

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

Housing York Inc.
May 9, 2007
Report of the
General Manager

HOUSING YORK INC TENANT SURVEY

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Board of Housing York Inc. (HYI) support this as a baseline survey and further support for the administration of future surveys at regular (three-year) intervals.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Board of Directors of HYI or the results of the HYI Tenant Survey which took place in the fall of 2006.

This report highlights some of the key findings from the survey. A detailed summary of the results and implications for HYI service planning are provided in the *HYI Tenant Survey 2006 Report* prepared by Community Services and Housing staff as a background report (*see Attachment 1*).

3. BACKGROUND

Having a better understanding of who tenants are and what they need was one of the objectives of the 2006 HYI Business Plan. To do this, the Community Services and Housing Department's Housing Services and Policy and Program Support Services Branches partnered to design and conduct a survey of HYI tenants. The primary goals of the survey were to learn the social and economic makeup of current tenants and to assess tenant satisfaction with HYI as a housing provider and property manager. This information will help staff use resources even more effectively and improve service as well as strengthen tenant relations and communications.

4. ANALYSIS

The HYI Tenant Survey took place in October 2006 through a mail-out to all 1,867 HYI units, which resulted in 902 completed surveys. This 48% response rate is unusually high. This strong statistically representative sample of the HYI tenant population makes it possible to draw accurate conclusions about the socio-economic profile of HYI tenants, their needs and satisfaction rates.

Overall, HYI tenants are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their housing units (83%) and the services (76%) provided by HYI.

4.1 Methodology

The survey was conducted by using a mail-out survey which tenants filled in themselves. To increase tenant participation, posters were placed in all HYI buildings to notify tenants of the upcoming survey. Tenants were also provided with small incentives for completing the survey.

4.1.2 Separate Family and Senior Surveys

As HYI housing is organized into family and seniors housing facilities, and each has unique needs and issues, two separate surveys were developed. Both surveys had approximately 40 questions covering demographic household information and tenant satisfaction. Both surveys had a number of similar questions. However, the family survey had more in-depth questions on employment and children/youth, while the senior survey asked additional disability questions.

4.1.3 Response Rate

One hundred and eighty-four or 35% of HYI’s 532 family units responded to the survey. Seven hundred and eighteen or 54% of HYI’s 1,335 senior units responded to the survey. This means of the 902 surveys completed, 20% were completed by family units and 80% came from senior units. This provides a statistical representation of both tenant populations, considered accurate between +/- 2.3%, 19 times out of 20.

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 are over 100%.

4.1.4 Tenant Confidentiality

Tenant confidentiality was maintained throughout the survey process. Individual survey responses and personal information was not shared with any HYI staff – and this information was seen only by Policy and Program Support Services staff directly connected to the project. Participants were also made aware that participation in the survey would not affect their eligibility for housing assistance in the future.

4.2 Key Findings

4.2.1 HYI Senior Survey

Key findings of the HYI Senior Survey are:

- 81% of senior respondents are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the overall services provided by HYI.
- 65% of senior respondents reported a total household income between \$10,000 and \$19,999.

- 39% of senior respondents are immigrants to Canada. The primary countries of origin are: The United Kingdom, Russia (and the Former Soviet Union) and Germany.

Senior respondents reported a high level of satisfaction (81%) with the overall services provided by HYI and their housing units (87%). Respondents were also asked to provide suggestions where improvements could be made. The most common areas cited included repairs and maintenance followed by communication.

The majority of senior respondents were female (79%). Almost all of these women live alone (91%). The vast majority of senior respondents (94%) are Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) tenants, and 65% have a total household income between \$10,000 and \$19,999.

As noted above, 39% of senior respondents are immigrants to Canada. This is very similar in proportion to York Region's 2001 Census total population. Their primary countries of origin are The United Kingdom, Russia (and the Former Soviet Union) and Germany. The majority (90%) of senior respondents speak English most often at home. Less than half (39%) of senior respondents reported having a long-term disability. There were also 22% that had included a household member with a disability. Thirty-nine percent of senior respondents participate in support programs/activities offered at their HYI residence.

