Clause 14 in Report No. 9 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on May 21, 2015.

**14**

**York Region's Housing Stability Program: Preventing Homelessness in York Region**

Committee of the Whole recommends:

1. Receipt of the presentation by Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager, Social Services.

2. Adoption of the following recommendation contained in the report dated April 24, 2015 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

## 1. Recommendation

It is recommended that Council receive this report for information.

## 2. Purpose

This report provides Council with an update on the first two years of the Housing Stability Program pilot.

## 3. Background

### Residents who are at risk of becoming homeless has increased steadily since 2006

As the Region has grown and housing costs have increased, the number of households experiencing homelessness in the Region has also increased. Despite the fact that most homeless residents do not use emergency housing (shelters) there has been a steady increase in households using emergency housing, which has been mitigated by more recent Regional innovation. At the same time, a growing number of households in York Region are at risk of becoming homeless. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing

Corporation, more than 36,000 residents are considered to be 'at risk' as they spend more than 30-35% of their gross income on housing and related costs. When 'at risk' households experience a crisis, such as a job loss or fire, they are more likely to become homeless. Figure 1 illustrates how the use of York Region's emergency housing and homelessness prevention programs has grown in the past eight years.

**Figure 1**
**Total Number of At-Risk of Homelessness Households Served 2006-2014**
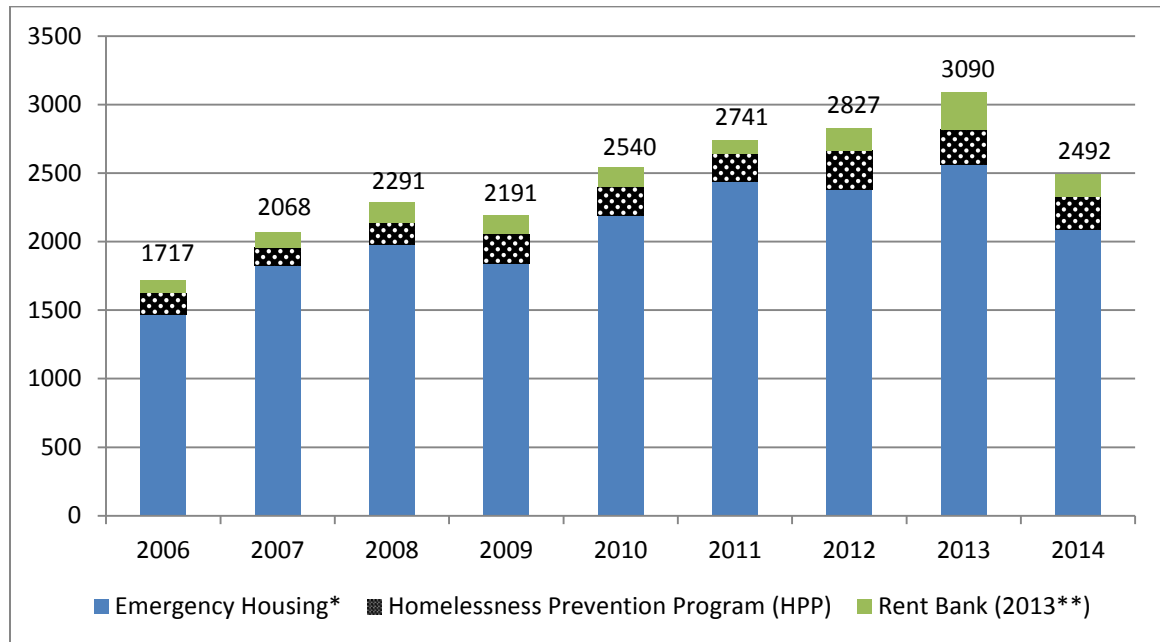


## In York Region, where obtaining and keeping affordable housing is difficult, preventing housing loss is especially crucial

In 2012, Council endorsed a new vision for homelessness prevention. The new vision guides investments and service planning for York Region's current and future emergency, transitional and homelessness prevention services. This vision represents a shift from managing crisis after housing has been lost to actively promoting housing stability. The goal is to prevent homelessness and to help residents who become homeless with the supports to find and keep housing.

A key element of the new vision is the provision of wrap-around support services to help residents with the particular range of supports they need to find and/or retain housing. This may include immediate financial assistance to pay rent or utility arrears, but can also include help with finding housing, life skills, education/training, employment, access to mental health or addictions services, or transportation.

In York Region, where obtaining and keeping affordable housing is difficult, preventing housing loss is especially crucial. Over time, York Region's investments in promoting housing stability will help reduce pressures, and therefore costs, on emergency or crisis supports for people at risk of homelessness.

## Two key provincial changes announced in 2012 made it possible for the Region to implement a 'made in York' Housing Stability Program

In 2012, the Province announced the start of provincial homelessness reform effective January 1, 2013. A key part of the reform is the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) which consolidates the funding for five provincial homelessness programs administered by local Service Managers (Emergency Hostels, the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program, Rent Bank, Emergency Energy Fund, and Domiciliary Hostels).

Homelessness reform provides Service Managers with greater flexibility to plan and determine how homelessness funds are used to meet local needs. Service Managers must achieve two key outcomes: people who are homeless obtain and retain housing, and people who are at risk of homelessness maintain housing. York Region's vision for homelessness prevention is completely aligned with these outcomes.

During the same period, the Province announced the elimination of the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (Community Start-Up). Community Start-up was a mandatory benefit that provided financial assistance to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients to help with the costs of establishing a new principle residence, preventing eviction or discontinuance of heating or utilities, or maintaining a residence where there is a threat to the health or welfare of the resident. While the York Region Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) continued to support low-income working individuals and families, the elimination of Community Start-Up created a critical gap for residents receiving benefits under Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program.

These provincial changes led Community and Health Services to create a new, "made-in York Region" program to promote housing stability and prevent homelessness for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients.

## York Region created a program that promotes housing stability through a client focused wrap-around service delivery model

The Housing Stability Program was developed using a portion of York Region's homelessness reform funding. It incorporates a new service delivery model that

more closely aligns with the Region's vision for homelessness prevention. The Program fills the gap left by the elimination of Community Start-Up by providing social assistance recipients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with short-term financial assistance and/or client-focused wrap-around supports to retain housing. This program incorporates best practices that drive changes in how staff traditionally support clients.

