



R . O . C . K .

Reach Out Chatham - Kent

HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE TOOLKIT

Land Acknowledgement

Reach Out Chatham-Kent (R.O.C.K) gratefully acknowledges that our work takes place on the traditional territories of the Odawa, Potawatomi, and Ojibwe Nations, also known as the Three Fires Confederacy. These lands belong to and are occupied by Indigenous Peoples known as the Anishnaabeg, as well as the Lenape.

Our community is home to many Indigenous, First Nations, and Metis Peoples. The lands colonially known as Chatham-Kent, neighbour Eelünaapéewi Lahkéewiit Delaware Nation which is part of the McKee Purchase Treaty, or Treaty 2 of 1790. Our community also borders the unceded territory of Bkejwanong Walpole Island First Nation, as well as the ancestral, uncaded territory of the Caldwell First Nation.

We are all subject to many treaties, including the Dish With One Spoon and Two Row Wampum Belt Covenants. These agreements teach us to never take more than what we need, and to leave our community in a better place than how we found it for future generations. We are also taught how Indigenous Peoples and settlers can live together as allies and equals. R.O.C.K. is committed to taking action to redress structures of oppression. When we engage in conversations and work around substance use and homelessness we must recognize the historic, current, and ongoing trauma and violence of genocidal policy, including the disproportionate harms of the drug poisoning crisis, criminalization, and homelessness crisis for Indigenous Peoples.

R.O.C.K. recognizes the need for ongoing learning in our journey towards Truth and Reconciliation. We invite you to reflect on this Land Acknowledgement and how you can practice allyship for Indigenous Peoples and communities. Please contact us if you have feedback on this Land Acknowledgement.

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This toolkit was developed with inspiration and guidance from the Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA) Homelessness Response Toolkit. While adapted to meet the specific needs of our community, we recognize and appreciate the foundational work done by the OBIAA and OrgCode Consulting Inc. **Modification of this handbook is prohibited without prior permission from R.O.C.K.**

Introduction: Challenging Perceptions

As you go about your daily routine, you may encounter individuals who are experiencing homelessness. We understand that times are changing, and with these changes come new challenges. This toolkit is designed to offer insight and practical ways to navigate these shifts together.

Pause for a moment and ask yourself: does this make me uncomfortable? Why? What assumptions or judgments come to mind? It's natural to have questions and emotions, but we are often conditioned to see homelessness as a personal failure. What if we challenged that narrative? What if, instead of viewing people as problems to be solved, we saw them as individuals navigating a difficult reality—just like any of us might?

The reality of homelessness is complex, rooted in systemic issues like affordable housing shortages, lack of access to adequate mental health services, economic changes and lack of funding for social services. It's not a matter of poor decisions or moral failing. When we begin to remove blame and shame, we can start to see people for who they are: community members, not outsiders.

Let's break down the walls of stigma and instead build bridges of understanding and compassion.

Bridging the Gap: Connecting with Local Homelessness Resources

We understand that navigating these experiences may feel unfamiliar or even overwhelming, whether they are new to you or ongoing. If you're a community member feeling disconnected from the homelessness response system, consider trying one or more of the following actions:

- **Speak with non-profit homelessness service providers or C-K Employment and Social Services.**
- **Read reports made to your Municipal Council** pertaining to homelessness, or watch past council meetings on YouTube on the YourTV Chatham-Kent page.
- **Convene a meeting with the local social services, relevant non-profits and community police officers** so that all parties are in the same room together to talk about homelessness in the C-K and the response.
- **Attend a Council meeting where homelessness matters are being discussed**, and make a presentation outlining your concerns, where you think there are opportunities, and how the community can assist in realizing strategic objectives related to the homelessness response.
- **Advocate to your local MPP and MP.** Remember that many issues relating to homelessness, substance use, and mental health are perpetuated by structural oppression and systemic barriers. Municipal governments are not provided with

adequate resources to address these longstanding inequities; change is required at the policy and societal levels.

