels like prison, or a room in a house where they feel unsafe. On top of this, in Peterborough, only 1% of rental units are vacant at any given time, making the competition steep, the average rent for a bachelor is \$873, and the income of a person on Ontario Works is \$733 a month. **Can we really call that a choice?**