

Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters

Person With Lived Experience Report

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Executive Summary

Between the dates of February 7th to March 3rd, 2022, the Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters conducted interviews of thirty-six people with current or recent lived experience of unsheltered homelessness. The purpose of these interviews was to assess the need for a community of tiny shelters, to learn how they would want the program structured, and to find the ideal location.

This report is a summary of those interviews.

The data shows a need for this program in Hamilton, with 97.2% of respondents saying they would be interested in a home if one was available for them. The preferred location would be outside the downtown core, close enough to access services, but not so close that the problems of downtown life come to them. Most of the respondents (94.2%) would be willing to do both paid and volunteer work for the betterment of the community, and they value neighbours who would do the same - working collectively for the community and trying to better themselves in the process. They also did not expect it to be free, with 96.9% of respondents agreeing to contribute the housing portion of their OW or ODSP cheque to support the program.

When it came to services, the focus was primarily on the support system that would allow them to stabilize their lives (mental health support, street outreach, housing workers), followed by opportunities to be independent and grow (kitchen access, community gardens, library). The services that were the least prioritized were door-to-door deliveries, emphasizing a desire for autonomy.

Finally, the individuals surveyed wanted a site free from open drug use, violence, and illegal weapons. They recognized the importance of rules and consequences, but also understood that warnings and opportunities for redemption were sometimes more appropriate than immediate eviction. If it becomes necessary to evict a resident, these individuals prefer a hybrid model where both staff and residents have input on whether it's time for someone to go.

Overall, the people interviewed expressed wanting something better for themselves and that they would be willing to work for it. They wanted safety, independence, and privacy. They wanted tiny homes in Hamilton.

Background

The focus of this survey is to assist the Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters in their efforts to create a tiny cabin community for people experiencing homelessness. Gathering the experiences, preferences, and perspectives of people with lived experience (PWLE) will help inform the direction of the project and ensure it is as successful as possible.

The key areas of inquiry in this report are; whether the program meets a real need, where it should be located, and how it should be operated. Any attempt to answer these questions would be incomplete without the firsthand voices of people with lived experience. The data in this report is a step towards answering those questions in a way that centres the experiences and insights of people who live this reality every day.

Finally, this report marks the beginning of HATS' consultation and inclusion of people with lived experience, not an end to it. Applying the philosophy of '*nothing about us without us*' means that there will be ongoing efforts to include the voices of lived experience at every step of the process. These voices, alongside input from the city, service agencies, and the HATS core team, will ensure that Hamilton's tiny shelter project is a success.

Survey Method

This data is the product of thirty-seven interviews that took place in Hamilton, Ontario between the dates of February 7th, 2022 to March 3rd, 2022. The target audience was people who are currently experiencing or have recently experienced unsheltered homelessness. In order to reach this population, the surveyor attended morning drop in centres at Wesley Urban Ministries (52 Catharine Street North) and evening drop in centres at The Hub (78 Vine St). The surveyor worked with staff and volunteers to find eligible respondents. Respondents were given a \$10.00 Tim Hortons gift card in exchange for their time.

The format of the surveys was a blend of open-ended and closed-ended questions leading to a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. After the interviews closed, the surveyor went through the qualitative data, collecting common themes and assigning a numerical value to the number of different respondents who mentioned them independently. Questions 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 14 were done with this methodology. That means the final figures for those questions are subject to interpretation and should be used more as a guide than an exact figure.

Thirty-seven surveys were completed over four days. There was one duplicate participant who had more to offer, leaving thirty-six unique respondents*. All respondents are either currently experiencing or have recently experienced unsheltered homelessness in Hamilton. To protect their privacy, no identifying information was taken from any of the respondents. The only identifying piece of information is a unique interview code attached to every result confirming the date of the survey and what order they were surveyed. Because of this, no demographic data is available.

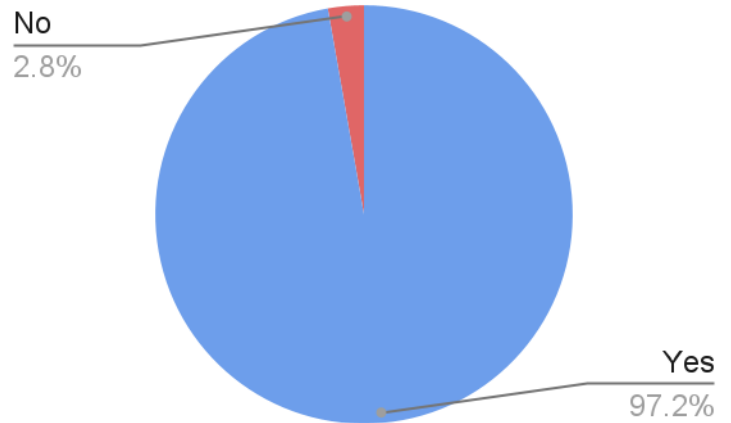
*This respondent did not have their data included twice. Their additional feedback was only included in the final ‘any additional comments’ section. All other fields were left blank.

Q1 - Would you be interested in a place like this?