Clients may receive one-time financial assistance to enable them to obtain new housing, or to maintain their current housing if they are at risk of homelessness. Financial assistance may cover costs such as last month's rent, utility or rental arrears, and housing supports including moving costs. Unlike Community Start-Up, the amount clients receive is not a mandatory amount – it is based on an analysis of actual costs and need.

York Region's Housing Stability model is successful because workers partner with clients to find solutions. In addition to initial supports, dedicated workers provide wrap-around support for six months. This is how long, on average, it takes to stabilize vulnerable people. Housing Stability Workers help clients plan and problem-solve, provide help with service system navigation, and collaborate with a broad range of partners to get the client stable. Workers follow up with clients at regular intervals to probe for additional services or supports that may be needed and make referrals to address those need. They focus on helping clients to become more independent over time.

The Provincial Community Start-Up mandated financial assistance to address a specific financial need. Although this financial assistance could resolve the immediate issue, it often did not address the root cause of the client's situation and did not provide support designed to build long term housing stability. Clients, therefore, came back over and over. The Housing Stability Program does much more than simply issue money. For example, a Worker recently provided a client with assistance with rental arrears to stay in their home. After working with the client to get a better understanding of family circumstances, the Worker contacted the Provincial Ontario Disability Support Program staff to set up direct payment to the landlord to ensure that the client would not face the same family situation again. Also, as a result of ongoing discussions with the client about health issues that were impacting the ability to live independently at home, the client was referred to a Regional Outreach Worker to arrange for additional supports. Today, the client is stable, better able to independently manage, and is receiving weekly in-home assistance through Community Care Access Centre.

Housing Stability Workers are able to spend the time to support clients and provide this wrap-around service because the majority of the administrative work to comply with social assistance rules and regulations is handled by each client's Social Assistance case worker.

## 4.    Analysis and Options

### York Region's Housing Stability Program provides better service at less cost than the program it replaced

Approximately $2.6 million in benefits were issued under the provincially mandated Community Start-Up in 2011. In comparison, under Housing Stability, $1.2 million in benefits were issued to clients in 2013, while a total of $960,689 was issued between January and October of 2014. Figure 2 illustrates the difference in program spending between Community Start-Up and the Housing Stability Program.

**Figure 2\***
**Total Amount Spent on Community Start-Up 2011 and Housing Stability 2013/2014**
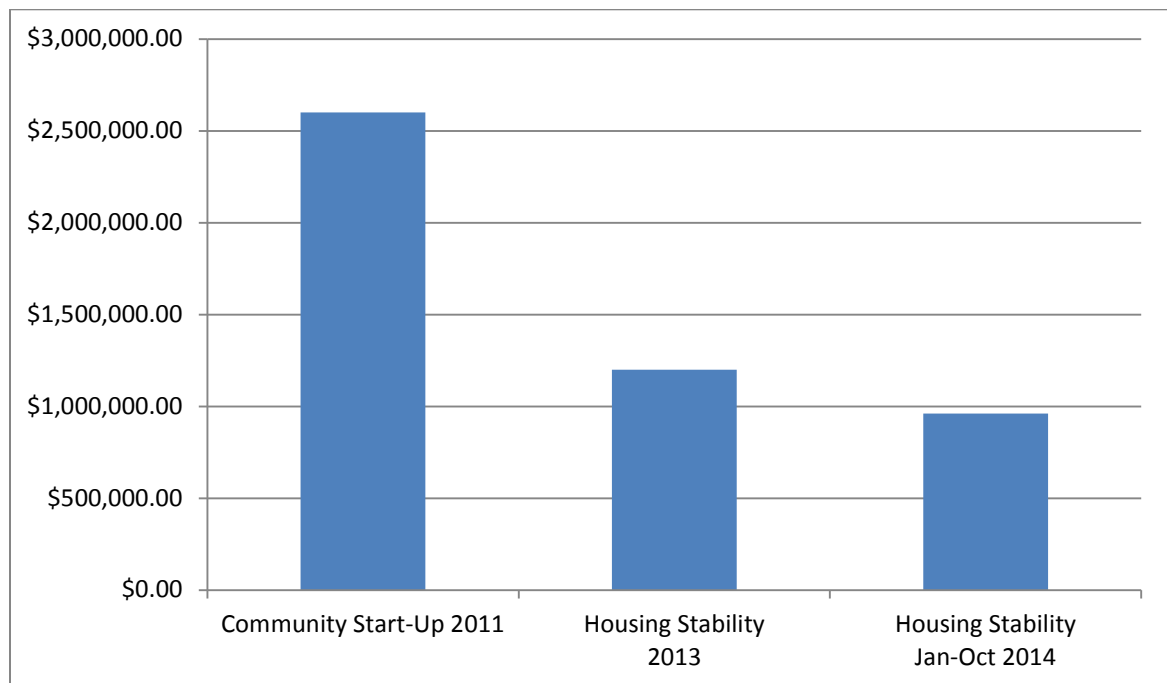


*Note: The amount of benefits issued under Housing Stability in 2014 reflects 10 months (January to October). Data for November and December was not available due to the provincial technology conversion from the Service Delivery Management Technology (SDMT) to the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS)

**York Region's Housing Stability Program**

Despite the lower total amount of benefits issued under Housing Stability, clients received approximately the same level of financial assistance in both programs. The average benefit issued under Community Start-Up was $670.00 in 2011, compared to an average of $697.00 issued under Housing Stability in 2013 and 2014.

The cost difference in York Region's model results in more clients not just getting housed but staying housed. Under Housing Stability, clients are cycling back less for ongoing benefits. Also, this program targets Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients who are truly at risk of homelessness or are homeless. Benefits issued are based on the client's actual needs, as assessed in collaboration with the client by a Housing Stability Worker. This model gets and keeps clients stable and has allowed funds to be put toward other homelessness initiatives.

