



**Max Eckstein Presentation  
on behalf of Square One Community  
at the City of Moose Jaw Public Meeting  
on Community Wellness and Safety**

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this very important topic today. My name is Maxton Eckstein, and I am the Coordinator at Square One Community, a local organization dedicated to supporting unhoused individuals. I have a decade of experience working in housing insecurity and with people experiencing

homelessness. This includes being a Team Lead in a Regina Housing First Program working with the chronically homeless. The reason today I bring up my experience in this field, is because it has given me the firsthand knowledge to understand what works and what doesn't work.

We all want a safe community, and we all want people to be housed and live their best lives, but what actually works in bringing in those desired outcomes?

An increase of people experiencing homelessness is not just a Moose Jaw problem. It is happening across every city in this country, for a variety of reasons. The majority of unhoused people in Moose Jaw, in fact have deep Moose Jaw roots. Despite rumours to the contrary, what people working front line in this field are seeing, is local people who have fallen through the cracks of our system, who have deep roots not only to the city, but to family and friends within it. The perception that the unhoused people in our city are not from here is categorically false. In fact, it was quite the opposite when I worked in Regina. I would see influxes of Moose Jaw residents who had no access to services in their own hometown. Being a city approaching 40,000 citizens, it is time for all of us here in Moose Jaw to take responsibility for the solutions.

So, what works? What turns a life around? What helps someone choose recovery, and to engage in independent living. The answer is relationships. From all my years in this work, I have learned that a strong therapeutic relationship between an unhoused individual and a support worker who is intensively involved in their day to day lives, brings profound change and stability to that person. Studies have shown that up to 70% of someone's rehabilitation comes from their relationship with their key worker. Not the size of a program or their funding, not the facilities, not the specific programming offered, but the therapeutic relationship. These other things are important too, but real change comes from real

relationships, from a worker who cares and is dedicated to helping a client see through the changes they dream of.

So, what does that look like in the field? It looks like supportive housing. Our shelters provide pivotal work in this community. So many of the things people are worried about occurring are mitigated when someone has a bed to sleep in. But what comes next? To prevent someone being stuck in the shelter system indefinitely, we need supportive housing programs, on a larger scale. This means support workers helping a client acquire and maintain a tenancy in the community. Once someone is housed, with actual wrap around supports, that is when real change occurs. In practice, I have found that over 90% of my clients I have worked with chose to try to recover from any existing addictions AFTER they have acquired this support and housing.

Relocating people or facilities to the outskirts of the city will not have a positive impact on community safety or on the lives of unhoused individuals. People will not simply walk away from the downtown core area. They will stay where the resources that are important to them are, they will stay where their social connections are. Attempting to restrict or relocate services will not only isolate people but will create a self-fulfilling prophecy of creating the very high-risk behavior a plan like this proports to eliminate. When people feel unwanted and disconnected, that is when you see a steep increase in high-risk behavior.

What Moose Jaw needs is a strong continuum of support for unhoused individuals to progress through. From community outreach to the shelter system, to supportive housing, to independence. Our shelters are not a stop gap for someone to be stuck in, they are a gateway into a system of support that will change someone's life, and they need to be located where people are at.

Improving the continuum of support is Square One's business. Right now, Square One is forming a new Social Housing Advisory Committee. This committee will consist of all the organizations working on serving the unhoused population, including a seat for all levels of government and the business community. There is a tremendous amount of siloing and duplication of services in this city, as organizations do not communicate like they used to since the dissolution of the Regional Intersectoral Committee. This committee on a regular basis, will be able to tackle the challenges the city is facing around homelessness, and will foster a strong continuum of support, allowing organizations like Square One, to fill gaps in our system, like a lack of supportive housing.

Thank you so much for your time today, and I look forward to working with you all on creating solutions that actually work.