Knowing who to contact in different situations can make a big difference in supporting both your community and those experiencing homelessness. **On page 4, you'll find a 'Who to Call' list. Use this guide to ensure you're reaching the right resources when needed.**

THE STATE OF HOUSING IN CHATHAM-KENT

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent is reporting that homelessness across the community has **jumped by 171 per cent since 2019.**

Number of people experiencing homelessness in C-K:



There are between **75 - 100** people staying in **10 known encampments** in C-K.

The waitlist for community housing is now at a record high of **1,352 households**.
The estimated wait time is 10 years.

The average "asking rent" in Chatham-Kent has doubled since 2019.

The average for a one bedroom apartment has **increased by 115%** from \$816 to \$1,759 per month, **more than double** the total monthly income of the 1,400 single applicants in CK receiving Ontario Works.

Source: CKNewsToday.ca, "Homelessness in CK Has Nearly Tripled in Five Years," January 13, 2025

Who to Call List

Service	Name	Contact	When to Call
Emergency Services	Police, Fire, Ambulance	911	Life threatening emergency or crime in progress
Connecting with community services	Community Navigators	519-355-1380	See page 10
Transitional Cabins	Pathways on Park	Homeless Response Line: 519-354-6628	Call page 7
Food Resources	Employment and Social Services Food resources by community	519-351-8573 https://www.chatham-kent.ca/community/Pages/Holiday-Food-Resources.aspx	When someone is facing food insecurity
Garbage, abandoned belongings, or human waste on municipal/public property	311 Chatham-Kent	Call: 311 www.ck311.ca	See page 18
Harm Reduction Supplies	R.O.C.K. C-K Public Health	519-351-1450 (Chatham) 226-626-8996 (Wallaceburg) ck@reachoutck.com https://ckphu.com/needle-syringe-program/	See page 5
Needles/Sharps Cleanup	R.O.C.K. (Private Property) 311 Chatham-Kent (Municipal/Public Property)	519-351-1450 (Chatham) 226-626-8996 (Wallaceburg) ck@reachoutck.com 311 www.ck311.ca	See page 16
Non-Emergency Community Paramedics	CK EMS Community Paramedics	519-380-9334 Ext. 10	See page 8
Non-Emergency Police	CKPS Community Mobilization Officers	519-436-6600 Ext. 0	See page 11
Social and Community Supports	211 Ontario	211 (Call or text) 211ontario.ca	
Street Outreach	R.O.C.K.	519-351-1450 (Chatham) 226-626-8996 (Wallaceburg) ck@reachoutck.com	See page 5

Definitions and Examples of When to Call

Some of the terms in this section might be new to you. Understanding these concepts is an important step in building connections and creating positive change. If you have questions or want to learn more, we encourage you to reach out to R.O.C.K. We're here to support you and provide further clarification whenever needed.

Street Outreach: R.O.C.K. conducts outreach through "feet on the street" to engage with people experiencing homelessness in Chatham and Wallaceburg. Using a trauma-informed and person centered approach*, the street outreach team meets people where they are at, providing compassion and support, and also assists with system navigation to link people to services and supports needed.

The street outreach team often needs to engage with individuals in isolated locations, such as encampments, wooded areas, and those living in precarious housing. We do not give up and keep showing up to build trust and connection.

When to call: If someone expresses the need for services or support where they are living but there are barriers preventing them from visiting a drop-in centre. Or, if they just need the extra support. Once connected with one of R.O.C.K.'s staff, they will be connected to the services they need.

Harm Reduction: As many of our friends use substances, R.O.C.K. provides a service that allows them access to safe consumption products, such as sterile needles and pipes. R.O.C.K. also provides empty sharps bins and collects full ones. Distributing Naloxone** is another form of harm reduction. Harm reduction is more than handing out sterile supplies. A large part of harm reduction is education on how to reduce harm and ensuring a strong rapport is developed with the person to explore reductions in harm from substance use.

