

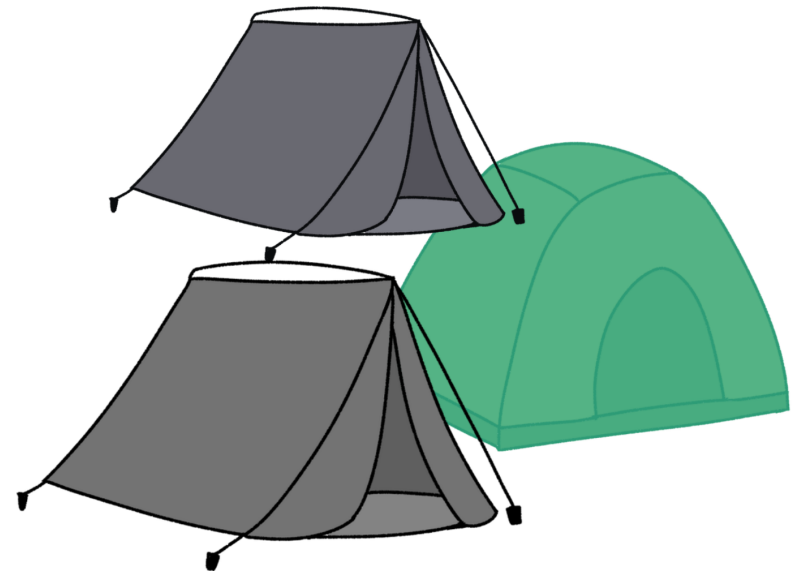
"They're choosing between a really crappy room in a rooming house where they feel unsafe and living outside where they feel like they at least have some sort of autonomy over their life. We often put it, "people choose to be homeless," as if their choice of housing is a good one! But it's not a good one. It's not a good one" "Natalie: Get rid of the no tenting bylaw. Grace: I agree. If you talk to individuals, if you ask people who are in the tents, they say, give us a park. We just need a shower and security so we're safe. "We can't afford to live as is, never mind having to pay fines and shit like that for just trying to sleep at night. I don't think it's really right. But it is what it is" Blair

"...it feels like if people die outside, their numbers go down and that's measured as success. That's the only way I can wrap my head around why there's no action" (Payne)

"Oh, it's frustrating as hell. It's like, what are we supposed to do, man? I already have to poop and pee outside, that's embarrassing enough. I can't wash myself properly. I'm embarrassed and I cry every morning. Why can't I just pitch a tent where I've lived before? I spend every day here in and right now I'm breaking the law by even being here. I got a trespassing... " "People aren't allowed to live outside, so if you're refusing the shelter, you're in perpetual hiding. And so, you don't get your tent asked to move on and possibly stuff taken. And again, there's all sorts of charges that can come with that for people who have criminal records, whether it's a breach, or a failure to comply or mischief, or then if someone gets into an altercation".

Park Stories

Issue Five: Parks and
Facilities Bylaw



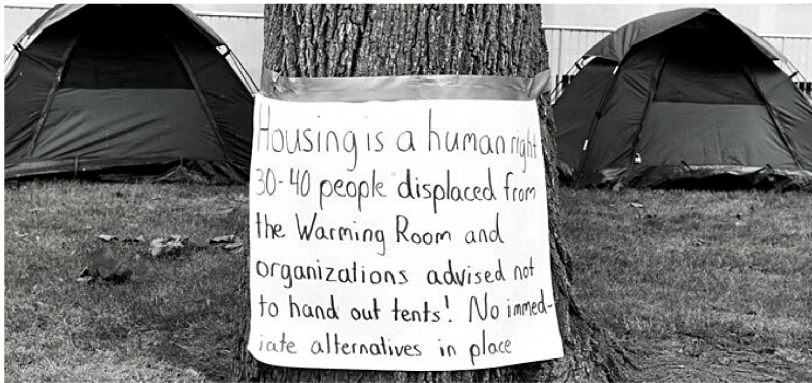
During the summer and fall of 2022, the Research for Social Change Lab research team conducted 48 interviews with people with lived experience of homelessness and 42 interviews with local service providers. One of the main concerns from the interviews from both groups of people was the negative impacts of the parks and facilities bylaw in Peterborough. The following zine is a composite of viewpoints from people with lived experience of homelessness and local service providers on how the parks and facilities bylaw makes providing and receiving emergency and essential services harder.

