

HYI Tenant Survey

Socio-Economic Profile and Tenant Satisfaction Report

Introduction

Housing York Inc. (HYI) tenants live in all nine municipalities in York Region. In October 2006, the corporation owned 1,876 units of non-profit housing, which are located in 29 communities across the Region. The HYI Tenant Survey was developed to help improve and enhance services to HYI tenants and improve the quality of life for vulnerable residents in York Region.

Background

One of the objectives in the 2006 HYI Business Plan and Budget was to develop a data collection framework to complete a tenant profile to better understand and serve the HYI client base. In the spring of 2006, the staff of Policy and Program Support Services Branch and Housing Services Branch began work to develop a socio-economic profile of HYI tenants.

After an in-depth assessment of both HYI databases, it was determined that the existing data sources would only provide basic demographic data, property information, and limited income data. Therefore, only a limited number of variables would be included in a socio-economic profile by using existing HYI data. It was decided that conducting a survey of HYI tenants would provide the data needed to produce an in-depth socio-demographic profile of HYI tenants and properly assess tenant satisfaction.

The Policy and Program Support Services Branch designed the HYI Tenant Survey as a baseline survey, which can be repeated every few years. This means that data collected can be used as a benchmark to track progress in client satisfaction and tenant socio-economic trends.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of Directors of HYI of the results from the HYI Tenant Survey that took place in the fall of 2006. The survey was conducted to help develop a socio-economic profile of the HYI tenant population and to assess tenant satisfaction with HYI services. The results provide insight on the tenants who make up the HYI population. Having a better understanding of tenant needs enables HYI to continually improve upon the services provided.

Methodology

The research was conducted by using a self-administered mail-out survey. The survey package contained a letter that outlined the reasons for conducting the survey, instructions for completing the survey and assured confidentiality. In order to increase tenant participation, posters were placed in all HYI buildings to notify tenants of the upcoming survey. Tenants were also provided incentives for completing the survey.

As HYI housing is organized into Family and Seniors Units, each with unique needs and issues, two separate surveys were developed. Both surveys were comprised of approximately 40 questions in the following categories: demographic household information and tenant satisfaction. The family survey included additional questions on employment and children/youth, while the senior survey asked additional disability questions.

The HYI Tenant Survey was mailed to all 1,867 HYI units in October 2006, which resulted in 902 completed surveys (a 48% response rate). Of those, 20% (184 respondents out of 532 family units) were completed by family units and the other 80% (718 respondents out of 1,335 senior units) from senior units. This provides a statistical representation of both tenant populations, considered accurate between +/- 2.3%, 19 times out of 20.

Tenant confidentiality was maintained throughout the survey process. Individual survey responses or personal information was not shared with any HYI staff. Results are provided in aggregate form in this report to ensure confidentiality. Participants were also made aware that participation in the survey would not affect their eligibility for housing assistance in the future.

It should also be noted, that in a few cases, questions were asked that allowed respondents to select all answers that apply to them. Therefore, where multiple responses were given, final percentages will be over 100%.

Data Limitations

The data collected provides HYI with statistically significant information that is useful for developing a socio-economic profile of current HYI tenants. It also establishes a baseline that can be used for future data collection. However, data limitations may exist where respondents may have misunderstood the question being asked, or where multiple responses were provided where only one response was asked for.

Results

This section of the report provides a detailed summary of the survey results for both the family and senior respondents.

Family HYI Tenants

The following section details the HYI Tenants Survey results for the family respondents.

Socio-Economic Profile of Family HYI Tenants

Age, Sex and Living Situation (Family)

Of those surveyed, 82% of family respondents are female and 18% are male. Four age categories were used to group the family respondents; 46% of family respondents are between the ages of 25 and 44, while another 44% are between 45 and 64. Most (47%) of the family respondents are single parents, while 19% are married couples with children and 15% live alone.

Most family respondents live in Newmarket (51%), followed by Richmond Hill (18%), Markham (16%) and Georgina (13%). The majority (77%) of family respondents are Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) tenants, and most (45%) have lived at their current HYI address for five or more years.

Ethnicity and Language (Family)

Immigrants accounted for 31% of the family respondents. Of these, 81% have been living in Canada for 10 or more years, 11% between five and nine years and 8% have immigrated to Canada within the last 4 years. The United Kingdom, the Caribbean and South America are the most common places of birth for family respondents not born in Canada. However, it should be noted that the number of respondents from these countries is very small.

Survey respondents were also asked to identify which ethnic or cultural group their ancestors belong to. The most common ethnic origins cited among family respondents are Canadian, English, Irish, Scottish, German and French.

Of those surveyed, an overwhelming majority (91%) of family respondents indicated English as the most common language spoken at home (**Note:** Other language data was too small to report).