The wrap-around service delivery model used for the Housing Stability Program is labour intensive. However, the overall cost to deliver it, including staffing, is less than the cost of only benefits issued under Community Start-Up.

**An average of 87% of clients served have remained housed despite the fact that this is typically a very difficult population to stabilize**

A key indicator, tied to the Region's vision for homelessness prevention as well as the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative outcomes, is the percentage of Housing Stability clients who remain housed six months after the initiation of services. An average of 87% of clients served between January 2013 and August 2014 remained housed at the six-month follow-up. The expectation was that a made-in-York Region Housing Stability model would be more successful than the Community Start-Up model in getting and keeping clients housed and help to break the cycle of homelessness and risk. The program has exceeded expectations. This level of housing retention is an incredible level of success for a client group that to a large degree is very difficult to stabilize.

Of the remaining 13% of Housing Stability clients, the housing outcomes for the majority are unknown because they could not be reached for the six-month follow up.

### The majority of clients surveyed as they left the program reported their families were significantly more stable and independent

In addition to the strong quantitative housing retention data, clients' connections to the community and long-term stability have improved. Figure 3 summarizes Housing Stability clients' responses to key questions asked during the six-month follow-up to assess how the program has impacted their ability to maintain stable, independent housing.

**Figure 3**
**Housing Stability Program Survey Results**
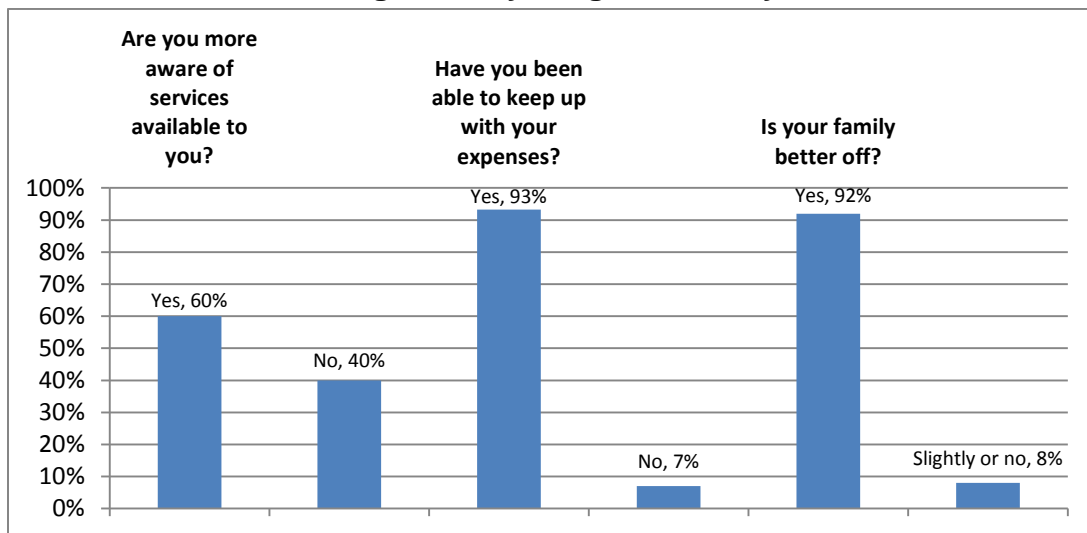


Many clients surveyed as they left the program asserted they are able to sustain and manage their finances in the longer term, and are therefore building their economic independence as well as increasing their housing stability. Ninety-two percent of the clients surveyed reported that their family was significantly better off and that they were more stable than they were before becoming involved with the program. Ninety-three percent of clients reported that they were able to keep up with their bills after six months in the program.

Approximately 60% of the clients surveyed said that after receiving supports through Housing Stability, they are more aware of the services that are available to help them. This empowers clients to take ongoing responsibility for their well-being and can also increase social inclusion.

### Link to key Council-approved plans

The Housing Stability Program is a unique wrap-around model designed for the realities that York Region residents face. It reflects the 'housing first' approach within the context of York Region realities. Given the difficulty in obtaining

housing in York Region, this program focuses on the prevention of housing loss in the first place and on getting to the unique root causes of why each client struggles to retain housing. It supports York Region's goal to respond to housing choices for people of all ages and stages as outlined in *Vision 2051.* The program also promotes housing stability by connecting clients to supports in the community through collaboration and partnerships.

The Housing Stability Program also directly supports the goal of the Region's 10-Year Housing Plan and Strategic Plan for 2015-2019 to strengthen services for people who are homeless or at risk. The program achieves this through the provision of financial assistance and wrap-around supports to help Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to obtain long-term housing stability.

## 5. Financial Implications

York Region's Homelessness Community Programs operates under an annual gross budget of $17.4 million (2015 approved budget). The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing provides up to $10.5 million in funding to York Region under the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Initiative. The Housing Stability Program is allocated $2.0 million of the total 2015 Homelessness Community Programs gross budget.

## 6. Local Municipal Impact

The Housing Stability Program supports Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients in all nine municipalities in York Region. Housing Stability Workers provide services in Ontario Works offices in Georgina, Vaughan, Newmarket and Richmond Hill and as needed, provide mobile services to social assistance recipients throughout the Region.

## 7. Conclusion

Council made the Housing Stability Program pilot a permanent program in the 2015 budget. The outcomes of the pilot over the past two years demonstrate that this "made-in-York Region" wrap-around service delivery model is effective in helping people stabilize their lives and address the issues that place them at risk of becoming homeless.

The focus on continuous assessment of client need and realities continues to enhance the services that Housing Stability provides. For example, the next step will be to incorporate a financial literacy component tailored to the unique client issues identified over the first two years of implementation.

