



St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services Service Review

February 25, 2025

Contents of the Report Presented by:

- **Heather Sheridan**, Director of Social Services

- **Joanne Weber**, Manager of Ontario Works

- **Danielle Neilson**, Manager of Housing Stability Services

- **Teresa Sulowski**, Manager of Children's Services

A photograph of two hands reaching towards each other against a bright blue sky with soft white clouds. The hands are positioned in the lower-left and center-left areas of the frame, with fingers slightly curled as if about to grasp each other. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Ontario Works

What is Ontario Works (OW)?

- Ontario Works provides financial assistance for basic living expenses
- Helps make connections to employment services and stability supports
- OW eligibility is based on financial need and willingness to participate

Who can apply?

- Applicants must be Ontario residents and meet criteria including income and asset limits

Application process:

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (Centralized Intake) handles:

- Initial eligibility decisions, internal reviews, decision notices, payments, and appeals most intakes

Municipalities manage:

- Selected intakes such as youth under 18, reinstates under 3 months, Temporary Care Assistance, and Emergency Assistance, as well as ongoing eligibility review for active cases

New and easy online application for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

Applying online is:

- **easy** - use anytime, anywhere on a smartphone or computer
- **accessible** - no need to go to an office - applicants can verify their identity and sign their application online
- **fast** - applicants can apply in 20 to 30 minutes



You can help applicants by:

- sharing the online application poster or info sheet with people who may be seeking financial assistance
- helping them apply online at ontario.ca/SocialAssistance

Documents needed to get started

Applicants need just a few identification, tax and financial documents, such as:

- Social Insurance Number (SIN)
- OHIP card (Ontario health card)
- birth certificate
- immigration papers
- tax returns
- banking information

We're here to help

If applicants need help, they can contact us Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at 1-888-999-1142 or TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Applicants can get started at ontario.ca/SocialAssistance

Centralized Intake Process - What Happens After I Apply?



Track Your Application

Online:

[Application Status Tracker](#)

Phone: 1-888-999-1142

MyBenefits Account



Initial Payments

Grant decision made by
Centralized Intake

First payment issued
Direct Deposit or Cheque



No Response Letter

Centralized Intake makes contact **for missing info**

No response in **4 days** →
Application withdrawn

Client responds within **30 days** → **Application backdated**



Denials & Appeals

Ineligible letter includes appeal instructions (check letter for details)

Internal reviews handled by Provincial staff



Follow-Up Appointment

Must meet a **caseworker within 30 days in West Lorne, Aylmer or St. Thomas**

Advised **what to bring & who must attend**

Provided with ongoing **case management services and supports**



File Closure

When no longer eligible for assistance, any **overpayments are transferred to the Province for collection**

St. Thomas-Elgin Ontario Works staff determine initial eligibility for applicants under 18, Temporary Care Assistance, and Emergency Assistance. They will also process reinstates.

OW Benefits & Caseworker Supports

Benefits for Ontario Works Recipients:

