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County launching Rural Homelessness Estimation Project

The County of Grande Prairie is preparing to launch the Rural Homelessness Estimation Project, in partnership with the towns of Beaverlodge, Wembley and Sexsmith and the Village of Hythe.

“The purpose of the project is to establish who within our rural areas, are homeless or are living at risk of homelessness,” said Lisa Watson, FCSS Child, Youth, Family and Community Team Lead. “We will use the results of the study to generate conversation and action around poverty and homelessness in the area.”

The County Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) department received a \$5,000 grant from the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) to lead the initiative, which is intended to develop an estimate of how many individuals living in the five municipalities meet the definition of homelessness. According to the ARDN, there are four types of living conditions that will be included in the estimation, which can be defined as follows:

- Unsheltered – people who are absolutely homeless, living on the street or in places not intended for human habitation
- Emergency Sheltered – people who are staying in overnight shelters due to homelessness or family violence
- Provisionally Accommodated – people living in temporary accommodations or in places that are not intended for long-term accommodation
- At Risk of Homelessness – people who are not yet homeless but their current economic situation is precarious

The municipalities will work with local agencies to gather data about the individuals accessing their services, from Monday, September 17 to October 17. Individuals will be assigned with a unique identifier to avoid double-counting while protecting their anonymity; individuals and families who fit into the categories also have the option to self-report by connecting with one of the participating agencies. Once the data collection is complete, County FCSS will tabulate the data and create a final report.

This unique approach was developed by ARDN to address the unique challenges associated with estimating homelessness in rural communities. ARDN is supporting similar estimation projects across the province to help develop an understanding and increase awareness of the issue of rural homelessness.



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