It has become clear that dedicated workers who provide wrap-around supports and client-focused case management is a best practice in homelessness prevention. While it would require social assistance reform to be truly effective, the program has also allowed the Social Services Branch to implement and test new approaches to service delivery that may help frontline social assistance workers in the future to more effectively assist clients to achieve better outcomes.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager, Social Services at Extension 72150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

April 24, 2015

#6087836

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request

# York Region's Housing Stability Program: Preventing Homelessness in York Region

## Presentation to

**Committee of the Whole**
**Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager**
**Social Services Branch**
**Community and Health Services**
**Department**

May 7, 2015
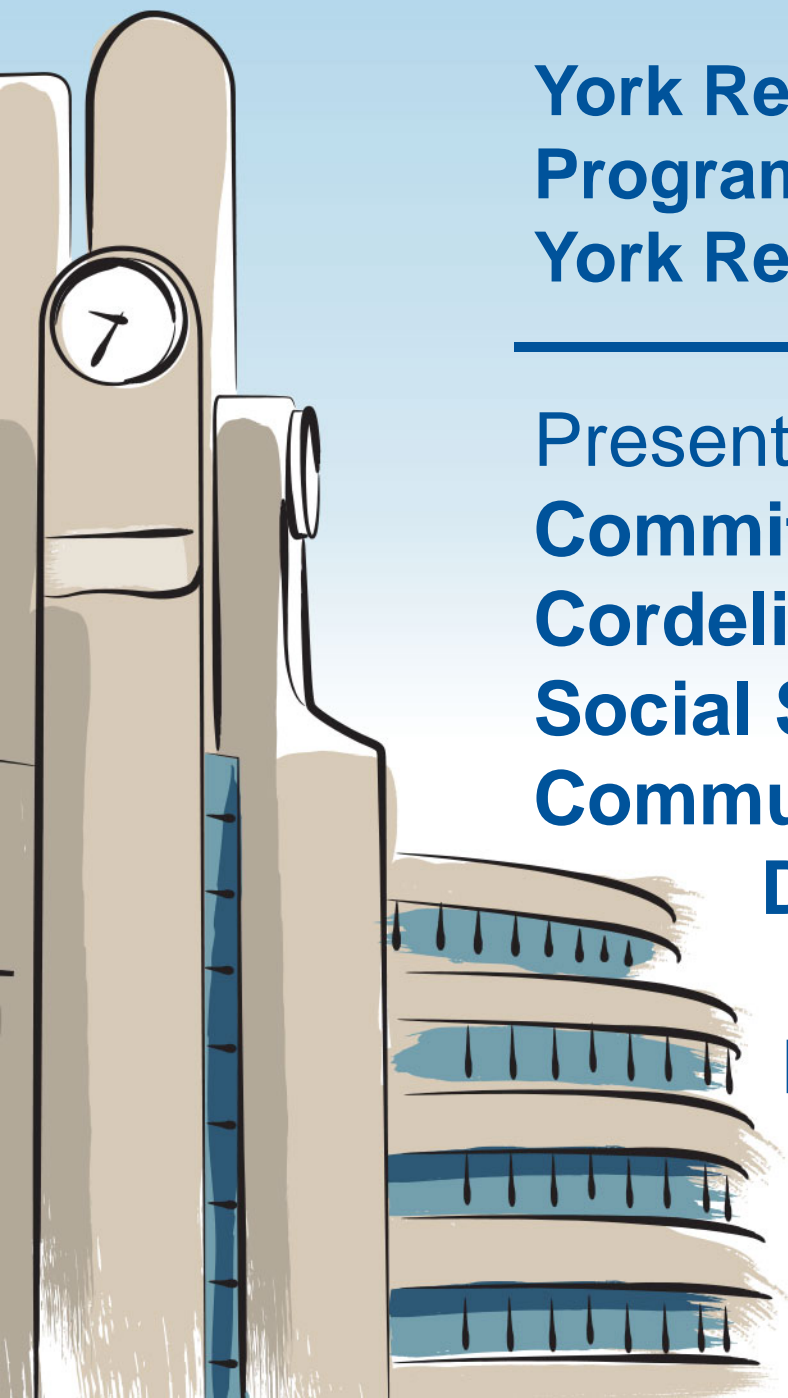
**York Region**

# York Region's Vision to Mitigate Homelessness
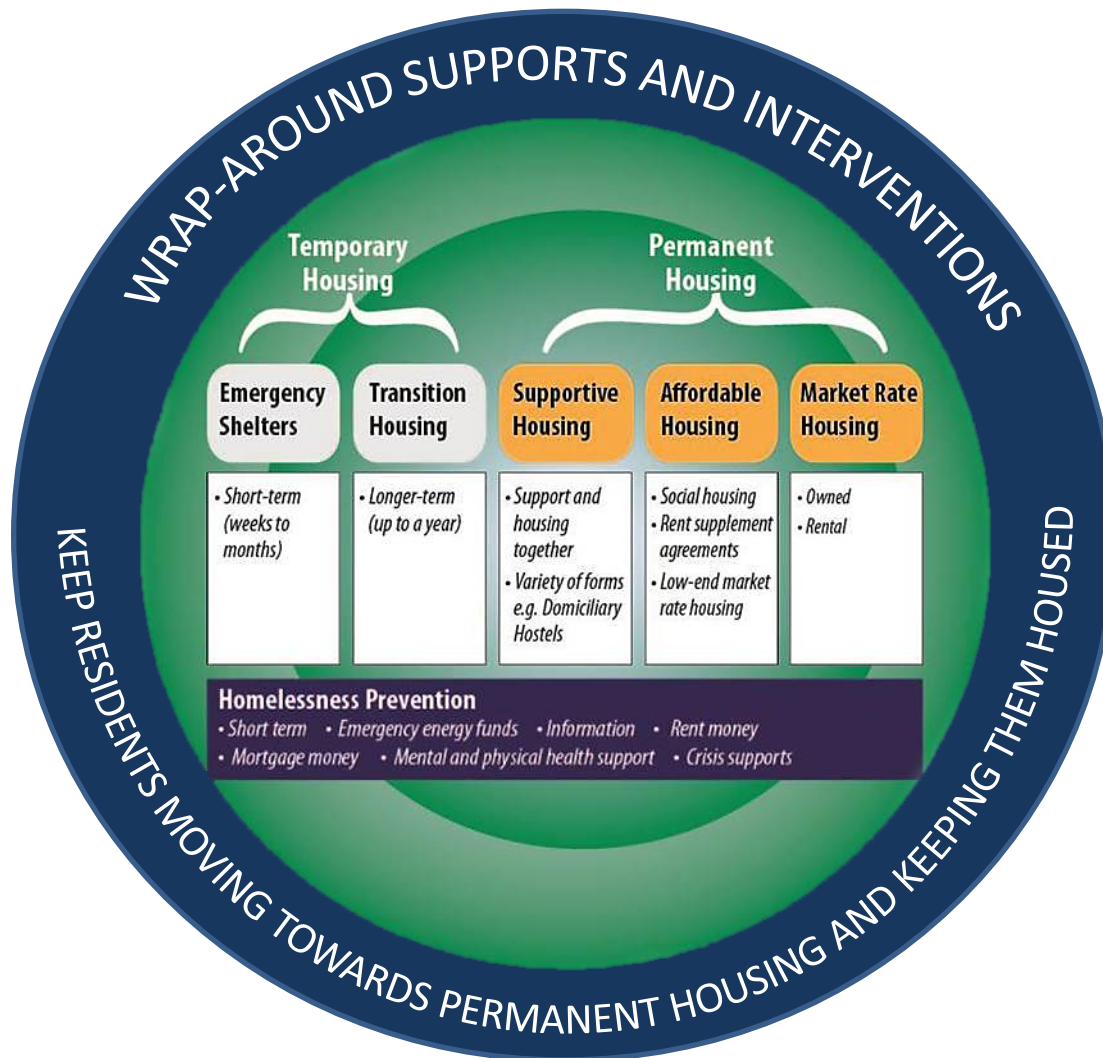
# York Region's Housing Stability Program

