

## **SOCIAL HOUSING APPLICATION PROCESS SURVEY**

This report outlines the results of Social Housing Application Process Survey administered by Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board. The survey collected information from individuals currently on the centralized waiting list for Rent Geared To Income assistance social housing managed by Central Housing Registry.

The purpose of the Social Housing Application Survey was to assess the level of applicant satisfaction with the Central Housing Registry's service delivery and to identify needs and establish priorities for areas that may require further development.

The main objective of this survey was:

1. To identify and assess if there are challenges related to the application process; and define areas of improvement; and
2. To determine and measure applicants' perception of service delivery; and describe any adjustments that may be required to improve services.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Social Housing Application Survey was designed to be a mail-out survey that was sent out in January 2007 to 300 applicants on the Central Housing Registry's waiting list. The survey package included a self addressed return envelope for responses. Plans were made with a third party to receive and compile the completed surveys. A total of 54 completed surveys were received by March, 2007, with a response rate of 18%. A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix A.

### **Highlights of Findings:**

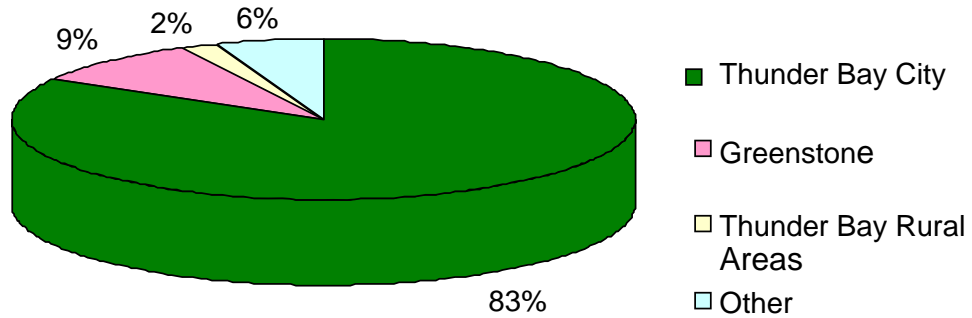
- Seventy-two percent (72%) of applicants on Central Housing Registry's waiting list who responded to the survey were satisfied with the process they went through to apply for Rent Geared to Income Assistance.
- Seventy percent (70%) of respondents reported they are renters.
- Forty-eight percent (48%) of respondents indicated they applied for seniors housing.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of respondents stated their source of information regarding "Rent Geared to Income" came from community agencies.

### **Results:**

Question 1, asked respondents; Where do you live? As illustrated in Figure1, 83% of the 54 respondents reported that they are from the City of Thunder Bay,

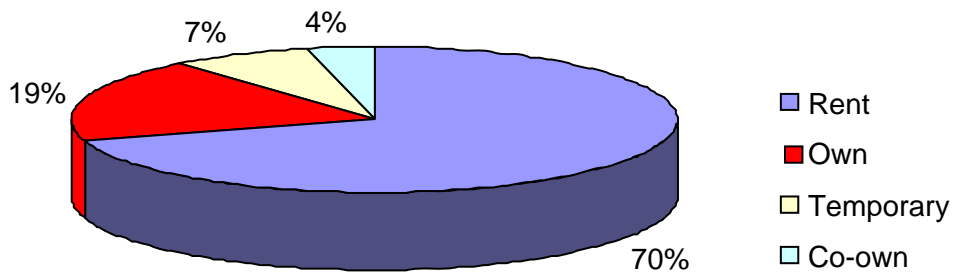
9% indicated they are from Greenstone, 2% stated they are from rural areas outside of the City of Thunder Bay and 6% indicated other locations.

Figure 1 Respondent's Residence



Question 2, asked Respondents; what type of housing accommodation do you reside in? Figure 2 illustrates that 70% of respondents indicated they are living in private rental units, 19% were living in their own house, 7% reported they were living in temporary accommodations, and 4% stated they co-own the house.

Figure 2 Current Type of Accommodations - Own/Rent/Temporary/Co-own



Question 3, asked respondents; How did you find out about Rent Geared to Income housing? As illustrated in Table 1, 39% of respondents stated that their main sources of information about Rent Geared to Income (RGI) housing came

from community agencies. The second most common source was a friend (33.3%) and a relative (14%). Neighbours and landlords accounted for 3.7% each and other sources 16.7%.

**Table 1 Information about RGI**

	Number	Percentage*
Community Agency	21	38.9
Friend	18	33.3
Relative	8	14.8
Neighbour	2	3.7
Landlord	2	3.7
Other	9	16.7

\* These percentages are not definitive because they are based on multiple responses.

Question 4, asked respondents; What type of housing unit did you apply for? As illustrated in Table 2, 48% of respondents indicated that they applied for seniors housing, 33% reported singles, 24% indicated family housing, and 3% stated modified/accessible.