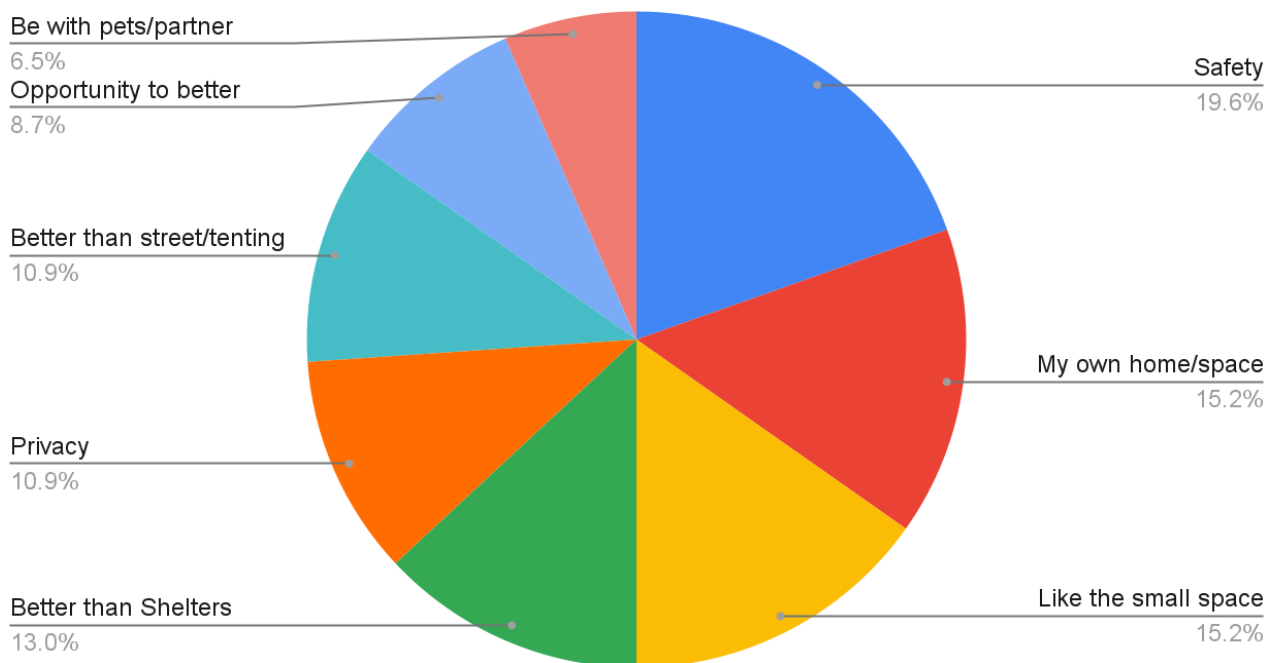
Of the individuals surveyed, 97.2% said they would be interested in one of these homes if it became available to them.

When asked to elaborate on why, they emphasized that a shelter like this within a supportive community would meet their needs for safety, independence, and privacy. They also said the smaller space would be easier to manage, and they would prefer something like this to either shelters or to sleeping rough outdoors. The final items mentioned by the individuals surveyed were that a place like this could give them an opportunity to better themselves and would give them the ability to access a safe shelter without giving up their partners or, importantly, their pets.

Would you be interested in a tiny shelter?



Why?



Taken as a whole, this data shows a need for a community of tiny shelters in Hamilton that is focused on safety, independence, and autonomy - all while providing the residents opportunities to change their lives. In the words of one interviewee:

“I think this sounds like a very very great idea. Hamilton needs it. It's bad out here. the homelessness, drug addiction. I'm an addict myself but the living space will get people into living skills, living situations, growing up a bit. I'm a grown ass adult and I don't act like it half the time. Treat someone like a child, they are gonna act like a child. Treat them like an adult and they are gonna act it.”

Would you be interested in a tiny shelter?

Yes	35
No	1

Why?

Safety	9
My own home/space	7
Like the small space aspect	7
Better than Shelters	6
Privacy	5
Better than street/tenting	5
Opportunity to better themselves	4
Be with pets/partner	3

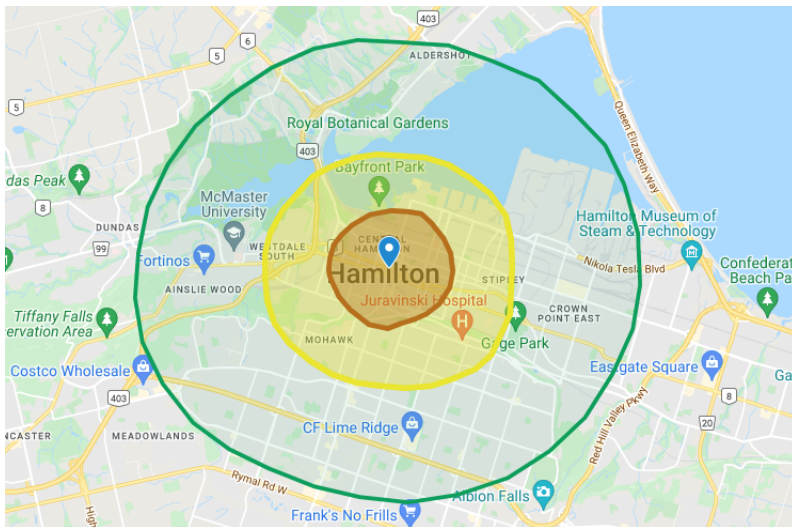
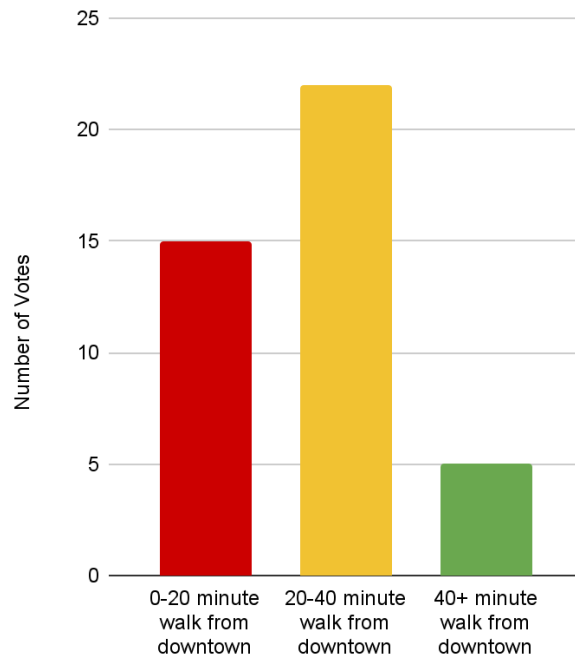
Q2 - Where in the city would you like it to be?