Financial Assistance

- Covers rent, food, clothing, and essentials

Health Benefits

- Prescription drugs, medical travel, and special diets

Discretionary Benefits

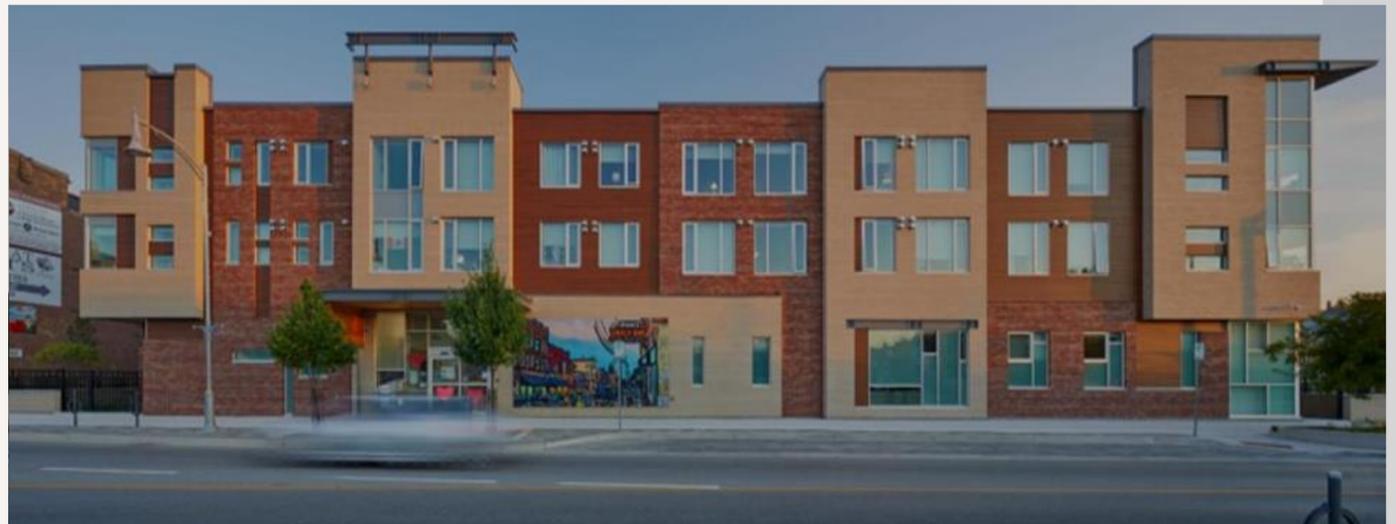
- Basic medical supplies, vision/dental care, and funerals

Stability Support

- Necessary items that lead towards employability

Caseworker Supports:

- Assess client needs and connect to benefits
- Co-develop a self-sufficiency plan
- Refer to employment services and training
- Connect clients to services to meet their needs
- Monitor progress and adjust plans
- Act as a gateway to other income supports



Myths vs. Facts about Ontario Works

-  **Myth: People on Ontario Works don't want to work.**
 **Fact:** Many recipients actively seek employment and participate in training or education programs. Some face barriers like health issues, caregiving responsibilities, or homelessness.
-  **Myth: Ontario Works provides enough to cover all basic needs.**
 **Fact:** Ontario Works provides financial assistance, but the amount is often not enough to fully cover rent, food, and other essentials. Many recipients rely on additional community resources.
-  **Myth: Once you're on Ontario Works, you stay on it forever.**
 **Fact:** Most people use Ontario Works as a temporary support while they transition to employment, education, or other assistance programs.
-  **Myth: Everyone on Ontario Works is employable.**
 **Fact:** Some recipients have disabilities, chronic illnesses, or other challenges that limit their ability to work. Ontario Works helps connect them with the appropriate supports.
-  **Myth: People on Ontario Works don't work.**
 **Fact:** Many Ontario Works recipients work in part-time or low-wage jobs, but don't earn enough to fully support themselves. Ontario Works can supplement their income while they work towards financial stability.

Emergency Assistance

For those in urgent financial need, Emergency Assistance provides short-term support for essentials like food and shelter. It's available to those who don't qualify for Ontario Works but still need immediate help.

A crisis or emergency includes situations where you are:

- being evicted from your home within 7 days
- in or are leaving an abusive relationship
- worried about your personal safety
- affected by fire, flood, or another natural disaster
- in Canada under emergency authorization (e.g. CUAET)



Housing Stability Services



St. Thomas-Elgin Social Housing

of Units (subsidized, affordable & market):

- Total units: 1123
- in Elgin County: 334
- Plus, approximately 150 rent supplements

Centralized Waitlist

- 1700+ households waiting
- wait time of 3 to 10+ years

Waitlist Household Composition:

- Single: 725
- Families: 675
- Seniors: 285

Waitlist Household Location:

- 70% from within St. Thomas-Elgin
- 30% from outside the municipality or no fixed address