This zine and the research it draws on was supported by "Reaching Home" Canada's Homelessness Strategy and United Way Peterborough and District.

Parks and Facilities Bylaw

Over the last two decades, Canada has seen a significant rise in the use of anti-homeless laws. According to one 2020 estimate, 75 percent of the Canadian population lives in a city with anti-homeless laws.

These laws are designed to move unhoused people out of public spaces and into shelters and other services in the community. But what happens when there are not enough services available for people?



In the summer of 2019, the warming room program closed and Victoria park in Peterborough became the site of Peterborough's first tent city. On August 12, 2019, Peterborough City council amended the parks and facilities by law to ensure that tenting in public parks was prohibited.

The bylaw outlines that no one can be in a public park between 2:00 a.m. and 5:00 am, and the fines can range from \$200 - \$10,000 with non payment of fines potentially leading to a bench warrant and jail time.

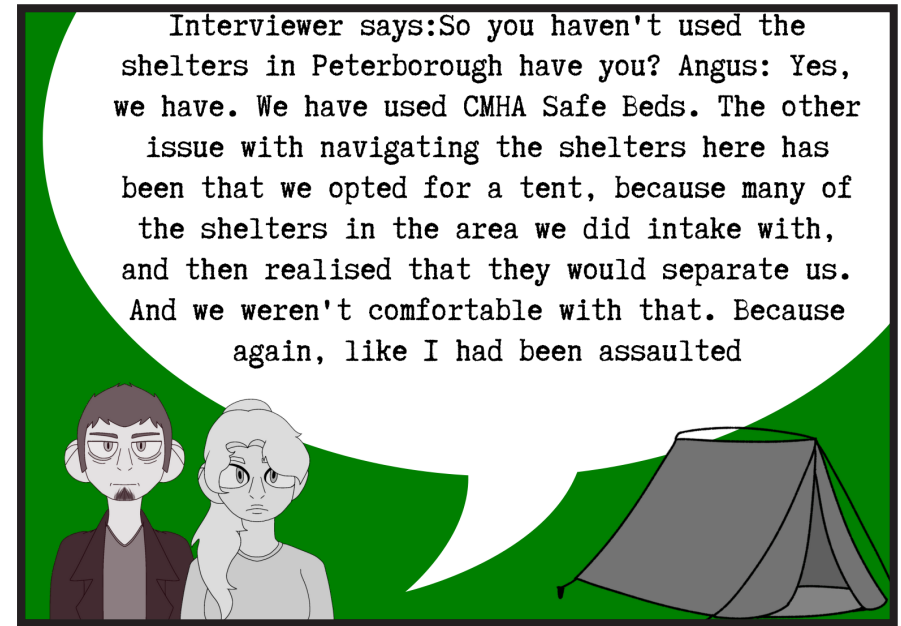
The Bylaw is designed to be complaint driven, which means that tent evictions are only supposed happen if there has been a complaint made.



"We can't afford to live as is, never mind having to pay fines and shit like that for just trying to sleep at night. I don't think it's really right. But it is what it is" Blair

Why do people tent?

When the conversation about tent city comes up, there is a tendency to frame it as a choice people make. Caleb, one of the local service providers we spoke with gave us a powerful take on what the “choice” to tent really looks like: “They're choosing between a really crappy room in a rooming house where they feel unsafe and living outside where they feel like they at least have some sort of autonomy over their life. We often put it, “people choose to be homeless,” as if their choice of housing is a good one! But it's not a good one. It's not a good one” Caleb also pointed out that the community tends to get upset at people who “choose” to be homeless instead of asking, “what is it that is making more and more people choose not to use our shelters? Why is it better to be outside in friggin wintertime than to use the shelters?”



Interviewer says: So you haven't used the shelters in Peterborough have you? Angus: Yes, we have. We have used CMHA Safe Beds. The other issue with navigating the shelters here has been that we opted for a tent, because many of the shelters in the area we did intake with, and then realised that they would separate us. And we weren't comfortable with that. Because again, like I had been assaulted

When it comes to trying to access housing Leylah another local service provider told us “there are many, many reasons that somebody may struggle to find a place to live, why somebody who's experiencing homelessness may struggle to find a place to rent. And only some of that is cost. There is rampant discrimination, despite it being illegal, against people who draw on any kind of social assistance. It is rampant and everybody's aware of it”. Leylah also points out that wording like “suitable for a working professional. Proof of income required” can be found on many housing listings.