Although this question was second in the survey, the surveyor asked it at the end of the interview so that respondents could have a full understanding of the program before answering. Respondents were asked what the ideal location would be for this community. They could answer with either a distance from downtown or a specific location.

Then, the surveyor calculated the walking distance from their ideal location to downtown (Jackson Square) and tallied the results into the three categories below. Some respondents gave multiple answers so the sum of the responses is greater than the number of respondents.

This data shows that, when imagining an ideal community, many of these individuals want to get out of the downtown core and the issues associated with it. The ideal location is one where you can access the downtown, but you are far enough away that the problems of downtown don't come knocking. In the words of another respondent:

“I don't really care if it's central. There are buses everywhere. I just want to be somewhere secure, and safe, and that I can have access to a phone, and that I can get on with my life - because I can't get on with my life.”



For easier visualization of what these distances look like, locations were transposed on to [this map](#):

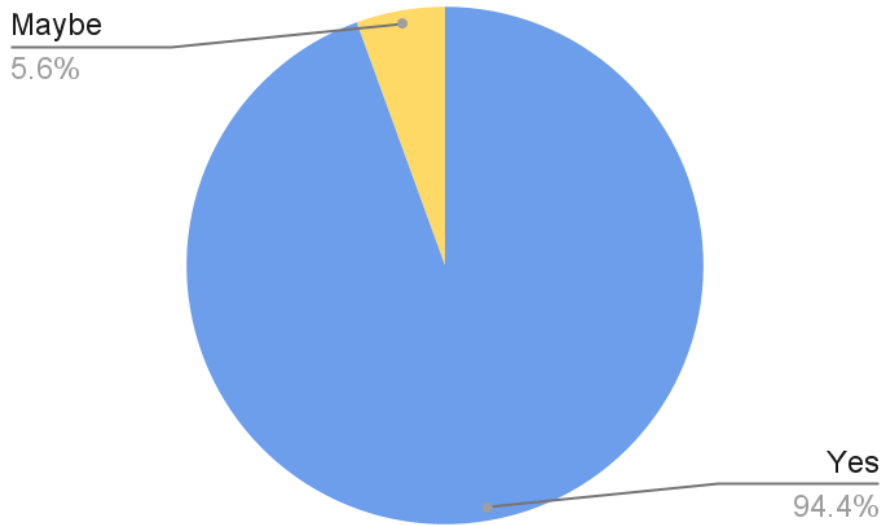
Some locations that came up repeatedly in the conversations were:

- Cathedral Park
- SJAM
- Stoney Creek
- Bayfront Area
- Downtown

Q3 - Would you do volunteer work on site?

Volunteer work will be critical to the success of this project. When asked if they would do unpaid chores and site maintenance work around the project, 94.4% of respondents said they would.

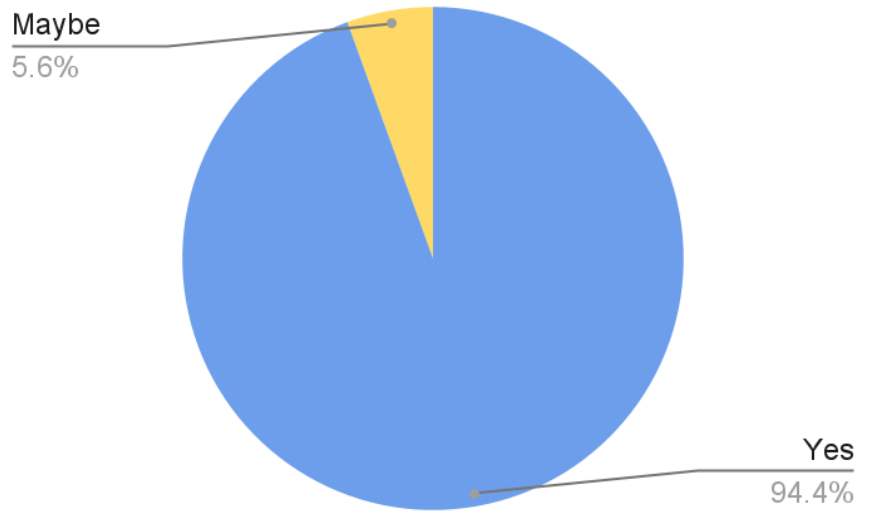
Yes	34
Maybe	2
No	0



Q4 - Would you do paid work on site?

This project is also exploring offering paid positions to residents. The same percentage said they would do paid work, indicating that the desire to help is as important to the potential residents as the salary itself.

Yes	34
Maybe	2
No	0



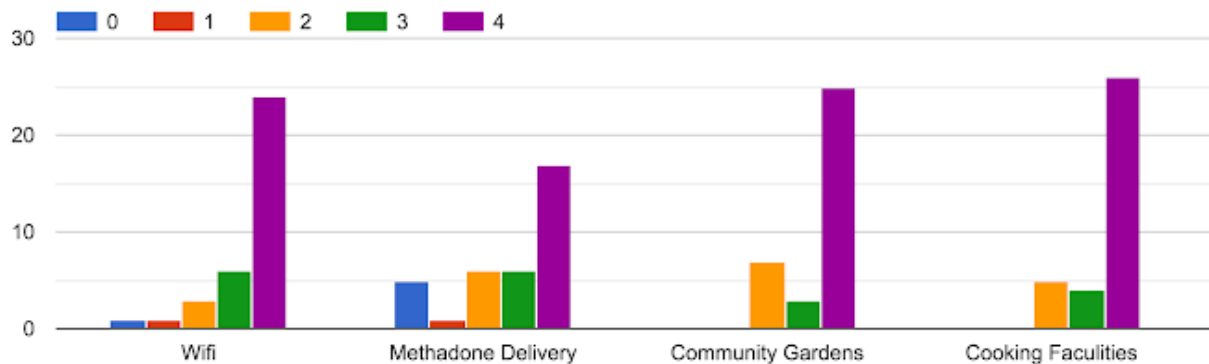
Q5 - Which of the following would be the most important to you? (Service Ranking)