Education, Employment and Income (Family)

Over half (63%) of family respondents have attained post secondary education of some sort. Thirty-three percent of family respondents have a college diploma/certificate and another 16% have a university degree or higher. Twenty-two percent of family respondents have their high school graduation certificate and only 14% have not completed high school.

Almost half (46%) of the family respondents are currently employed. Of these, 69% are working full-time and 25% work part-time. Most work in the health, education or social services sector (22%), followed by administration (15%) and skilled/general labour (14%). Disability or illness (54%) was the main reason cited by family respondents who are not currently working, followed by unemployment (17%).

Thirty-three percent of family respondents have another household member that is currently employed. Of these, the majority are children (56%), followed by spouses (52%). Most (67%) are working full-time, 20% work part-time, while another 14% are casually employed.

The highest reported (29%) total household income category for family respondents is between \$10,000 and \$19,999, while another 27% report a total household income less than \$10,000. Six percent of family respondents report a total household income of \$60,000 or higher.

Market Rent and Rent-Geared-to-Income (Family)

Of the family respondents who pay market rent (23%), 80% are currently employed, and 29% report a total household income of \$60,000 or higher. The majority (62%) have a college diploma/certificate or higher.

Of the family respondents who are rent-geared-to-income (RGI) tenants (77%), 36% are currently employed. The highest reported (36%) total household income category is between \$10,000 and \$19,999, while 88% report a total household income less than \$30,000. Similar to market rent family tenants, 50% hold at minimum a trade's diploma/certificate. Of these, 33% have a college diploma/certificate and 13% have a university degree or higher.

Children and Youth (19 years of age or under) (Family)

On average, there are two children per family household and 85% of children are 19 years of age or under. The majority (64%) of children are attending elementary school, while 41% are in high school and 9% are enrolled in college or university. Twenty-two percent of children are in childcare.

Almost half (48%) of the children are currently participating in extra-curricular or community-based programs. The most common activities are sports (44%), summer camps (37%) and after-school programs (28%).

The majority (79%) of children are not working. Of the children who are working, 11% work part-time, 5% are casually employed and 4% work full time.

Disabilities (Family)

Of those surveyed, 38% of family respondents have a long-term disability that limits their daily activities. Of these, most (50%) report having a physical disability and only 16% are currently employed. Twenty-two percent of family respondents have a household member with a long-term disability that limits their daily activities.

Activities (Family)

Twenty-one percent of the family respondents participate in support programs/activities offered at their HYI residence. Of these, 61% are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the programs/activities offered. More (37%) family respondents are participating in support programs/activities offered through the community.

Family Tenant Satisfaction**Satisfaction with Housing (Family)**

Family respondents are most satisfied with the location (79%), size of their unit (79%), and parking (75%). Fewer family respondents are satisfied with building security (40%), quality of the neighbourhood (40%) and the condition of the unit (53%).

Family respondents provided many positive comments about their homes. Several family respondents mentioned that they are thankful to have a home, feel it is worth the rent, and it is better than previous housing they have lived in.

The main concerns expressed by family respondents are related to the quality of the neighbourhood and building security. Suggestions given by family tenants to address these concerns include: additional security, ensuring outdoor lighting is bright and working and providing clean/safe play areas for children.

Contact with Property Management (Family)

The majority (82%) of family respondents have contacted the property management staff within the last 12 months. The main reason for contacting the property management was repairs (73%). Other reasons for contact included: rent issues (8%), neighbour issues (5%) and noise complaints (4%).

Of the family respondents who contacted the property management, 60% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were helpful and 58% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they provided quality service, while 26% “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that the property management was easy to contact.

Comments that speak to overall service provided by the property management are positive. Terms used to describe the quality of service provided by the property management included: excellent, great, helpful, friendly, and pleasant.

The main concern among family respondents is the property management’s ability to deal with requests, especially requests for repairs. This is followed by a concern that it can be difficult to contact the property management.

Keeping Tenants Informed (Family)

The majority (60%) of family respondents felt “informed” or “very informed” about things that might affect them as a tenant, 28% felt “somewhat informed” and 12% felt “not at all informed”.

Of the family respondents who provided suggestions on what HYI should keep them more informed about, most indicated they would like more information about repairs and maintenance. Family respondents also indicated they would like to be notified of new changes that might affect them as tenants.

Overall Satisfaction (Family)

The majority (58%) of family respondents are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the overall services provided by HYI. The majority (67%) are also “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their housing unit.

The top suggestion for how HYI can improve their service is related to repairs and maintenance, in particular, completing work requests in a timely manner. Another common suggestion was for better communication with tenants. Family respondents also suggest having full time security at their building.