**Table 2 Type of Housing Unit**

Housing Type	Number	Percentage*
Seniors housing	26	48.1
Singles	18	33.3
Family housing	13	24.1
Modified/Accessible	2	3.7

\* These percentages are not definitive because they are based on multiple responses.

### **Perception of Service Delivery**

Question 5, dealt with the respondents' perception of service delivery and was broken into five areas of responses, from the statement that, "The staff I talked to at Central Housing Registry Office is":

#### **5.1 Friendly, courteous, helpful, and willing to listen**

As illustrated in Table 3, 83.4% of the 54 respondents reported that staff are "always" or "usually" friendly, courteous, helpful, and willing to listen. Nine percent of respondents indicated "sometimes," 1.9% stated "never," and 5.6% did not respond to this statement.

#### **5.2 The staff I talked to at Central Housing Registry Office is organized**

Eighty-one percent (81.5%) of respondents reported that the staff they talked to at Central Housing Registry office are "always" or "usually" organized. Nine percent (9.3%) of respondents indicated "sometimes," 1.9% reported "never," and 7.4% did not provide a response to this statement.

#### **5.3 The staff I talked to at Central Housing Registry Office is knowledgeable and able to answer my questions**

Seventy-nine percent (79.7%) of respondents indicated that staff are “always” or “usually” knowledgeable and able to answer their questions. Thirteen percent (13%) of respondents reported “sometimes,” 1.9% stated “never,” and 5% did not respond to this statement.

**5.4 The staff I talked to at Central Housing Registry Office is respectful of my background and culture**

Seventy-seven percent (77.8%) of respondents reported that Central Housing Registry staff are “always” or “usually” respectful of their background and culture. Fourteen percent (14.8%) of respondents indicated “sometimes” or “never”, and 7% did not respond to this statement.

**5.5 The staff I talked to at Central Housing Registry Office is protective of my privacy**

Eighty-one percent (81.5%) of respondents indicated that staff they talked to at Central Housing Registry’s Office is “always” or “usually” protective of their privacy. Seven percent (7.5%) of respondents reported “sometimes” or “never”, and 11.1% did not respond to this statement.

**Table 3: Perception of Service Delivery**

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Did not Respond
<b>5.1</b> Friendly, courteous, helpful, and willing to listen	28 51.9%	17 31.5%	5 9.3%	1 1.9%	3 5.6%
<b>5.2</b> Organized	24 44.4%	20 37.1%	5 9.3%	1 1.9%	4 7.4%
<b>5.3</b> Knowledgeable and able to answer my questions	23 42.6%	20 37.1%	7 13.0%	1 1.9%	3 5.6%
<b>5.4</b> Respectful of my background and culture	31 57.4%	11 20.4%	6 11.1%	2 3.7%	4 7.4%
<b>5.5</b> Protective of my privacy	34 63.0%	10 18.5%	3 5.6%	1 1.9%	6 11.1%

Of the 54 respondents to the survey, 15 (27.8%) provided comments about the Central Housing Registry Staff. Thirty-nine respondents (72.2%) did not provide a comment. The 15 respondents made the following general comments.

Information

- Two (2) of the respondents commented that Central Housing Registry staff should let applicants know what is happening with their application.

#### Frustration

- Three (3) of the respondents reported they were not satisfied with the services they received.
- One (1) of the respondents stated that staff need to be more responsive to their needs.

#### Waiting list

- One (1) of the respondents stated she has been on the waiting list for two years and finding it difficult to make ends meet.
- One (1) other respondent indicated she is still on the waiting list, waiting for a response.

#### Office size

- One (1) of the respondents commented that the office is too small and they felt rushed.

#### Compliments

- Four (4) of the respondents complimented the Central Housing Registry staff for the professional services that they provide.

#### Other

- Two (2) of the respondents made comments that were not related to this question.

### **Respondents' Satisfaction with Services**

Question 7, asked respondents; Please rate your experiences when dealing with Central Housing registry:

#### **7.1 I am aware of whom I need to speak to if I have questions**

As Table 4 illustrates, 62.9% of respondents reported that they are “always” or “usually” aware of whom they need to speak to if they have questions. Twenty four percent (24.1%) of respondents indicated “sometimes,” 7.4% stated “never,” and 5.6% did not respond to this statement.

#### **7.2 I am able to use the automatic telephone system or voicemail**

Fifty-one percent (51.8%) of respondents indicated that they are able to use the automatic telephone system or voicemail “always” or “usually”. Fourteen percent (14.8%) reported “sometimes,” 22.2% stated “never,” and 11.1% did not respond to this statement.