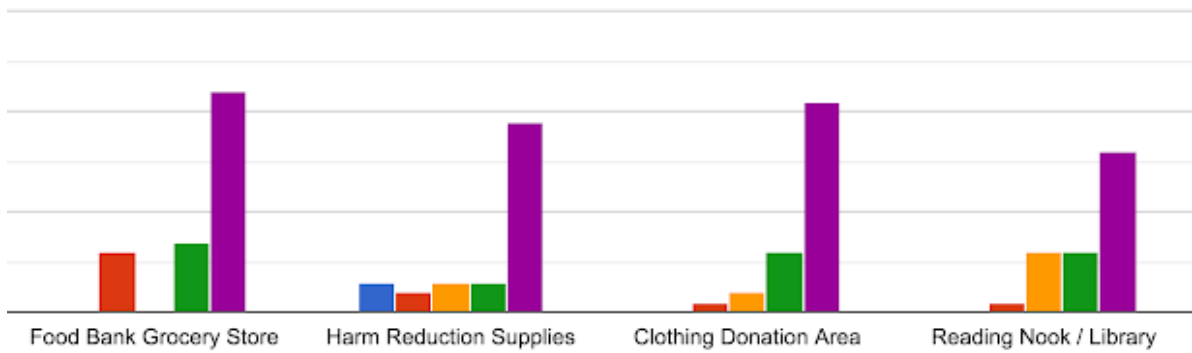
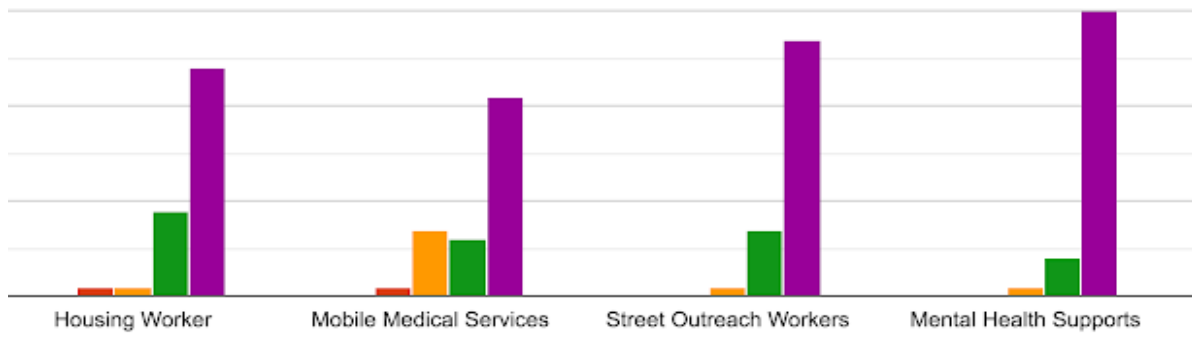
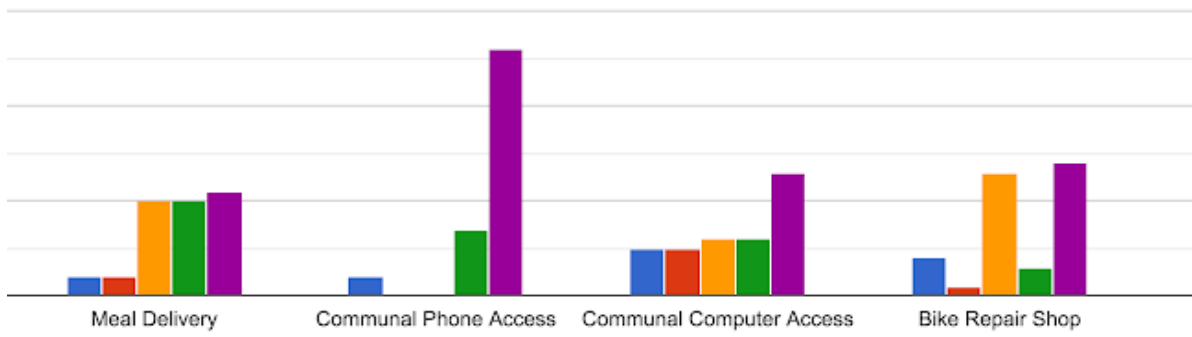
For this question, respondents were presented with a list of potential services that could be offered on-site then asked to rank them from zero to four with zero being 'should not be on site' and four being 'absolutely necessary'.

Scores were then averaged and the list below is how they were ranked:

Service	Rank
Mental Health Supports	3.9
Street Outreach Workers	3.7
Housing Worker	3.6
Wifi	3.6
Clothing Donation Area	3.6
Community Gardens	3.5
Cooking Facilities (Kitchen)	3.5
Communal Phone Access	3.3
Harm Reduction Supplies	3.3
Reading Nook / Library	3.2
Mobile Medical Services	3.0
Food Bank Grocery Store	3.0
Methadone Delivery	3.0
Meal Delivery	2.8
Communal Computer Access	2.3
Bike Repair Shop	2.2