Harm Reduction Team: R.O.C.K.'s harm reduction team focuses on minimizing the negative health, social, and legal impacts associated with substance use and homelessness, without requiring abstinence as a condition for receiving help. Harm reduction is often viewed negatively because of its link to substance use, but harm reduction approaches are used on a daily basis by the general population: hand washing, seat belts in cars, crosswalks and bike helmets.

When to call: If someone expresses the need for harm reduction supplies but there are barriers preventing them from visiting a drop-in centre, they can be referred to R.O.C.K.'s Harm Reduction Team. Once connected with one of R.O.C.K.'s staff, they will be connected to the services they need.

* A way of supporting people that empowers the recipient of services to establish the goals on which they want to work, and have an active voice in articulating the supports they feel are necessary to achieve those goals. This is different from programs or services that impose various steps to be followed or have pre-established goals for all program participants.

** Commonly known as Narcan, Naloxone is an injection or nasal spray used to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. **It is lifesaving.** As opioids increasingly get mixed with benzodiazepine, Naloxone cannot reverse the impacts of benzodiazepine overdose.

Our Words Matter

As a community member, you may encounter situations involving individuals experiencing homelessness that leave you with questions, concerns, or even frustration. These interactions can sometimes feel complex and emotional when faced with the realities of your community.

This section provides practical tools to reframe how we speak about and approach homelessness.

Instead of:	Use this:
The homeless	People experiencing homelessness
A bum, hobo, homeless person	Person experiencing homelessness
Junkie, druggie, addict	Person that uses substances
Substance abuse/misuse	Substance use
Crazy	Person living with mental illness
Beggar	Person who is panhandling
Welfare	Person receiving income assistance

Help end the stigma surrounding people who use substances and/or are experiencing homelessness by using person first language in your day-to-day life. In addition to using more person-centered and empowering language to address stigma, the terms we recommend are also more accurate and specific to the unique situations faced by individuals. These terms are derived from the most updated research and are therefore more useful to service providers seeking to offer effective support.

Local Homelessness Resources

[R.O.C.K. \(Reach Out Chatham-Kent\)](#) provides a fulsome street outreach every Tuesday in Chatham and delivers food, harm reduction and hygiene supplies. R.O.C.K. also provides outreach 7 days a week in Chatham, focused mainly on encampment and outdoor locations, with a secondary focus on congregate living situations.

R.O.C.K. has a drop in centre in Chatham where services are also provided. There is access to a washroom, shower, laundry facilities and connections to community support.

Hours: Monday 1-5, Wednesday* 1-4PM, Thursday and Friday 1-5PM

*Community Paramedics and a Municipal Housing Worker are on site from 1-3PM on Wednesdays.

Address: 39 Richmond St, Chatham, ON N7M 1N5

Contact info: 519-351-1450 | ck@reachoutck.com | www.reachoutck.com

R.O.C.K. also operates a drop in centre in Wallaceburg, and provides street outreach every Wednesday and delivers food, harm reduction and hygiene supplies. This drop in provides the same services as the Chatham drop in, with the exception of showers and laundry facilities. Hours of operation are:

Hours: Monday*, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 1-5PM

*Community Paramedics and a Municipal Housing Worker are on site from 1-3PM on the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month.

Address: 233 Nelson St, Wallaceburg, N8A 4G5

Contact info: 226-626-8996 | ck@reachoutck.com

[Pathways on Park \(POP\)](#) is C-K's Municipally run transitional cabin project. Pathways on Park offers individuals experiencing homelessness safety, stability, and support with an end goal of improving lives and moving residents forward towards permanent housing.

If someone is interested in moving into a cabin, they can contact the Homeless Response Line at 519-354-6628 to begin the intake process.