4.2.2 HYI Family Survey

Key findings of the HYI Family Survey are:

- 58% of family respondents are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the overall services provided by HYI.
- 47% of family respondents are single parents. Of these, 87% reported a total household income that is less than \$30,000.
- Almost half (46%) of family respondents are currently working.
- 49% of family respondents have a college diploma/certificate or higher.
- 31% of family respondents are immigrants to Canada. The primary countries of origin are: The United Kingdom, the Caribbean and South America.

Family respondents also reported satisfaction with HYI, but not to the same degree as senior respondents. The majority (58%) of family respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with the overall services provided by HYI and their housing unit (67%). Security and the quality of neighbourhood are potential areas of concern, with only 40% of family respondents reporting being satisfied in both cases. Like senior respondents, family respondents also reported repairs and maintenance, and communications as areas for improvement, similar to those cited by senior respondents.

Family respondents reflect a mix of household types, including single parents (47%), married couples with children (19%), and people living alone (15%). Low and moderate income households can be seen in both RGI and Market Rent units. They fit the general profile of low income residents in York Region in that many have post-secondary levels

of education (49%), and 46% of family respondents work regularly in either full or part-time jobs in a wide variety of employment sectors.

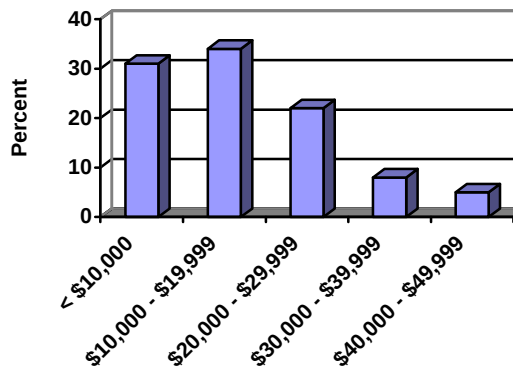
Immigrants accounted for 31% of the family respondents. Their primary countries of origin are The United Kingdom, the Caribbean and South America. However, it should be noted that the number of respondents from these countries are very small. Of these, 81% have been living in Canada for 10 or more years. An overwhelming majority (91%) of family respondents indicated English as the most common language spoken at home.

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. 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%).

Single parents represent almost half (47%) of all family respondents. Forty-six percent of these are currently employed and 53% have a college diploma/certificate or higher. The majority (87%) 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.

Note: includes both Market rent and RGI tenants

Figure 1
Single Parents Total Household Income



Similar to senior respondents, 38% of family respondents reported having a disability. Twenty-two percent also reported having a household member with a disability. Twenty-one percent of the family respondents participate in support programs/activities offered at their HYI residence.

4.3 How HYI will Use the Information

The survey results provide rich new data for HYI to better understand the backgrounds of tenants and identify priorities for service planning and program development. 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.

The information developed through the survey is an excellent baseline for tracking tenant satisfaction and changing 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.

Since the survey was completed, a number of operational changes were made that will partially respond to the key areas tenants think we could improve our service. In December 2006, HYI reorganized the property management unit to deliver a “one window” service to tenants. Property Managers are now responsible for all areas of the leasing relationship with tenants. This service delivery model is expected to simplify communication with tenants and reduce the number of staff a tenant needs to speak with. Additionally, a permanent notice was posted throughout each property with the key staff names, contact information and their area of responsibility.

Staff will follow up on, gather more detailed information and consider options for improving service areas for repairs and communication. Consideration could be given to holding tenant focus group sessions in order to achieve this.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Enhancing tenant services would need to be considered in the context of the financial resources available to HYI. As a social housing provider, HYI is limited financially by the legislated funding model, using benchmarks for revenues and expenses.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

HYI tenants live in all nine area municipalities in York Region. Providing quality services and supports contributes to the quality of life for HYI tenants across the Region and the betterment of the broader community.

7. CONCLUSION

It is important to gauge tenant satisfaction. It is equally important to understand the client base that HYI serves in order to appropriately allocate resources, have effective current program delivery and anticipate future needs. This HYI survey is one of only a few major surveys that has comprehensively done these things. HYI also now has a baseline survey, which could be repeated every few years to compare demographic trends and track progress in HYI tenant satisfaction.

HYI provides housing options for a range of household types. 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. This, and future tenant surveys, will be valuable tools that will help to support HYI goals.

For more information on this report contact Sylvia Patterson, Director of the Housing Services Branch in the Community Services and Housing Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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Attachment – 1

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