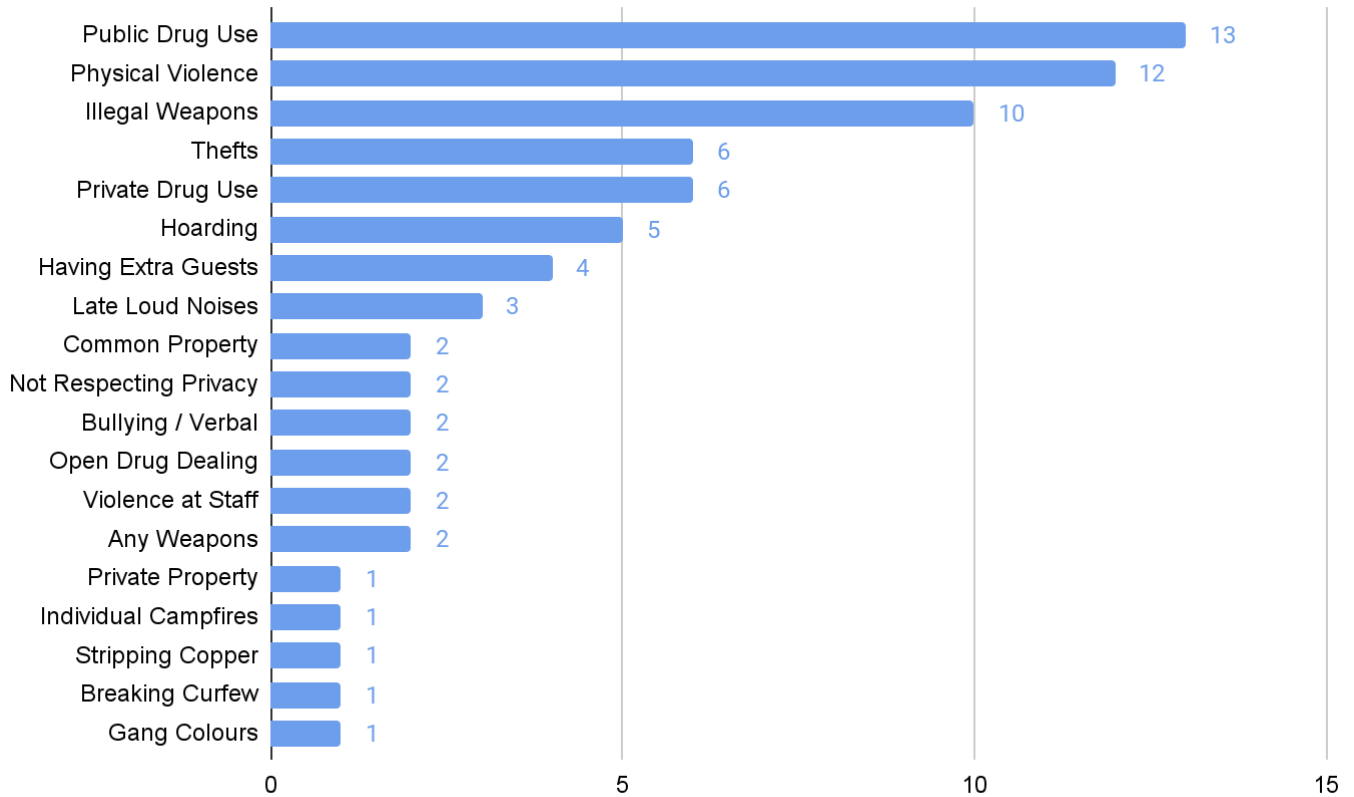
Which of the following would be important to you?





Q6 - What should be prohibited?

This question asked the respondents what should be prohibited within the community. These responses will help inform the commitment statements that residents must agree to in order to live within the community. Their responses are below:

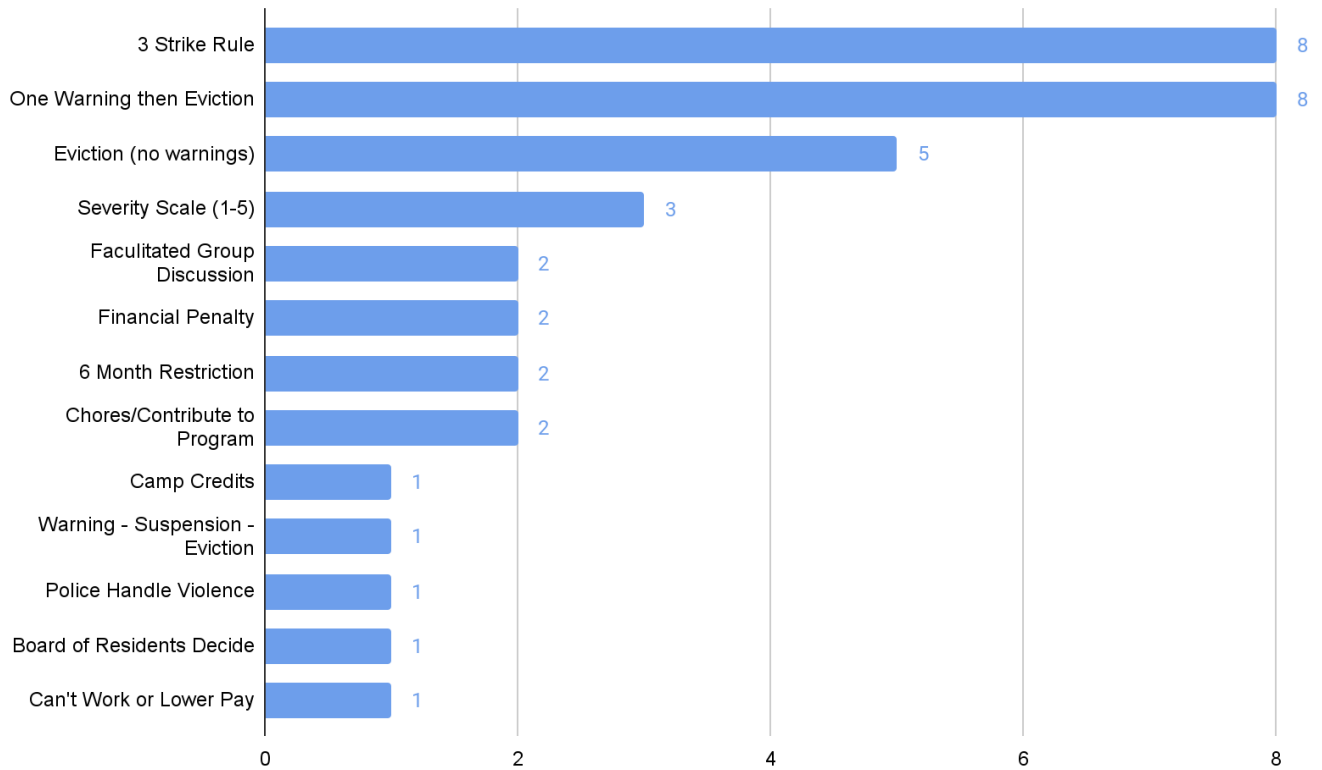


Public Drug Use	13
Physical Violence	12
Illegal Weapons	10
Thefts	6
Private Drug Use	6
Hoarding	5
Having Extra Guests (Beyond a limit)	4
Late Loud Noises	3
Common Property Destruction	2
Not Respecting Privacy	2
Bullying / Verbal Violence	2
Open Drug Dealing	2
Violence at Staff	2
Any Weapons	2

Private Property Destruction	1
Individual Campfires	1
Stripping Copper	1
Breaking Curfew	1
Gang Colours	1

Q7 - What should happen when someone breaks the rules?

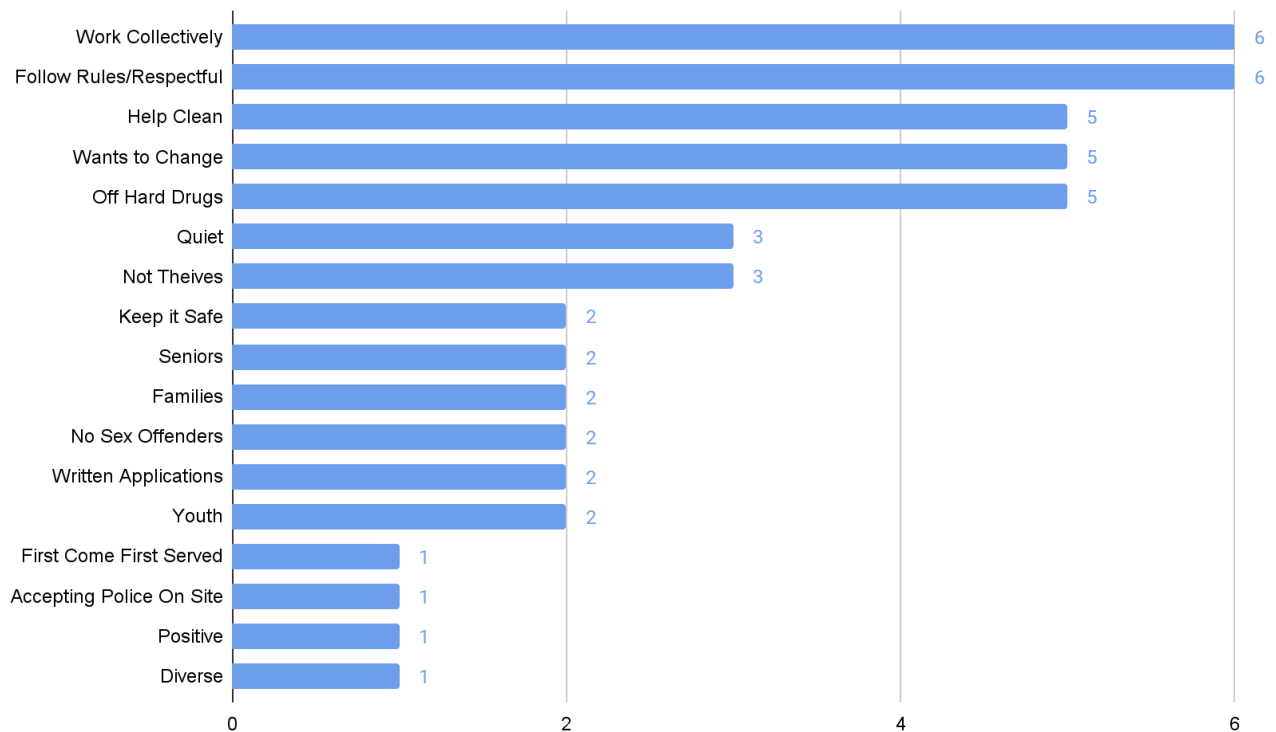
The following question asked, if a resident were to break the proposed rules you just mentioned, what should the penalty for that be? These penalties leaned heavily towards a warning - eviction model of justice. Some interviewees mentioned the opportunity to earn your second chances by working for the improvement of the program and being held accountable to a group of residents for your actions.



3 Strike Rule	8
One Warning then Eviction	8
Eviction (no warnings)	5
Severity Scale (1-5)	3
Facilitated Group Discussion	2
Financial Penalty	2
6 month restriction	2
Chores/Contribute to Program	2
Camp Credits	1
Warning-Suspension-Eviction	1
Police Handle Violence	1
Board of Residents Decide	1
Can't work or lower pay	1

Q8 - If you lived here, who would you want as a neighbour - why? (Ideal candidate)

This question was posed to respondents by assuming that, if they were guaranteed a home, what qualities would they hope for in their neighbours. Consistent themes were then pulled out of the responses. These themes seem to show that the best individuals were the ones willing to work for the betterment of the community (work collectively, clean) and for the betterment of themselves (wants to change, off hard drugs), all while respecting neighbours (follow rules/respectful, quiet, not thieves).