* Note: People fleeing domestic violence and/or human trafficking are considered a Special Priority for Social Housing. See: [Special Priority Policy](#)



Social Housing Highlights of 2024



Supported the development of new affordable seniors housing



Invested over \$500k in capital repairs



Assisted over 90 households move into social housing



Provided Service Manager advice and guidance to prospective operators & developers

Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP)

HPP is a provincially funded program that supports Ontario municipalities to provide supports and services to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

In St. Thomas-Elgin, we use HPP to fund:

- **Emergency Shelters**
(The INN. Familu Central. Youth for Christ)
- **Supportive Housing Units**
(YWCA. Indwell. CMHATV)
- **Rent Supplements**
(to end occurrences of homelessness)
- **Housing Stability Financial Assistance Program**
(up to \$1500 for single households & up to \$3000 for families)
- **Day Services**
(sustem naviaation. case manaaement. street outreach. drop-in)



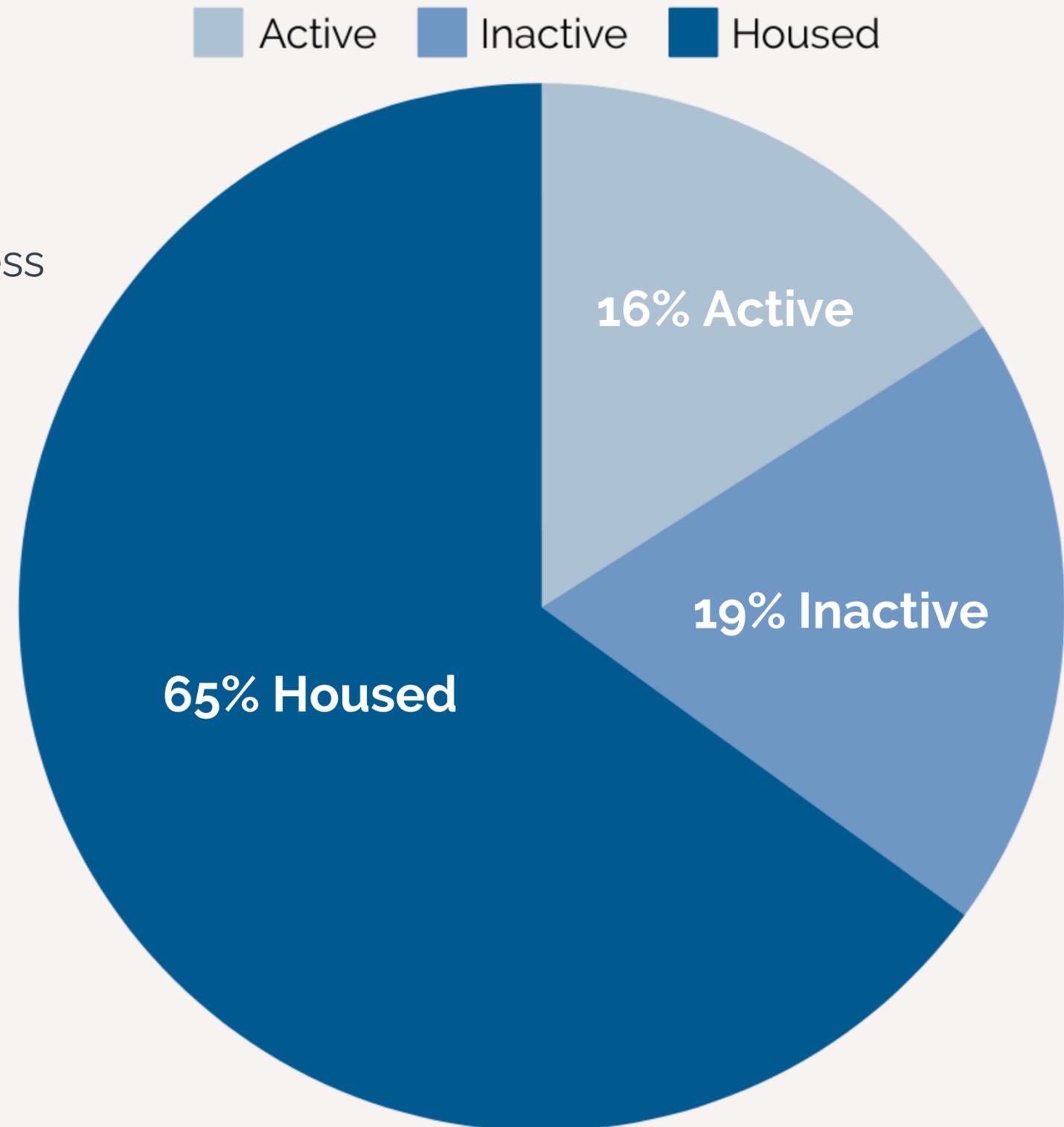
See: [Homelessness Prevention Program](#)