Senior HYI Tenants

The following section details the HYI Tenant Satisfaction Survey results for the senior respondents.

Socio-Economic Profile of Senior HYI Tenants

Age, Sex and Living Situation (Senior)

The majority (79%) of senior respondents are female and 21% are male. Four age categories were used to group the senior respondents; 40% of senior respondents are between the ages of 65 and 74, 35% are between 75 and 84 and 18% are 85 years or older. The majority (84%) of senior respondents live alone, and 14% are married couples without children.

Most senior respondents live in Newmarket (31%) and Richmond Hill (28%), followed by Georgina (15%) and Aurora (13%). The majority (93%) of senior respondents are RGI tenants, and most (31%) have lived at their current HYI address for 10 or more years.

Ethnicity and Language (Senior)

Thirty-nine percent of senior respondents are immigrants to Canada. Of these, 90% have been living in Canada for 10 or more years and the other 10% between 5 and 9 years. The United Kingdom, Russia and the Former Soviet Union and Germany are the most common places of birth for senior respondents not born in Canada.

Survey respondents were also asked to identify which ethnic or cultural group their ancestors belong to. The most common ethnic origins cited by senior respondents are English, Canadian, Irish, Scottish, German, French and Russian.

Of those surveyed, the majority (90%) of senior respondents indicated English as the most common language spoken at home. Ten percent (70 respondents) of senior respondents speak a language other than English most often at home. For these 70 respondents, Russian (23%), Cantonese (14%) and Persian (10%) are the most common languages spoken.

Education and Income (Senior)

Senior respondents have lower levels of education compared to family respondents. Eleven percent of senior respondents have a college diploma/certificate and only 8% have a university degree or higher. Twenty-eight percent of senior respondents have their high school graduation certificate; however, 34% did not complete high school.

The highest reported (65%) total household income category for senior respondents is between \$10,000 and \$19,999, while another 17% report a total household income less than \$10,000. Five percent of senior respondents report a total household income of \$30,000 or higher.

Market Rent and Rent-Geared-to-Income (Senior)

Of the senior respondents who pay market rent (7%), the highest (48%) reported total household income category is between \$20,000 and \$29,999. The level of education attained is lower than family respondents who pay market rent, 29% have a college diploma/certificate or higher.

The household income of senior respondents who are RGI tenants is almost always (97%) less than \$30,000. Of these, 69% have a total household income between \$10,000 and \$19,999. Many (34%) senior respondents paying RGI have less than a high school graduation certificate.

Disabilities (Senior)

Similar to family respondents, 39% of senior respondents have a long-term disability that limits their daily activities. Of these, the majority (68%) have a physical disability, followed by disabilities resulting from accident, illness or disease (19%). Twenty-two percent of senior respondents have a household member with a long-term disability that limits their daily activities.

Activities (Senior)

Thirty-nine percent of senior respondents participate in support programs/activities offered at their HYI residence. Of these, the majority (80%) are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the programs/activities offered. Thirty-two percent of senior respondents are participating in programs/activities offered through the community.

Senior Tenant Satisfaction

Satisfaction with Housing (Senior)

Senior respondents were most satisfied with the location (90%) and size of their unit (84%) and quality of their neighbourhood (90%). Fewer senior respondents are satisfied with and building common areas (78%), parking (75%) and building security (73%).

Senior respondents provided many positive comments. They are happy with improvements that have been made to buildings. Most concerns are related to maintenance and repairs, most notably about the condition of the carpeting within the building.

Contact with Property Management Staff (Senior)

The majority (58%) of senior respondents have contacted the property management in the last 12 months. Repairs (61%) were the main reason for contact. Other reasons for contact included rent issues (9%), general inquiries (5%), neighbour issues (4%) and noise complaints (3%).

The majority (72%) of senior respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the property management was helpful. In addition, the majority (69%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the property management provided quality service. Only 20% “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement that the property management was easy to contact.

There were many positive comments stating that the property management staff was excellent, fixed their problem and provided overall quality service. In several instances the property management was described as helpful and friendly.

The main suggestion mentioned by senior respondents was that they would like the property management to follow up on maintenance and repair requests and make sure they have been completed.

Keeping Tenants Informed (Senior)

The majority (72%) of senior respondents felt “informed” or “very informed” about things that might affect them as a tenant, 23% felt “somewhat informed” and only 5% felt they were “not at all informed”.

Suggestions provided by senior respondents on how HYI could keep tenants more informed included: repairs, maintenance and upcoming work. Senior respondents would like to be kept informed through meetings, notices, the bulletin board, letters or newsletters.

Overall Satisfaction (Senior)

A strong majority (81%) of senior respondents are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the overall services provided by HYI, and 87% are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their housing unit overall.