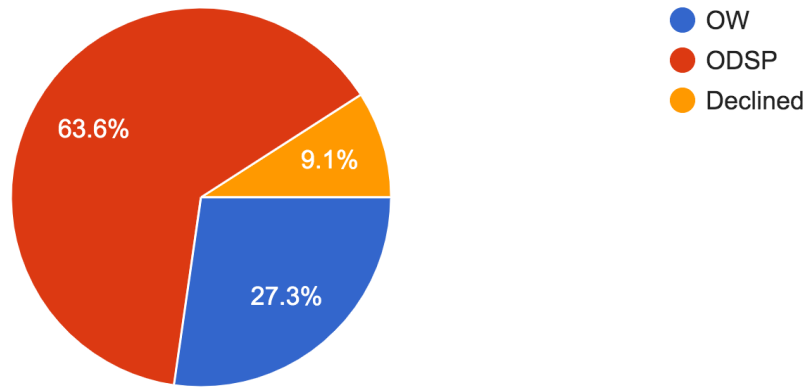


Work Collectively	6	Families	2
Follow Rules/Respectful	6	No Sex Offenders	2
Help Clean	5	Written Applications	2
Wants to Change	5	Youth	2
Off Hard Drugs	5	First Come First Served	1
Quiet	3	Accepting Police On Site	1
Not Thieves	3	Positive	1
Keep it Safe	2	Diverse	1
Seniors	2	Families	2

Q9 - What is your income source?

What is your income source?

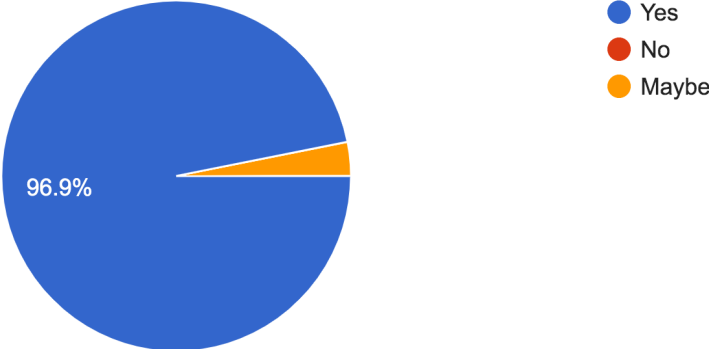
33 responses



ODSP	21
OW	9
Declined	3

Q10 - Would you pay a program fee equal to the shelter portion of your OW/ODSP?

Would you pay a program fee equal to the shelter portion of your OW/ODSP?
32 responses

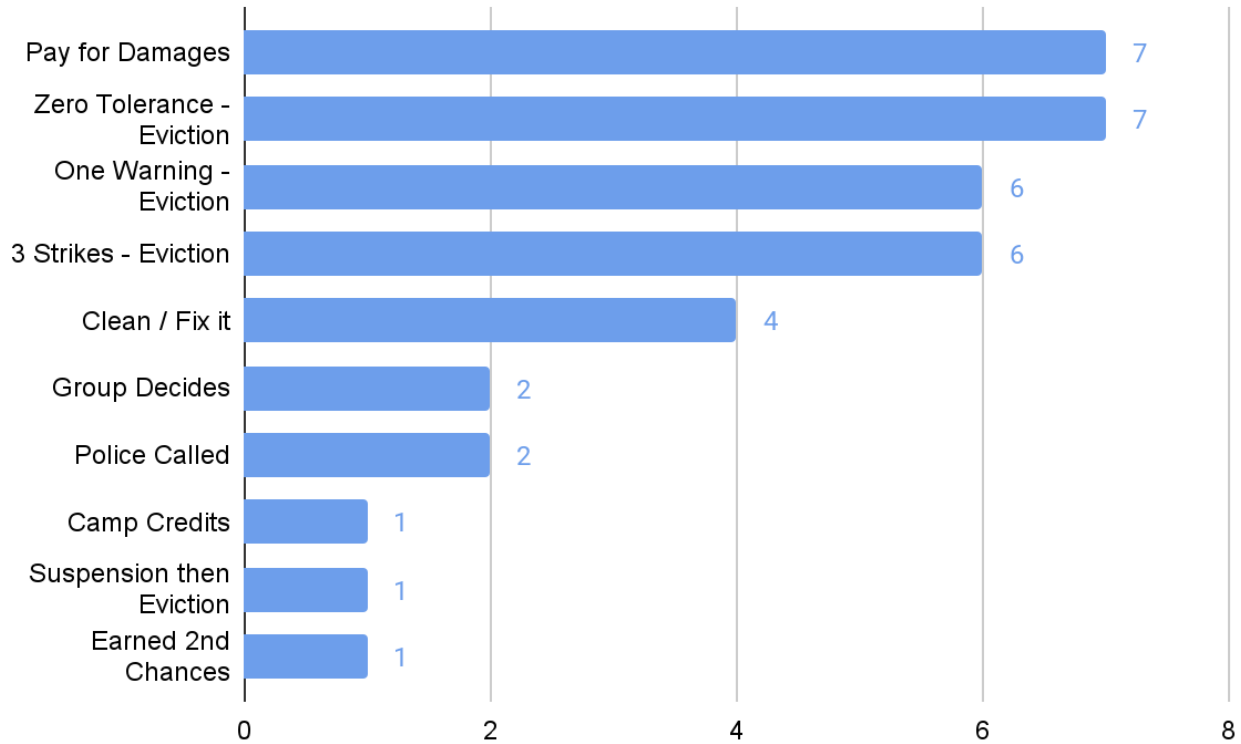


Yes	31
Maybe	1
No	0

Q11 - What should happen when someone destroys the property?

Destruction of common property is a challenging reality in these communities and is one of the major things a resident can do to damage the program. Because of this, respondents were asked specifically how this should be handled.

The responses pointed to a split between eviction-based responses and financial or reparation-based responses. The direct findings are below.