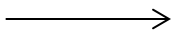Two Provincial decisions made the York Region Housing Stability Program possible:

1) Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) announced

2) Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) eliminated

Housing Stability

# How the Housing Stability Program Helped 'Jane' Achieve Housing Stability

'Jane' has rental arrears and is at risk of becoming homeless → Rental Arrears paid by HSP Worker

HSP Worker arranged ODSP direct payment of rent to the landlord
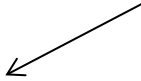
Health issues identified

Client referred to Outreach Worker
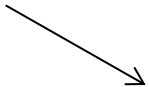
Connected to Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) → Weekly in-home assistance →
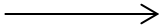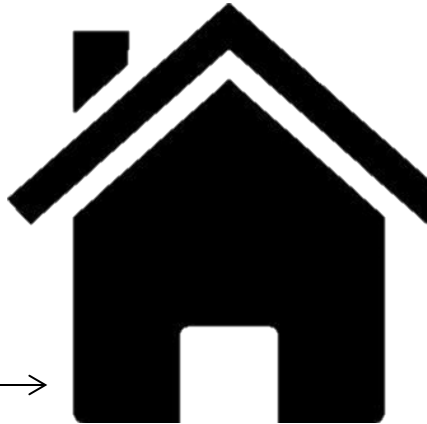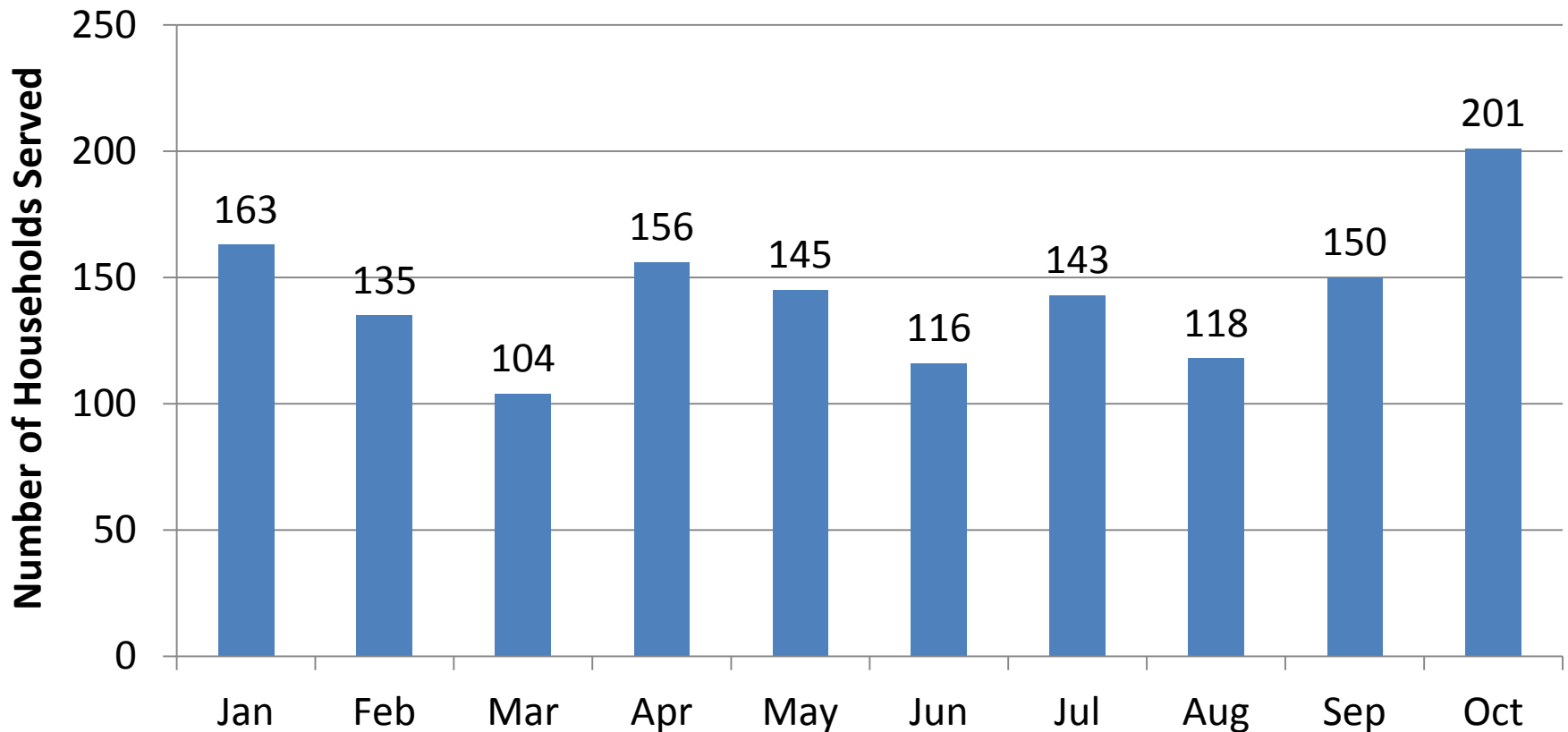
# Simple but Strong Measures

- How much did we do?