The hidden costs of tent evictions

The desperation that service providers and service users experience due to the parks and facilities bylaw enforcement has led to the creation of the Permission to Survive Campaign. It is important to highlight that the Permission to Survive Campaign is not a proposed solution to homelessness in Peterborough. It is strictly a campaign to decriminalize survival when people are unhoused and cannot access any of the local housing services for help for any number of reasons. Anna, a local service provider told us that "a number of the people that are currently living outside, we know have been housed by a couple of different organizations unsuccessfully, and they're very unwell. And we do not have a solution for them"

Other hidden consequences of the Parks and Facilities bylaw include a loss of safety for people and their belongings. Julia told us "you can't sleep. You're on guard all the time. It's just not good" and Mickey told us something similar "Yeah so, I really tried to be safe at night. And when I sleep, I mean, that's when you're most susceptible."

The threat to safety is compounded by the damage that bylaw enforcement has on the relationships between service providers and the people who use their services. A service provider named Heather told us "that our folks are not part of the enforcement. And the reason for that is because we don't want the enforcement piece to affect the relationship that our folks have with people seeking services."

Veronica explained that for some service providers "the tenting in the parks puts them in a very tough position when they're trying to create relationships and help. And then the City is requiring them to move people."

When tents are dismantled people's lives are thrown into chaos again. "And then you have to try to rebuild and get your own stuff back. And how are you supposed to have a job? You can't get an address, you can't get mail, you can't have a phone because someone is just going to steal it. No computer access. You have nothing." (Hillary)

Belinda, one of the local service providers we spoke with, reiterated what Hillary said from their perspective" So then we see people camping. And then those are obviously torn down on a regular basis. And people lose all their belongings, they lose their tent, they lose any type of security that they've had."



The loss is immeasurable

Some of the local service providers we spoke with have lived experience of homelessness themselves. Their perspective is unique because they can see the issue from multiple angles at once. For example, Leah expressed a concern about the impact of bylaw enforcement on people's physical and mental health "These people have lost their teeth, they've lost fingers, they've lost toes, and some people have lost their fucking lives." Leah went on to explain how the bylaw impacts people's mental health as well "Some of them have lost things that they can never replace, pieces of children that have died, mementos of children they've lost custody of, parents, siblings, friends, cousins, you name it, these people are losing all the things that make them human, that makes them a person." Leah ended their thought by observing that people whose tents are cleared are "retraumatized every time the city comes for their fucking tents." Similarly, Mary =a service user and provider-told us "There is no hope for us. They just want us to move on. Everyone in town either wants us to die from overdosing. I see jokes about it on Facebook."



Encampment evictions cause trauma for the people who are living in the tents and the workers who have no choice but to enforce the bylaw. Some people we talked to had been through multiple tent evictions, and described how excessive the tent eviction process is. Coli told us what the eviction of 4 tents looked like "I remember this very vividly- they had 4 police cars. And tell me this isn't intimidation, okay? They had 4 police cars, 5 small city trucks, 2 dump trucks, 2 bulldozers, 2 bylaw officers"



The majority of the people we interviewed who had experienced a tent eviction first hand had had everything they owned thrown in a dumpster. For some people that meant losing irreplaceable mementos. For others it meant losing everything they had worked for. When people lose all their belongings, they also lose life-sustaining things like medications.

In an interview, Dusko lamented the loss of "all my personal belongings. Everything's gone. And there's no getting it back. And it's stuff I work hard for, you know. So it sucks."

Criminalizing Survival

The stories that we heard from service providers about tent evictions echoed what we were hearing from people who were tenting. Belinda's observation parallels Coli's eviction experience: "We have 2 police officers, usually, a bylaw officer. There's usually a dump truck, they'll have the bulldozer, and then they'll have usually 2 or 3 other police officers there to help out." Not only did stories about tent evictions echo each other but they also showed how encampment evictions are traumatizing for everyone involved including the city workers who have to dismantle peoples homes. One service provider Grace talked about how "their whole life is just picked up in one scoop" and went on to say "To watch the workers, they feel it as well. You see them with some of them were actually crying, which was good. They don't... this is what they're to do, but we have a big problem."



As such, most of the people we interviewed agreed that the Parks and Facilities Bylaw is causing harm. As Lehlay, a service provider, told us "I do think the parks bylaw needs to be rescinded immediately. People need to not have tents being confiscated and being told to move along and losing personal belongings." Similarly, Amy shared, "We're facilitating a protest next week. We will stand in front of tents to prevent them being torn down" Sara pointed out "So we do see people's right to find shelter being infringed in Peterborough all the time. Police officers will come and remove tents, they will remove people's belongings. And, I mean, what they're doing is they're destroying their homes and dismantling our community."