Address: 396 Park St, Chatham, ON N7M 3S6

[Hope Haven](#) operates as a drop in centre daily, providing access to food, showers, laundry and access to community support for those experiencing homelessness.

Hours: 7 days a week, 10AM - 2PM

Address: 183 Wellington St. W, Chatham, ON N7M 2G4

Contact info: 519-351-4010 | chathamhopehaven@gmail.com

Community Paramedics are available every Wednesday from 1–3 PM at the R.O.C.K. drop in centre in Chatham, and every 1st and 3rd Monday from 1-3 at the R.O.C.K. drop in centre in Wallaceburg as part of the **Pathway2Care** partnership. This initiative focuses on building trust, fostering connections, and addressing health and social needs. Individuals are encouraged to share their concerns with the Community Paramedics, who provide support and assistance

C-K Cares (Chatham-Kent Coordinated Assessment, Referral and Evaluation Services) is designed to organize community-level responses to homelessness. Individuals and families experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis are directed to community entry points, where trained workers use a common assessment tool. This tool evaluates the individual's or family's depth of need, prioritizes them for housing or support services, and helps match them to available housing-focused interventions.

519-351-8573

Municipal warming shelters and cooling shelters: Extreme weather alerts are put out on the Municipality of Chatham-Kent's Facebook page. Further information can be found on the Chatham-Kent Notices & Closures Facebook page. Please refer to these pages for the latest updates.

<https://www.facebook.com/cknotices>

The Community Resource Document is distributed via email bi-monthly by the Chatham-Kent Community Navigators (see page 10). This guide provides lists of services available in C-K, broken down by categories such as clothing and personal needs, employment resources, food resources, health and wellness supports, etc. R.O.C.K. can provide the most up to date version of this document, or you can sign up to receive it bi-monthly via email. To do so, email ckcn@chatham-kent.ca with the subject line "Please add me to the monthly resource document mail out".

C-K Encampment Updates

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent has created a Let's Talk page to provide clear, factual information about encampments in our community. On this page you will find some frequently asked questions related to encampments in Chatham-Kent, as well as the recently approved Encampment Protocol By-Law.

<https://www.letstalkchatham-kent.ca/encampmentupdates>

How to Get Up-to-Speed on Homelessness in C-K

There are several ways you can get up-to-speed on homelessness in C-K. These will be outlined in the pages of this guide. A combination of these will help to give you the best understanding of how many people are experiencing homelessness, the services that are available, etc. You may also want to know how much money is being invested in the response to homelessness in the community, and what that money is being spent on.

Talk to Community Leadership

This is often the best starting point. There are multiple Municipal groups whose job it is to help develop the Community Plan detailing the homelessness response, monitor performance of contracted non-profits, collect and report data, convene meetings of the sector, and create policy. Much of this work is then presented to decision-makers like Municipal Council at set intervals, with recommendations. These groups would include:

- Leadership at Chatham-Kent Employment and Social Services (ESS)
- Community Navigators

What is Chatham-Kent Employment and Social Services (ESS)?

Employment and Social Services is the Service Manager for the provincially funded Homeless Prevention Program and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services Ontario Works program. Managing the delivery of social assistance under the Ontario Works Act includes providing income supports, person-centred supports, Employment Services, discretionary benefits, participation benefits and education related supports. ESS also administers the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP). HPP provides pathways and services to resolve a person's experience of homelessness and prevent it from happening in the first place.

For more information, email CKESS@chatham-kent.ca or call 519-351-8573.

What are Community Navigators?

The Community Navigator program is a partnership between ESS and the Chatham Kent Public Libraries (CKPL). The Community Navigators assist residents of Chatham-Kent with navigating systems (Housing, Education, Employment, and Income), working with technology, and connecting with supportive community services. Working together, CKPL and ESS are able to bring these services to all residents of Chatham-Kent through the 11 branches of the library.

For more information, email CKCN@chatham-kent.ca or call 519-355-1380.

