

My name is Fidelia Ukueje, I am the founder and current President of Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo.

I sit with some amazing folks on the LEWG. I had my close experience to homelessness in 2013 when I came into Canada as a pregnant student at Conestoga college. Prior to leaving my country, I had secured a four months lease. However, my landlord on seeing me pregnant told me my lease would be up after the agreed four months. From then on I tried to secure another room before the expiration of my lease but couldn't as I kept getting rejections upon rejections.

I had my baby and was fortunate to have someone I had just met take me and my newborn into their home. My baby and I had to squat for weeks until we found a kind hearted landlord willing to rent to a new mum and her baby. This experience was what gave birth to NIROW.

My experience is not peculiar to me as there are predatory landlords who make finding and keeping housing difficult for people. There would be more homeless people if families in our NIROW community were not housing people experiencing precarious housing situations.

I believe we can achieve more if the region steps up as a partner in addressing homelessness. In Finland, only 0.1% of the population is experiencing homelessness currently because they are not delaying a Housing First approach. They are implementing it and putting resources toward it. In Helsinki, no one sleeps on the street. Between 2010 and 2018 Finland has enjoyed a 40% decline in its homelessness rate. Homelessness in Finland during the pandemic did not increase.

Here in Kitchener homelessness is rising exponentially. We are asking the Region for a more practical approach to Housing First.

We are asking that more funds be allocated to services such as transitional homes for the unsheltered and those experiencing hidden homelessness.

We ask that funds be allocated to training of staff to use trauma informed approaches in supporting homeless people, rather than approaches that further re-traumatize people.

Frontline workers must also be empowered and know they will be supported when implementing Housing First approaches.

Let's transform aspiration into action together.

Thank you