Like others, Leah told us in no uncertain terms that the city needs to designate a park for people to safely tent in while we continue to look for more creative solutions to ensure that the right to housing can be realized by everyone in Peterborough.

34 percent of the service providers we spoke with support the repeal of the parks and facilities bylaw, but no one thinks that tenting is a real solution. Among service users and service providers, people were clear that tenting is making the best of a horrible situation.

Tent Evictions are a cycle

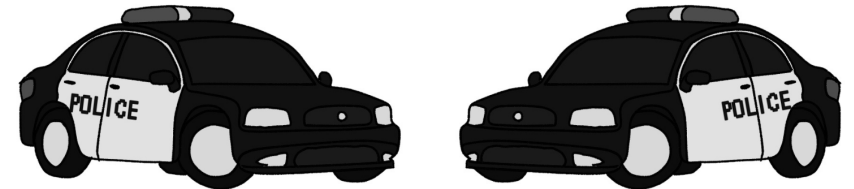
In order for anyone to be able to access services they need to be stabilized to a point, when someone is trying to keep a job the tenting bylaw makes an already difficult task a near impossible one. Dusko told us how hard it is to keep a job while he is living in a tent: "It's been hard like I have three jobs..." Dusko told us some of the reasons trying to keep a job and live in a tent is near impossible: "It sucks. It gets dirty fast. It's not-- kind of sucks because there's no washroom, no running water. You wake up in the middle of the night you're thirsty . And now the city's enforcing all these laws, you can't set up a tent anywhere."

"LITERALLY ANYWHERE. I'VE SLEPT IN STAIRWELLS. I SLEPT IN PARKING GARAGES. ANYWHERE, ANYWHERE YOU CAN FIND SHELTER. THE WINTER IS BRUTAL. IT'S FREEZING". STAN



of destabilization

The no tenting bylaw also puts extra stress on people who are trying to stay out of trouble. Clay, one of the local service providers we spoke with, pointed out that "People aren't allowed to live outside, so if you're refusing the shelter, you're in perpetual hiding. And again, there's all sorts of charges that can come with that for people who have criminal records, whether it's a breach, or a failure to comply or mischief, or then if someone gets into an altercation." Here again we see the impossible choice that people who are tenting have to face.



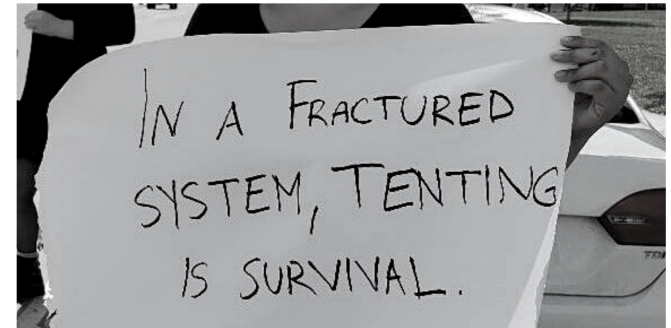
While some service providers maintained that enforcing the bylaw is simply something that is done as directed by Peterborough City council, Amy pointed out that "...The police don't want to be doing what they're being asked to do. The police don't want to rip people's tents down But they're being forced to, that's their job because of the bylaw. I'm sure you heard T- in that meeting that day being like, I wish I could stop telling my men to take the tents down..."

Tenting is Exhausting

Some people explained that staying at tent city can be as overwhelming as staying at the shelters. JL told us they had been discharged from the hospital and had nowhere to go. They tried to stay at the shelter and tent city and they told us that there was "just a lot of noise, a lot of yelling, a lot going on" JL walked around all night and tried to sleep on park benches but the police were called. Derek explained that being in a tent is a better alternative than the shelters "...because there's so many thieves in there and it's not funny. Like, not only thieves but people are screaming all night, you can't sleep, people getting into your shit..." As we were hearing about peoples experiences tenting it became clear that tenting is exhausting.