Talk to Non-Profits and Services that Deliver Homelessness and/or Housing Stability Services

To get an "on-the-ground" perspective of the service response in Chatham-Kent, consider learning which non-profits and other organizations serve people experiencing homelessness in the community. Street outreach, shelter, and drop-ins can all be

important connection points. See Local Homelessness Resources on page 7 of this document.

Talk to Community Mobilization Officers

The 'Community Mobilization' Section is made up of a Sergeant and three Constables. The officers assigned to this section act as community contacts for their assigned areas. They liaison with members of Municipal Council, local boards, chambers of commerce, business improvement associations and other community groups (such as MADD, Neighbourhood Watch Groups, service clubs and schools). The officers are also actively involved in the planning stages of special events to assist organizers in ensuring each event is safe and successful for the community.

To contact a Community Police Officer, call the non-emergency CKPS line at 519-436-6600 ext. 0 (Front Desk Officer) and ask for the Community Police Officer's information.

Stay Up to Date on Municipal Council Reports and Meetings

Funding announcements that impact a municipal budget, contract awards to non-profits along with their performance are often reported to a municipal council. You can get a hold of reports from the past few years related to funding announcements, funding decisions, and performance, and get up to speed on the investment and services in the community. You can watch past council meetings on YouTube, on the YourTV Chatham-Kent channel. You can find the Council Meeting schedule on the Municipality of Chatham-Kent website.

Talk to your local Municipal Councillor

Municipal Councillors can be an entry point into building connections and getting information on the homelessness response in C-K. If a Municipal Councillor does not immediately have the Municipal Council reports on hand where homelessness was discussed, they can likely connect you to the clerk to help locate those reports.

Chatham-Kent Councillor Contact Information:

Ward 1 West Kent	Lauren Anderson 226-229-2079 lauren.anderson@chatham-kent.ca Melissa Harrigan 519-350-8254 melissa.harrigan@chatham-kent.ca
Ward 2 South Kent	Anthony Ceccacci 519-436-3206 anthony.ceccacci@chatham-kent.ca Ryan Doyle 226-229-2543 ryan.doyle@chatham-kent.ca Trevor Thompson 519-350-3715 trevor.thompson@chatham-kent.ca
Ward 3 East Kent	Morena McDonald 519-350-1971 morena.mcdonald@chatham-kent.ca John Wright 519-436-3252 john.wright@chatham-kent.ca
Ward 4 North Kent	Rhonda Jubenville 519-350-1306 rhonda.jubenville@chatham-kent.ca Jamie McGrail 519-436-3221 jamie.mcgrail@chatham-kent.ca
Ward 5 Wallaceburg	Aaron Hall 519-436-3229 aaron.hall@chatham-kent.ca Carmen McGregor 519-350-3659 carmen.mcgregor@chatham-kent.ca
Ward 6 Chatham	Connor Allin 519-350-5649 conor.allin@chatham-kent.ca Michael Bondy 519-436-3246 michael.bondy@chatham-kent.ca Marjorie Crew 519-436-3218 marjorie.crew@chatham-kent.ca Amy Finn 519-436-3216 amy.finn@chatham-kent.ca Brock McGregor 519-350-2537 brock.mcgregor@chatham-kent.ca Alysson Storey 519-350-5689 alysson.storey@chatham-kent.ca

Common Concerns and Practical Responses

Drug Poisonings

It can be distressing to see or know that people who use substances are experiencing drug poisonings in your community. Here are some things you can try:

- **If someone is actively experiencing a drug poisoning (overdose), unconscious, or it looks to be a health emergency, call 911 immediately.**
- **If you are comfortable, keep Naloxone kits on hand** in case of an emergency. These can be provided for free by R.O.C.K., C-K Public Health, or local pharmacies.
- **Consider organizing Naloxone training** for workplaces or community groups, including how to administer it. R.O.C.K. offers this training in person. The Canadian Red Cross offers an online course called First Aid for Opioid Poisoning (<https://learn.redcross.ca/p/opioid-harm-reduction>)
- **Advocate to local elected officials** for evidence-based harm reduction approaches, such as a safer consumption site where people can use substances in a designated space while being supervised and supported.