- How well did we do it?

- Is anyone better off?

# Housing Stability Program Performance Measure
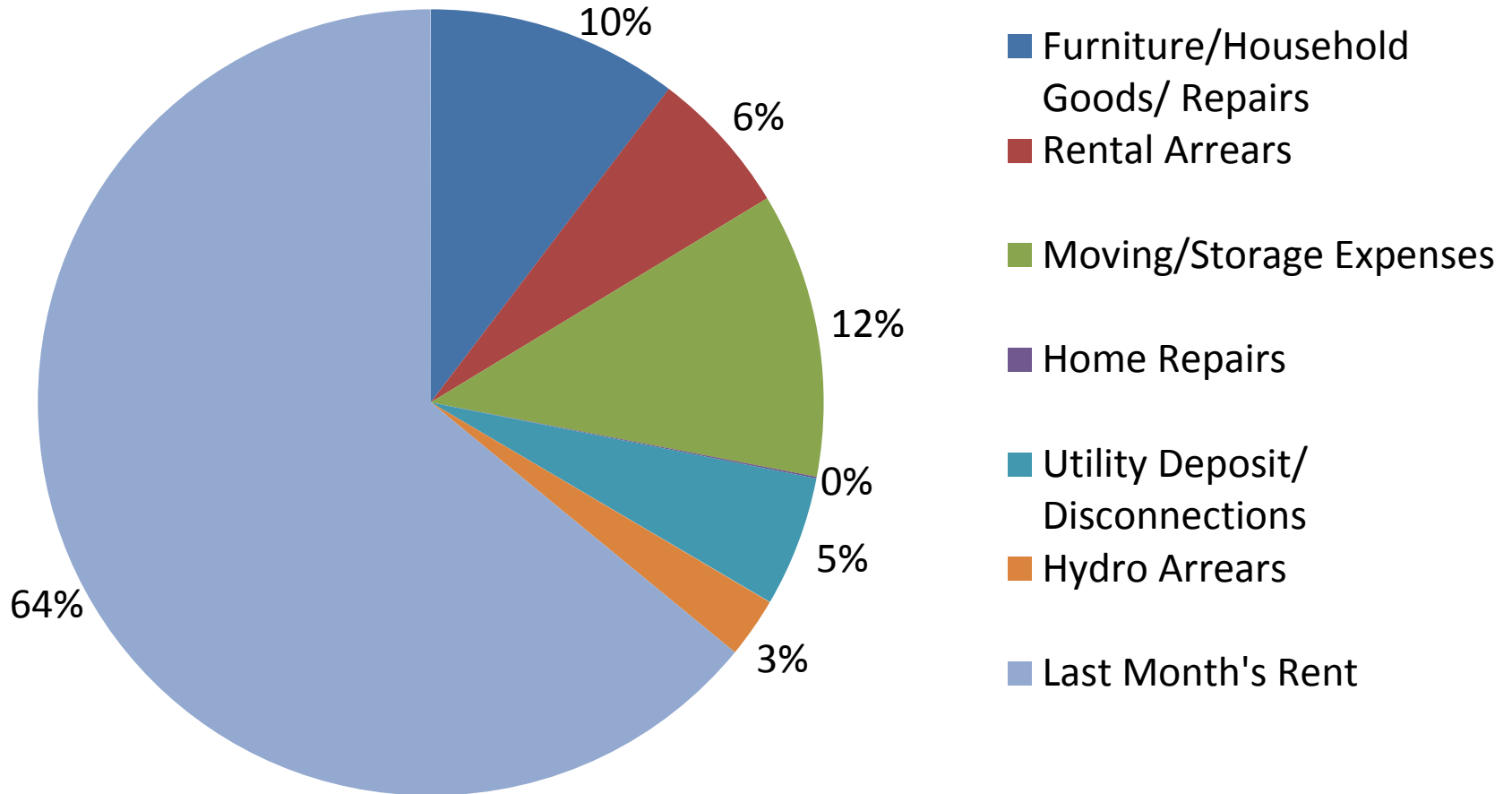## How much did we do?

**Number of Unique Households Served January-October 2014***



*November and December caseloads and benefit expenditures not available due to Province's Social Assistance Management System implementation.

# What was Funding used for?

**Percent Breakdown of Issuance by Benefit Type**
**January to October 2014**



Legend:
- Furniture/Household Goods/ Repairs
- Rental Arrears
- Moving/Storage Expenses
- Home Repairs
- Utility Deposit/ Disconnections
- Hydro Arrears
- Last Month's Rent

Pie chart values: 10%, 6%, 12%, 0%, 5%, 3%, 64%

*November and December caseloads and benefit expenditures not available due to Province's Social Assistance Management System implementation.