St. Thomas-Elgin By Names Data

A real-time list of people experiencing homelessness to better connect people with the services and support they need.

Local facts:

- Was implemented in July 2020
- 825 unique people have been referred (end of 2024)
- Majority of referrals are urban (St. Thomas)
- Approximately 10% or less are rural (Elgin County)
- 65% of all referrals are housed!
- Approximately 130 people (or 16%) remain unhoused



Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) Highlights of 2024



Assisted over 400 households with homelessness prevention



Have provided emergency shelter to over 250 unique individuals



Responded to over 150 requests for Street Outreach Services



Achieved reductions in chronic homelessness

Elgin County / Housing Stability Services Collaboratives



How to Access Housing Stability Services

In person:

230 Talbot Street
St. Thomas, Ontario

By phone:

519-631-9350

Online

stthomas.ca

Monday to Friday
8:30am to 4:30pm

St. Thomas-Elgin Community Resources

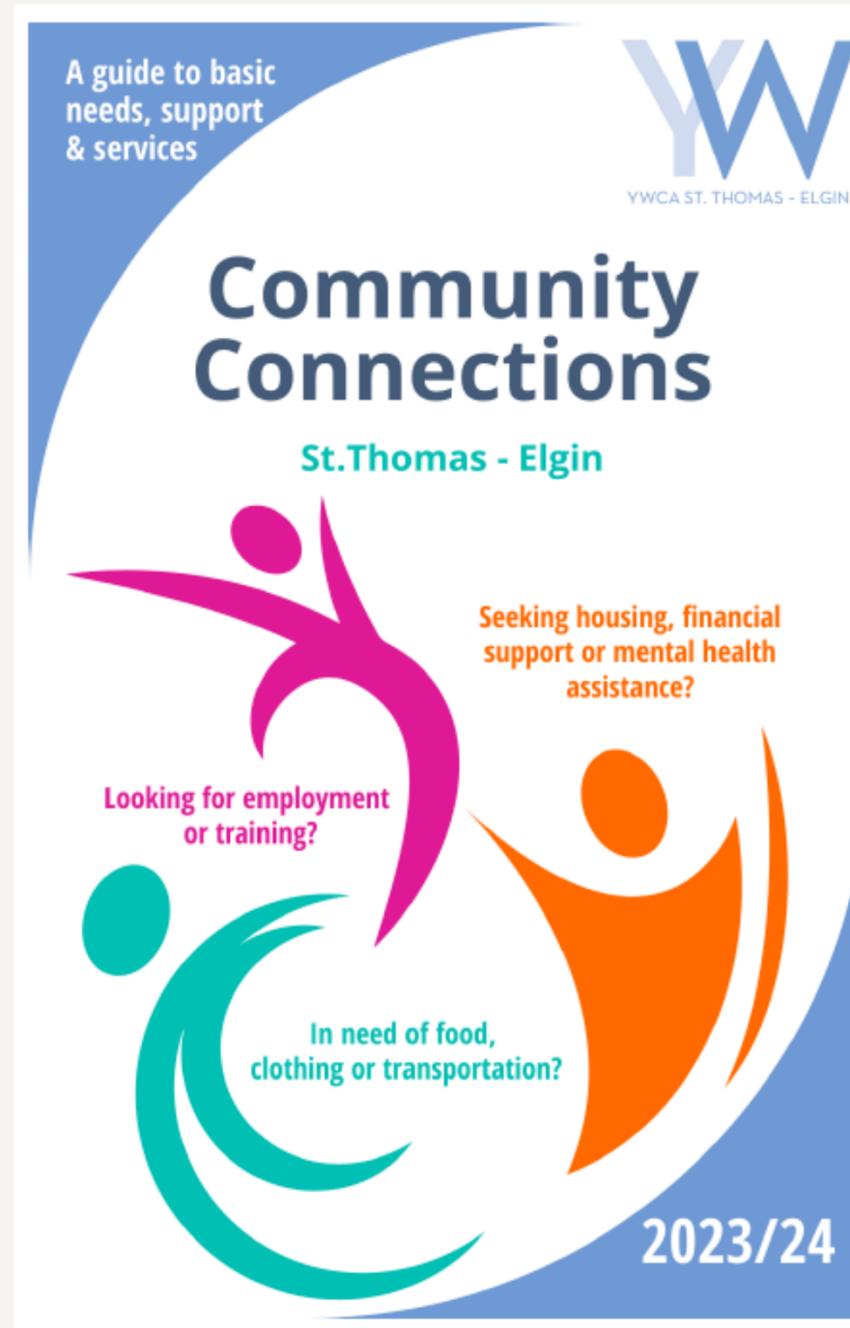


Table of Contents

Childcare	4
Clothing & Household Items	7
Community Centres	9
Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault.....	11
Education	14
Employment & Training	17
Financial Support	22
Food	26
Health Care	30
Housing & Shelter	34
Identification.....	42
Immigrant, Newcomer & Refugee Services.....	43
Legal & Advocacy	45
Libraries.....	49
Mental Health & Addictions.....	50
Parenting.....	66
Senior Services	70
Transportation	71
Special thanks to our community partners.....	75

Children's Services



What is CWELCC?

CWELCC is the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system. It is a federal-provincial agreement designed to make child care more affordable for families in Ontario by:

- Reducing child care costs to an average of \$10 per day by 2026 for eligible families with children under 6 years old