Person in Distress

It can be disturbing or jarring to encounter a person in distress. It doesn't matter if they are experiencing homelessness or not. If you see a person in distress, consider the following:

- **Is the person not responsive? Is the situation life threatening? Is the person at risk of exposure if you do not assist? Is this person in danger if they stay in the situation because of traffic, weather, etc.? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, call 911 immediately.** If it is safe, do your best to wait with the person or stay nearby.
- **If the person is responsive,** check the surrounding area for other parties to ensure the safety of the person and yourself.
- **Ask another bystander to stay with you,** while you assist.
- **Ask the person in distress if they would like you to call 911 or a family/friend to assist.**
- **Get the person a cup of water or a snack, if appropriate.** Only do this if you do not feel that 911 needs to be called.

People Displaying Behaviours That Lead You to Believe They May Be Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis

If you are concerned about the welfare and safety of a person because of their perceived mental state, or are concerned because of the behaviour of a person seems abnormal, here are some considerations:

- If the person is in active distress and you are worried they may harm themselves or others, call 911.
- If you feel safe, and a crisis response is not necessary, but you are still concerned, consider the following:
 - Ask the person if they are okay or need help
 - Get the person a cup of water and perhaps a snack
 - Ask if there is anyone you can contact for them
 - Ask a bystander or coworker to stay with you
- Consider a “See Something, Say Something” mentality, for example, if this was your elderly grandmother, would you feel comfortable leaving her in the situation? If you are concerned about exposure, health issues, or other factors, you should act as if the person is someone you care about. If you see someone in danger, say something. You could very well save their life.
- If you are worried about contacting law enforcement, follow the resources you have found in this handbook or contact non-profit service providers. Service providers don’t want to have people in unnecessary law enforcement situations either, so make a call, if you are able.
- Educate yourself on the Mental Health Act to better understand when, and under which conditions, the Act can be used, and what happens when it is used.

Damage to Property/Business and/or Theft

Damaging property or a business, as well as theft, are illegal and police matters. The homelessness response system is not equipped to intervene in these types of situations. Law enforcement has considerably more tools at their disposal. Consider the following:

- If you actively see a person damaging a property or building, or engaging in theft, take the same measures you would take if any person did the same thing, regardless of housing status.
- Work with community police to outline your concerns about damages and theft. Ask what they can do to enhance their response and help stop this from occurring.
- If theft is directly related to procuring items for day-to-day existence, work with local non-profits to organize how those items can be made available to people that are experiencing homelessness in ways that the individual does not need to interact with a business to get the item.

People Sleeping Outdoors

When people are sleeping outdoors, you may feel concerned about them and their welfare. It is also possible that where people are sleeping directly impacts a business, such as sleeping directly in front of the doorway leading into the shop. Here are some actions you can consider:

- **If you feel safe to do so, check to see if the person is conscious or having a health emergency.** You can do this verbally, keeping a safe distance, and speaking loudly. **If the person is unresponsive, the most appropriate action is calling 911.**
- **Ask yourself: is this a life-threatening situation?** Is it freezing/too hot outside and the person is at risk of exposure? Is the person in imminent danger if they stay in this place? Consider these situations to be exactly like any other person found in distress – whether they are experiencing homelessness or not.
- **Refer to Encampment Protocol By-law,** a link to this by-law can be found on page 9 of this document.
- **Contact R.O.C.K. (street outreach provider) to do a walk through of an area where people are often found sleeping.** Be specific about the times of day people thought to be experiencing homelessness are encountered, and where. The more information you can provide, the easier it is for the street outreach provider to time their engagement, and the approach they will use.
- **Help advocate for additional support or housing resources in the community,** if warranted. Sometimes it isn't that the homelessness response sector doesn't want to help or deliver programming, it's that they lack the human resources or funding to deliver the services needed. Start as allies, finding common ground. Try not to make assumptions on what the service provider can/cannot do.