# Housing Stability Program Performance Measure
## How well did we do?

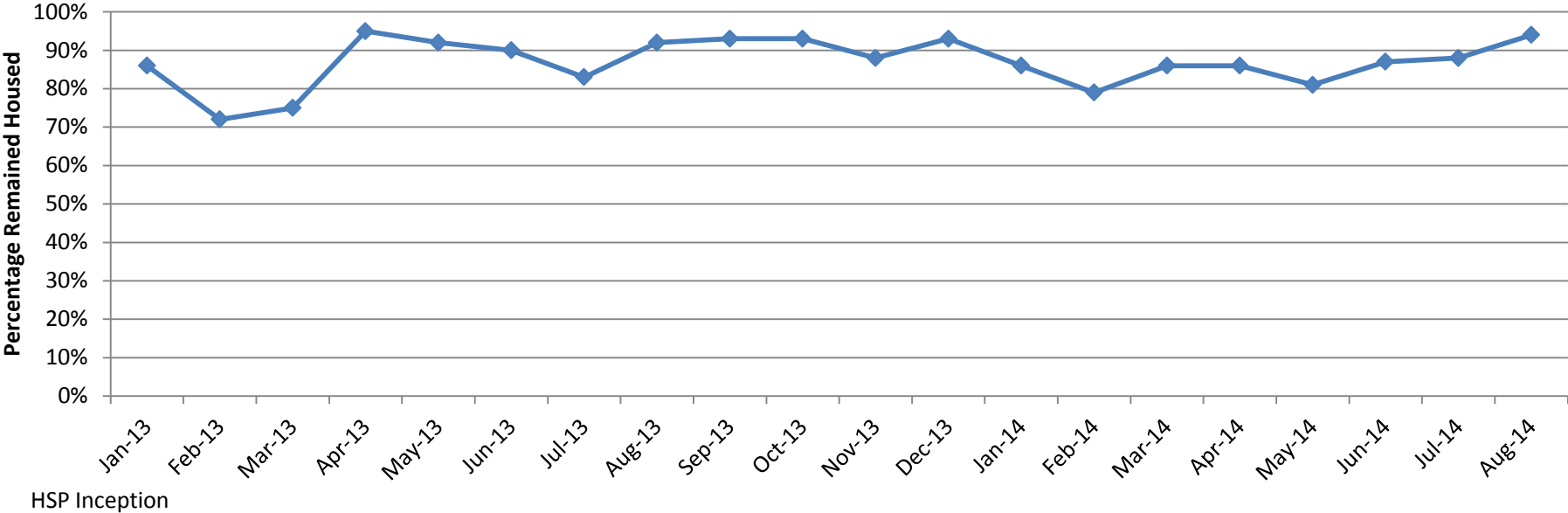### Total Amount Spent in Community Start-Up 2011 and Housing Stability 2013/2014
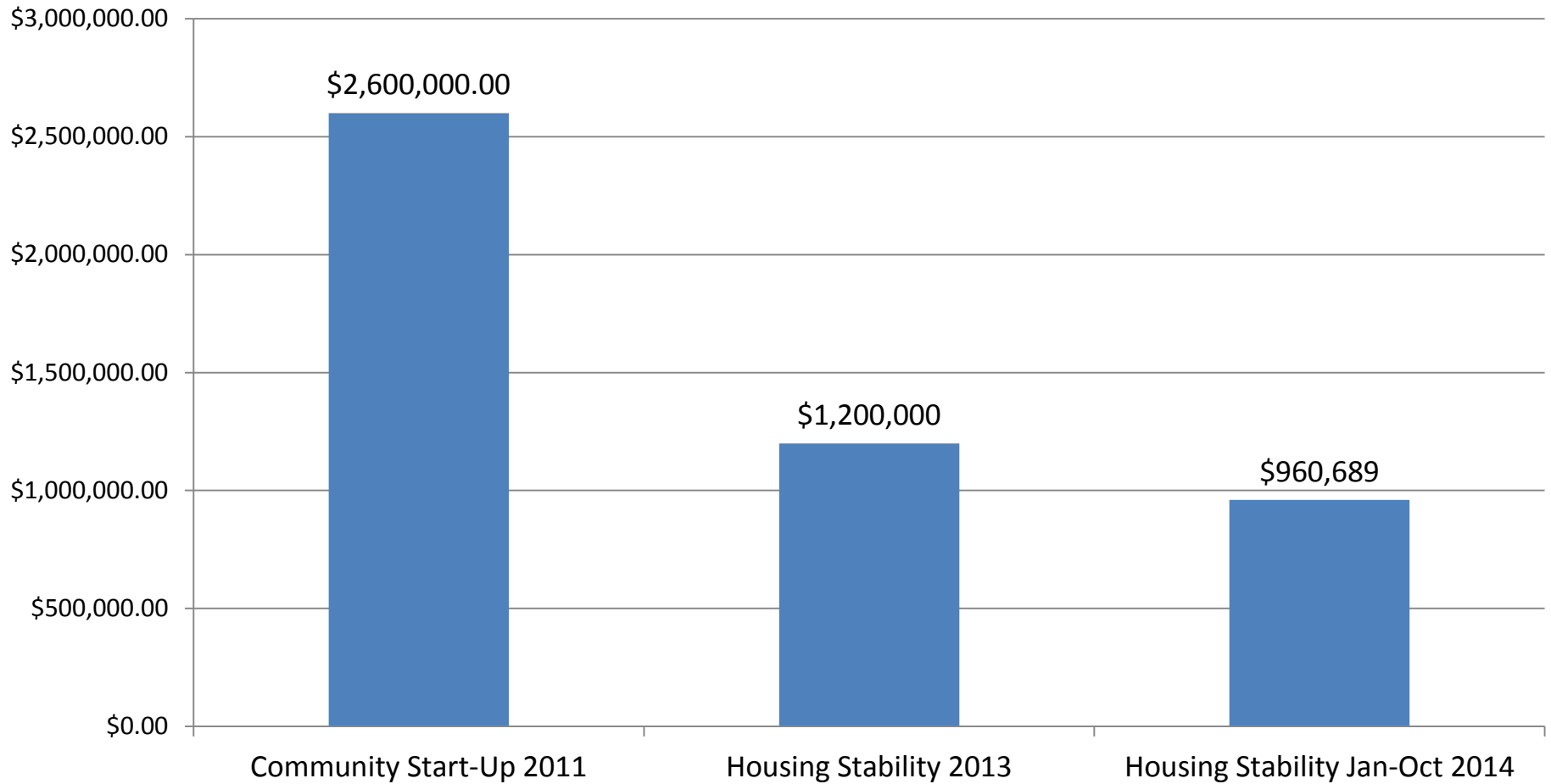