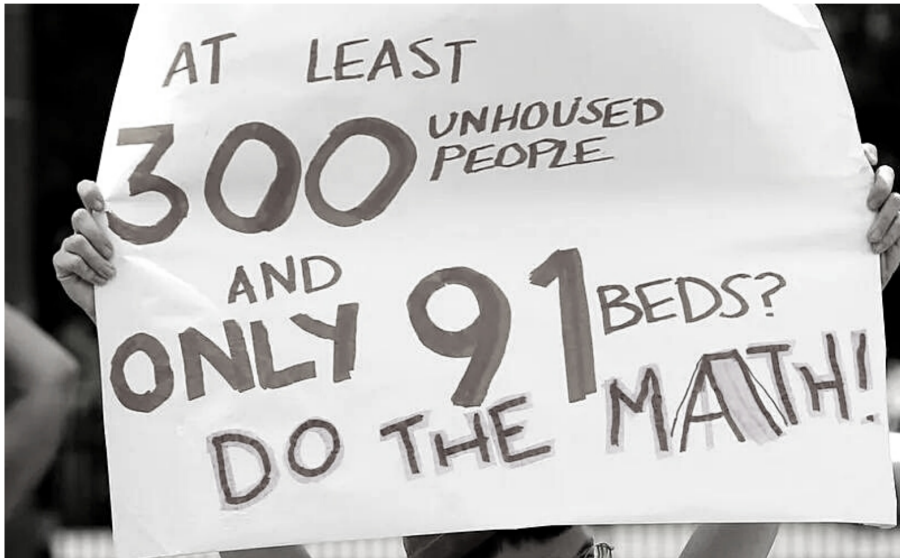
Blair told us that they have to take down their tent every morning "...It makes both of us grumpy in the morning." He said "Having to get up 7:30, 8 o'clock to tear the tent down just to lay a blanket on top of it to go back to sleep..." Just a pain in the ass. And it's not like it's stopping us from setting it up every night, so I don't see the whole point of them coming over with the fines and shit." At the time we were talking to him they had already received 2 warnings and he told us " ...the 3rd warning will bring the police in and if the police come in they'll end up arresting one of us..."



Not only is tenting exhausting but living outside can strip people of their dignity. Tiffany told us a little bit about how difficult it is to get your basic needs met when you're living outside "Oh, it's frustrating as hell. It's like, what are we supposed to do, man? I already have to poop and pee outside, that's embarrassing enough. I can't wash myself properly. I'm embarrassed and I cry every morning. Why can't I just pitch a tent where I've lived before? I spend every day here in and right now I'm breaking the law by even being here. I got a trespassing..."

In the end

We spoke with over 40 people who use the housing services in Peterborough and over 40 local service providers from different arms of the housing sector. The level of desperation in our community has become palpable. Payne told us that "...it feels like if people die outside, their numbers go down and that's measured as success. That's the only way I can wrap my head around why there's no action" It was clear from our interviews that the local service providers feel like their hands are tied despite their drive to help find a solution. "It feels like putting a Band-Aid on a gunshot wound sometimes." Payne



PARK STORIES is a series of zines produced by BfE SuperCrew at Trent University's Research for Social Change Lab. The zines document the stories and observations that people with experiences of homelessness shared with us in Victoria Park in 2022.

You're holding Issue Five — The Parks Bylaw.

This zine's lead author was **Samantha Blondeau**, a graduate research assistant at the Research for Social Change Lab. It relied on contributions from Thamer Linklater, Jimmy Frickey, Samantha Blondeau, Marisa Mackenzie, Naomi Nichols, Will Pearson, and Joey Lavictoire (who did all the illustrations).

Thanks for reading!

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"I think we have to enact Section I3 or whatever that section is where the CAO has the power to designate camping. Until we can provide enough shelter, we have to provide space that's that people can camp safely in" "a number of the people that are currently living outside, we know have been housed by a couple of different organizations unsuccessfully, and they're very unwell. And we do not have a solution for them" (Anna) I remember this very vividly- they had 4 police cars. And tell me this isn't intimidation, okay? They had 4 police cars, 5 small city trucks, 2 dump trucks, 2 bulldozers, 2 bylaws. SB: For how many people? Coli: 4 tents. Can you say 'overkill much "Some of them have lost things that they can never replace, pieces of children that have died, mementos of children they've lost custody of, parents, siblings, friends, cousins, you name it, these people are losing all the things that make them human, that makes them a person." "I think there should be some kind of solution where all these people can go and bring their tent, whether it be a big parking lot up by Reid Hill or something like that. [A place] where they're allowed, where you don't have to worry what every Thursday you've got to tear it down because every time you tear down a tent it's never going to go back up the same way".Kate