Encampment Establishing or Growing

Encampments are very diverse, as are the people that live in them. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to yield sustainable, long-term results. Each encampment needs to be assessed by social service professionals, often in combination with first responders and health professionals. Some things for your consideration to respond to encampments that are establishing or growing in the community:

- **Ask the local non-profits whether or not the shelter is currently full** as it may be prompting people to sleep outdoors. If the shelter is full, join the advocacy efforts to increase temporary shelter space for people.
- **Become familiar with the Encampment Protocol By-law,** the link to this by-law is provided on page 9 of this document.
- **Speak with local non profits** such as R.O.C.K., who engage daily with people living in encampments.
- **If the encampment is on private property,** property owners can exercise their rights related to trespassing, if necessary.
- **Consider refraining from clearing the encampment or asking individuals to move** on before trying other options such as contacting a local non profit. This doesn't resolve their homelessness or the issue of encampments. It is just an expensive and trauma-inducing way of shuffling people along.
- **If there are public or physical health concerns regarding people residing in the encampment,** include public health and other health providers in your convening of a meeting to talk about response and community protocols.

Street Involved Activities (e.g., panhandling, drug dealing)

Street involved activities can be unsettling for people who witness them. Some street involved activities are legal, while others are not. Sometimes it is how the activity is done that determines the legality. For example, asking people for money is legal. Stopping traffic to ask for money is illegal. Street work is sometimes a means of survival for individuals facing barriers to traditional forms of employment.

- **If there are clearly illegal activities like drug dealing, work with police** to determine what their response will be. These types of activities are outside the purview of homelessness service providers.
- **If there are activities that seem to violate local by-laws, work with your municipal enforcement** to understand how they go about investigating and responding to by-law violations. Ask how municipal enforcement integrates their response with social service providers - otherwise enforcement of by-laws can become adversarial and make it more difficult to resolve the situations.
- **Host a forum for fellow community members to engage in conversation with service providers and first responders** to discuss your concerns, as well as to better understand the underlying reasons why people are engaged in these activities. Try to listen so as to understand. You may gain more traction helping people experiencing homelessness advocate to have their needs met than going solely down an enforcement route, which is unlikely to get a long-lasting, desired effect.

Needles/Sharps

Whether for medical purposes or the use of injecting substances, needles present a hazard if not disposed of properly. Here are some things you can do:

- **If there are needles on private property**, you can contact R.O.C.K. for a clean up request at 519-351-1450.
- **If there are needles on public property**, you can contact the **Municipality of Chatham-Kent at 311 for a clean up request**. For more information on the disposal of needles in C-K, visit: <https://ckphu.com/disposal-of-needles/>
- **Ensure there are biohazard containers readily available in public areas**. Ensure there is regular pick-up and replacement of the biohazard containers. Your local public health department, harm reduction service providers and street outreach providers, can often help with this, as can your local municipal Councillor.
- **Host a harm reduction seminar or workshop for your business or community group**. R.O.C.K. provides peer led Harm Reduction training. R.O.C.K. can outline how and why they deliver harm reduction. Ask them for strategies to reduce unsafe needle disposal, and how you can work together to help achieve those aims.

Bathroom Access & Human Waste

Everyone has to “go” sometime. People experiencing homelessness are not an exception. But where are you supposed to do your business if you don’t have a place with a bathroom? Here are some considerations:

- **Contact the Municipality of Chatham-Kent at 311 if there is human waste that needs to be cleaned up on public property.**
- **Speak with non-profit service providers such as drop ins about bathroom access for people that need it.** Is there a way to fast-track access to the bathroom within those facilities when a person that is staying outdoors needs access to the bathroom?