*10 months

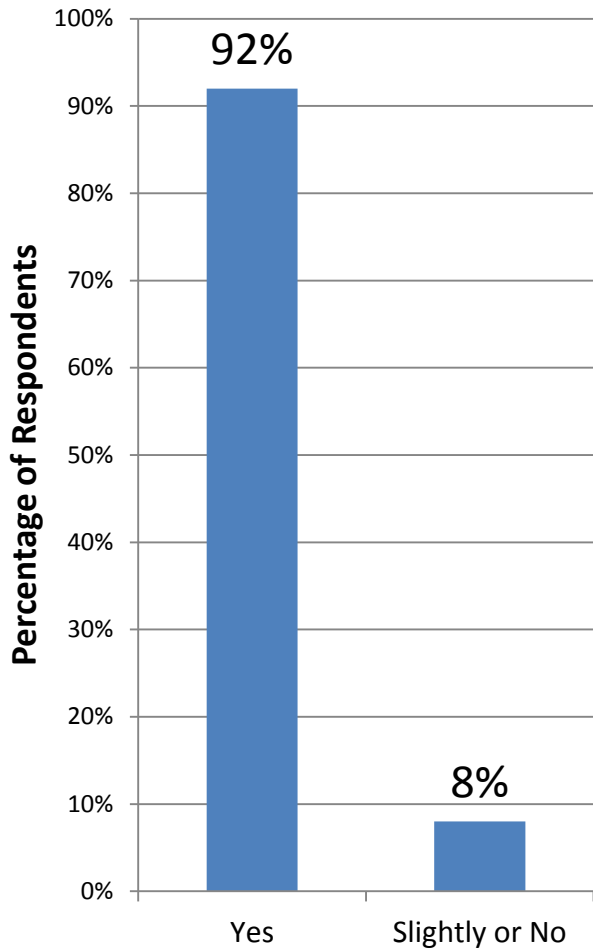# Housing Stability Program  Performance Measure
# Is anyone better off?



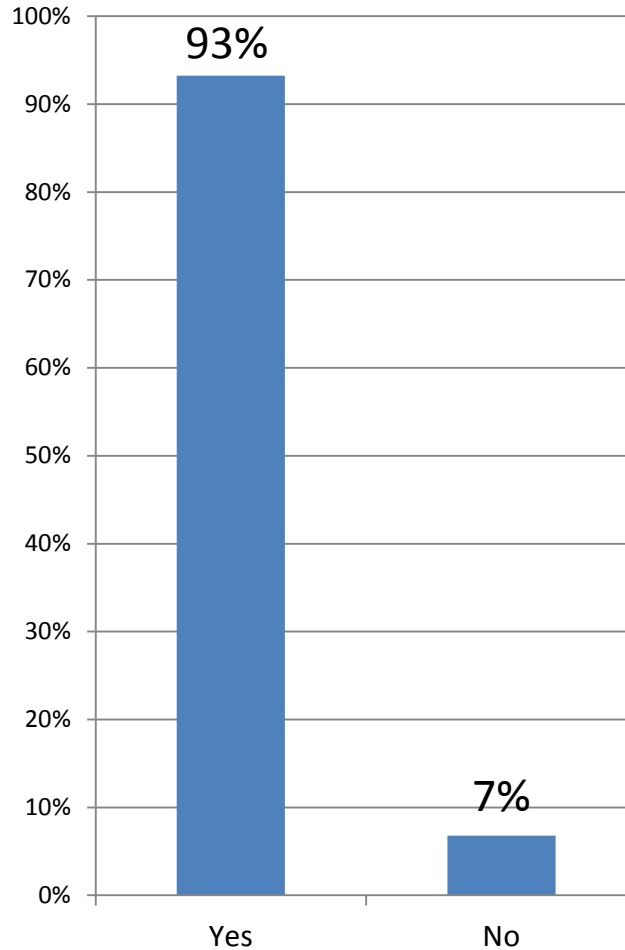**Clients Remained Housed after 6 Months
January 2013-August 2014**

HSP Inception

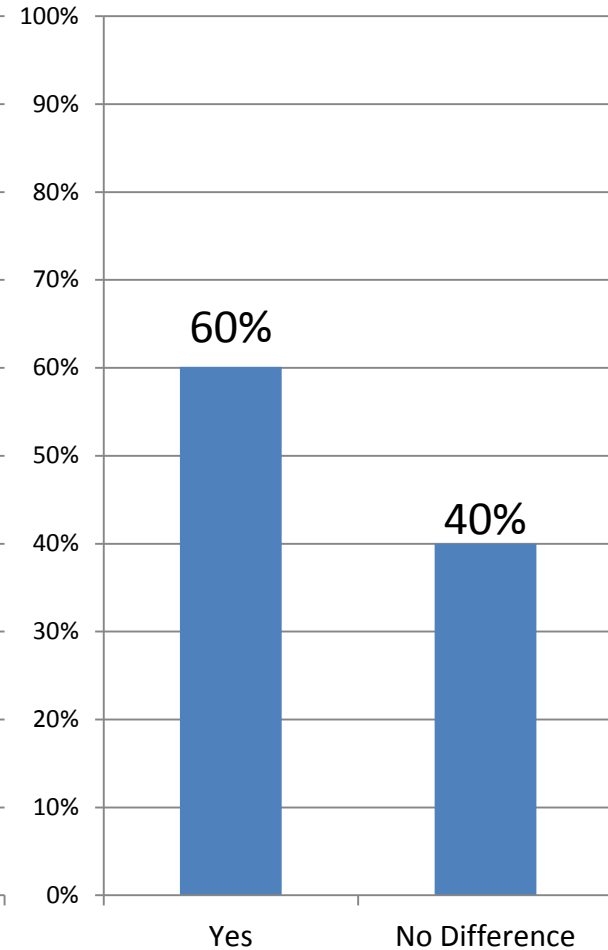# Housing Stability Program Performance Measure Survey: Is anyone better off?

**Is your family better off?**

- Yes: 92%
- Slightly or No: 8%

**Have you been able to keep up with your expenses?**

- Yes: 93%
- No: 7%

**Are you more aware of services available to you?**

- Yes: 60%
- No Difference: 40%

*Percentage of Respondents*

# What Makes York Region's Housing Stability Program Successful

- Wrap-around Service Delivery Model

- Program flexibility to meet clients' diverse needs

- Outcome-focused staff

- Simple, strong measures that focus on whether people are "better off"

- Cultural shift – Internal and External