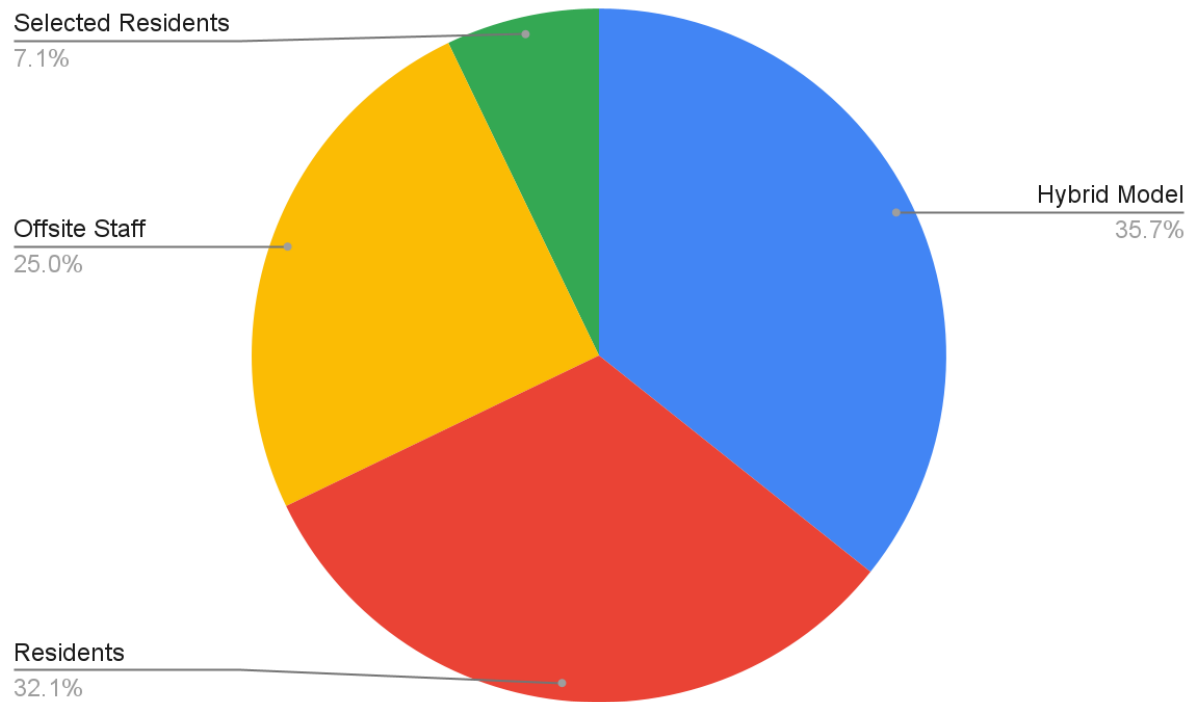


Pay for Damages	7
Zero Tolerance - Eviction	7
One Warning - Eviction	6
3 Strikes - Eviction	6
Clean / Fix it	4
Group Decides	2
Police Called	2
Camp Credits	1
Suspension then Eviction	1
Earned 2nd Chances	1

Q12 - How should evictions be decided?

When a resident has violated the commitment statements or becomes a danger to others, it may be necessary to evict them. When this happens, there will have to be a group that makes the final decision.

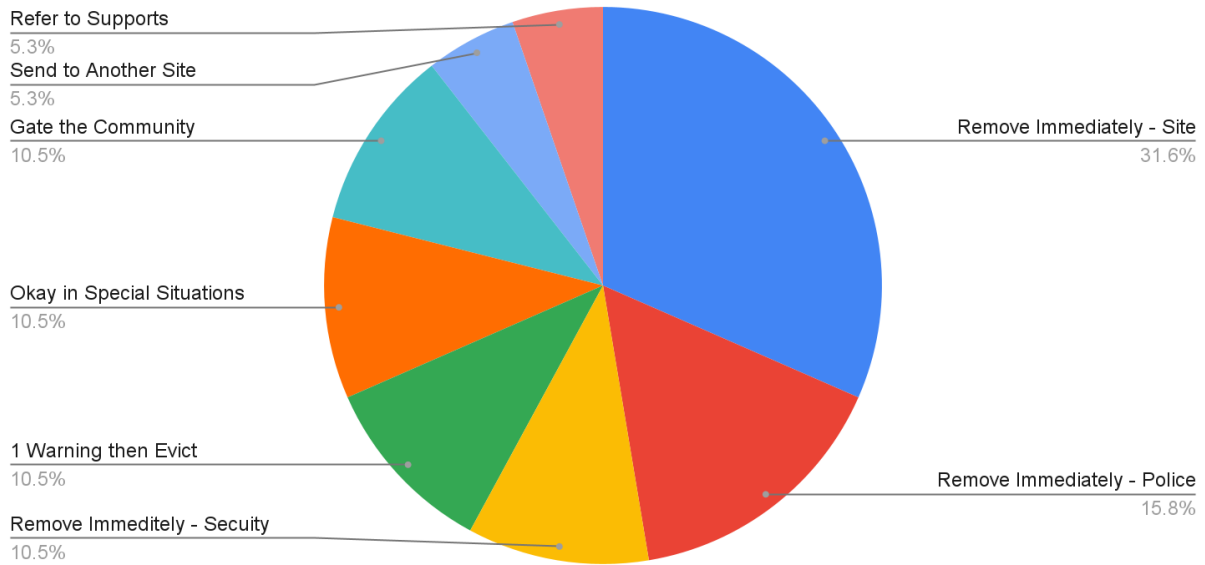
In this question, the surveyor asked who the person/people to make that decision should be. The most popular answer was a hybrid approach with both residents and staff involved but neither acting alone. This was followed by just residents and then just staff. Finally, some individuals mentioned having specific residents who were chosen to make those decisions.



Hybrid	10
Residents	9
Offsite Staff	7
Selected Residents	2

Q13 - How should illegal tenting be handled?

This final question was on the topic of non-residents setting up tents on the site. The respondents were told that any site HATS received would likely have a zero-tenting policy and it would fall to us to enforce it. The surveyor then asked what HATS should do in this situation.



Remove Immediately - Site Captain	6
Remove Immediately - Police	3
Okay in Special Situations	2
1 Warning then Evict	2
Remove Immediately - Security	2
Gate the Community	2
Send to Another Site	1
Refer to Supports	1