- Increasing the number of licensed child care spaces
- Improving the quality of child care by supporting programs with resources and professional development for staff
- Developing a wage framework for early childhood educators to support recruitment and retention



Key Achievements in Elgin County

- 100% participation in CWELCC in St. Thomas-Elgin
- Child care continues to become more affordable for all families. As of January 2025, there is a \$22 cap on all fees
- 2024 was a year of significant expansion in Elgin County:
 - 2 new child care centres were opened
 - EarlyOn expanded in Aylmer, West Lorne, and Port Burwell



What Challenges Have We Faced?



Staffing shortages continue to be an issue for all our child care and early years programs. With support from the Ministry of Education, we implemented a variety of recruitment and retention strategies throughout the year.

What Challenges Have We Faced?

Infrastructure Gaps:

- The demand for child care spaces far outweighs the number of spaces available
- The waiting list has gone from months to years with some families finding it difficult to re-enter the workforce after maternity leave



The Future of Children's Services in Elgin County



Implementation of the new funding formula



Expansion of child care and early years programming



Continue to support the needs of all families in Elgin County



Release an updated Children's Services Plan

Contact Information



Heather Sheridan

Director, St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services



230 Talbot Street

St. Thomas, Ontario, N5P 1B2

519-631-9350 ext 7134

hsheridan@stthomas.ca

Please feel free to contact Heather with any questions or concerns regarding any of the programs administered through St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services.