The most common suggestion on how HYI can improve their service is related to repairs and maintenance, primarily painting. Suggestions on improving communication, cleaning, security and safety followed. A few respondents raised concerns about the accessibility of their homes. One suggestion included having automatic doors for wheelchair access.

Profile of HYI Sub-Groups

Further analysis was completed for the two most prominent groups of the HYI tenant population: senior women and single parents.

Senior Women

The majority of senior respondents are female (79%). Almost all of these women live alone (91%). The vast majority (94%) are RGI tenants, and 85% have a total household income less than \$20,000. Many of these women have a limited education – 36% did not complete high school. In addition, 39% have a long-term disability that limits their daily activities.

Single Parents

Single parents represent almost half (47%) of all family respondents. Almost half (46%) of all single parents are currently employed, and 53% report having a college diploma/certificate or higher. The majority (87%) of single parents report a total household income that is less than \$30,000, of these, 65% report a total household income that is less than \$20,000. Almost all (90%) are RGI tenants.

Comparison between Family and Senior Tenant Satisfaction

Both family and senior respondents are most satisfied with the location and size of their housing unit and least satisfied with building security. The majority of respondents have contacted their Property Manager in the last 12 months, and the main reason for contact by both family and senior respondents was repairs. The majority of respondents agreed that the Property Manager was helpful and provided quality service.

Although the majority of respondents do feel informed about things that affect them as a tenant, differences exist between family and senior respondents on how they would like to be kept informed. Family respondents would prefer newsletters or notices, while senior tenants suggested tenant meetings. Family tenants are most concerned about repairs and maintenance, while seniors are most concerned about cleaning.

Implications

HYI initiated the 2006 Tenant Survey as part of its commitment to provide high quality customer service to HYI residents balanced with financial accountability. Understanding the abilities and vulnerabilities of HYI residents and responding to

their diversity are also central to HYI's Statement of Principles as a housing provider and property manager.

The survey results provide rich data for HYI to identify priorities for service planning and program development within HYI's budget and business planning cycle. Raising awareness of the survey results for HYI staff will be a key first step in this process through distributing summary fact sheets to all HYI staff and organizing staff workshops to review key results and gain feedback on potential areas for service improvements and enhanced communications with HYI tenants.

It is also recommended that the information developed through the survey be used to establish a baseline for tracking tenant satisfaction and the socio-economic characteristics over time. Repeating the survey at regular intervals (e.g. every three years) will provide valuable data to assess the effectiveness of service improvements and resident needs.

A few preliminary issues and observations for service planning include:

- Overall HYI tenants are satisfied with HYI as a housing provider and property manager, but there are areas where improvements could be considered in relation to on-going repairs and maintenance and tenant relations. Senior tenants placed a high priority on the cleanliness and appearance of common areas and may require different approaches for tenant communications than family respondents.
- HYI is providing housing options to a range of household types in York Region (e.g. young families and more mature households, couples and people living alone), but particularly to some of York Region's most economically vulnerable populations – low income, elderly, single women, and single parent families with school-aged children. According to 2001 Census data, low income rates for these populations are considerably higher than that of the total population – almost 2 times higher in the case of women over 75 and single parents and 4.6 times higher for women over 75 living alone. Without HYI, many of these households would struggle to maintain stable housing situations.
- Vulnerable populations are often at risk of social isolation and face barriers to participate in their communities and the labour market for those who are working age. Initiatives to increase tenant participation in on-site activities and awareness of community supports available to them could also be considered.
- The survey also shows that many HYI tenants reflect the broader population characteristics of York Region residents. Many are immigrants, have post-secondary levels of education, and regularly work either full or part-time jobs in a variety of service, administrative, or business sectors. Continuing or

enhancing the availability of mixed income housing that is well-integrated into the broader community is an important role for HYI in promoting social cohesion and meeting the needs of the low-to-moderate income working households.

- HYI is providing housing stability to many residents. However, the current wait list for RGI housing may be posing a barrier in responding to affordable housing needs of newer residents to York Region such as recent immigrants, who make up a small percentage of HYI tenants that responded to the survey.
- Ongoing accessibility planning will remain important to respond to the needs of HYI tenants with disabilities.

Conclusion

It is important to understand the client base that HYI serves in order to ensure effective current program delivery and anticipate future needs. The survey has provided an opportunity to collect data on tenant satisfaction and help to develop a socio-economic profile of the tenant population. The HYI Survey was developed as a baseline survey, which could be repeated every few years to compare demographic trends and track progress in HYI tenant satisfaction. The results also provide an opportunity to learn about the tenants who make up the HYI population and better understand their needs, in order to continually improve the services we provide.

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