People Looking for Food from Restaurants

Food insecurity can be an issue for people experiencing homelessness in our community. Consider the following:

- **Determine whether the restaurants see the request for food as an issue.** If it isn’t an issue for them, there may be nothing for you to do. Distribution of food is a personal choice. It is not illegal to make food available to people.
- **Consider approaching the person to see if they need assistance.** If someone is looking for food, provide information from the Community Resource Document that includes meal programs and food access. More information about this can be found on page 8 of this guide.
- **Develop consistent and informational talking points in response to requests for food,** if it cannot be provided on site. For example, “Sorry, we are unable to provide food; however, I can provide you with some information about meal programs in the community, if you would like.”

People Going Through Dumpsters

People experiencing homelessness may go through a dumpster for a host of reasons - from looking for food to identifying valuables that they may be able to use or sell. If this is concerning to you, consider one or more of the following:

- **Approaching the person to see if they need assistance.** If someone is looking for food, this is an opportunity to connect with the Community Resource Document to access the local food bank or meal service in town.
- **If people are sleeping in the dumpster,** it can be very unsafe and result in death if trash is collected and they are inside. It is often engagement with police that is required if street outreach workers are unsuccessful at convincing people that the dumpster is not a safe place to sleep.
- **If people are not going into a dumpster, but are going through municipal trash bins or business trash,** the same strategies as noted above should be considered.

Garbage and Abandoned Belongings

Concerns about trash, especially related to where people experiencing homelessness live or congregate is a frequent concern. Some of the things you can try are:

- **Getting involved in the weekly clean up** that is facilitated by The Historic Downtown Chatham BIA.
- **If personal belongings seem to be abandoned**, consider how long they have been abandoned. A couple of hours without seeing a person with their belongings may just mean the person is currently elsewhere. However, abandoning items for a day or more can be a sign that the person has moved on. Work with street outreach to determine if the person is coming back, (for example, if the person is currently hospitalized or incarcerated for a short period of time). If no one knows the whereabouts of the person and the belongings have been left behind for 48 hours or more, consider implementing a multi-stakeholder protocol. Steps in that protocol may include:
 - Street outreach or another service provider scans belongings (without touching the belongings) for personal effects and valuables like money, medication, or identification that is in plain sight.
 - Once personal effects and valuables have been scanned for items of value in plain sight, ask the service provider if they are able to make contact with the person that owns the items if they were able to be identified. that the belongings are considered abandoned and if not claimed within 24 hours will be removed on or after that time.
 - Then, it is up to the Municipality (call 311) or the property owner to take care of removing the belongings that have been abandoned, depending on which type of property the items were left on.

Using Private Businesses to Get Out of the Elements

At different times of the year, weather in Ontario can have an impact on people experiencing homelessness, when they are outdoors. As such, when it is cold, snowing, raining, windy, or too hot, people experiencing homelessness may seek an opportunity to get out of the elements, and want to use private businesses as the location to do so. If this is an issue for you and you do not want or are uncomfortable with people experiencing homelessness seeking reprieve from the elements indoors in an establishment, consider the following:

- **Know where local drop-in centres, warming centres, or cooling centres are located and share that information with people experiencing homelessness.** These resources are on page 7 of this document.
- **Ensure that people have transportation to get to where they can be inside.** If a ride is needed, or people need a bus ticket, work with service providers and Employment and Social Services to see if this is possible.
- **Develop a decision-matrix of the extent of the weather situation, what constitutes an emergency,** and whether there are any weather circumstances, especially

those that are temporary in nature (e.g. a tornado warning) where you may allow or even encourage people experiencing homelessness to come into a business.

This information was last updated in October of 2025. Details provided are accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of publication. However, information is subject to change. For the most up-to-date details, please contact R.O.C.K.



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