#### **7.3 I am able to communicate with staff who speaks my language**

Seventy-seven percent (77.8%) of respondents reported that they are “always” or “usually” able to communicate with staff who speaks their language. Eleven percent (11.1) of respondents stated “sometimes,” 5.6% indicated “never,” and 5.6% did not provide a response to this statement.

**7.4 I am provided with consistent and adequate information**

Sixty-eight percent (68.5%) of respondents indicated that they are provided with consistent and adequate information “always” or “usually”. Twenty-four percent (24.1%) of respondents reported “sometimes,” 1.6% stated “never,” and 5.6% did not respond to this statement.

**7.5 I am able to understand the forms/written information that I have to fill out**

Seventy-two percent (72.3%) of respondents reported that they are “always” or “usually” able to understand the forms/written information that they have to fill out. Twenty percent (20.4%) of respondents indicated “sometimes,” 3.7% stated “never,” and 3.7% did not respond to this statement.

**7.6 I am aware of the information that is required to complete my application**

Seventy-seven percent (77.8%) of respondents indicated that they are “always” or “usually” aware of the information that is required to complete an application. Nine percent (9.3%) of respondents reported “sometimes,” 3.7% indicated “never,” and 9.3% did not respond to this statement.

**7.7 I am comfortable in the waiting room**

Seventy percent (70.4) of respondents reported that they are “always” or “usually” comfortable in the waiting room. Five percent (5.6%) of respondents indicated “sometimes,” 7.4% stated “never,” and 16.7% did not provide a response to this statement.

**7.8 I am able to receive a response to my questions within one business day**

Sixty-one percent (61.1%) of respondents indicated that they are able to receive a response to their questions within one business day, with 16.7% reporting “always” and 44.4% “usually”. Sixteen percent (16.7%) of respondents reported “sometimes,” 13% stated “never,” and 9% did not respond to this statement.

**7.9 I am aware of how to appeal a decision that I disagree with**

Fifty percent (50%) of respondents reported that they are “always” or “usually” aware of how to appeal a decision that they disagree with. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents reported they are “sometimes” or “never” aware of how to appeal a decision that they disagree with, and 13% did not respond to this statement.

**Table 4 Respondents' Satisfaction with Service Delivery**

I am:	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Did not Respond
7.1 Aware of whom I need to speak to if I have questions.	12 22.2%	22 40.7%	13 24.1%	4 7.4%	3 5.6%
7.2 Able to use the automatic telephone system or voicemail.	14 25.9%	14 25.9%	8 14.8%	12 22.2%	6 11.1%
7.3 Able to communicate with staff who speaks my language.	30 55.6%	12 22.2%	6 11.1%	3 5.6%	3 5.6%
7.4 Provided with consistent and adequate information.	21 38.9%	16 29.6%	13 24.1%	1 1.6%	3 5.6%
7.5 Able to understand the forms/written information that I have to fill out.	19 35.2%	20 37.1%	11 20.4%	2 3.7%	2 3.7%
7.6 Aware of the information that is required to complete my application.	19 35.2%	23 42.6%	5 9.3%	2 3.7%	5 9.3%
7.7 Comfortable in the waiting room.	20 37.1%	18 33.3%	3 5.6%	4 7.4%	9% 16.7
7.8 Able to receive a response to my questions within one business day.	9 16.7%	24 44.4%	9 16.7%	7 13.0%	5 9.3%
7.9 Aware of how to appeal a decision that I disagree with.	16 29.6%	11 20.4%	10 18.5%	10 18.5%	7 13.0%

\*Percentages are rounded independently and may not add to 100.

Question 8, asked respondents; are there any other comments you would like to make about your experiences with the Central Housing Registry?

Of the 54 respondents who completed the questionnaires 37 (68.5%) did not answer this question. Only 17 respondents (31.5%) responded to this question

and provided various comments about their experiences with the Central Housing Registry. Some comments were centered on issues of:

1. Information (better dissemination of application information, contact information)
2. Communication
3. Length of waiting list
4. Privacy

Information:

- One (1) of the respondents indicated that he/she is confused at times as to whom to contact or deal with: Thunder Bay Housing or Central Housing Registry.
- One (1) of the respondents commented about information overload. He/she stated that too much information was provided at one time which created difficulties of processing, understanding and retention.
- One (1) of the respondents stated that he/she does not know who to contact and at what telephone number. He/she had called previously, left a message but has received no response.

Communication:

- One (1) of the respondents reported that it takes a long time for staff to respond or return phone calls.
- One (1) of the respondents felt staff have problems explaining what type of documentation is required to complete the application form.

Waiting List:

- Four (4) of the respondents raised concerns about the waiting list. They stated that the waiting period is too long.

Privacy:

- One (1) respondent stated that a private area away from other applicants in the waiting area would be appreciated. The respondent felt the waiting area is too small and open, any conversation carried between individual applicants and staff are overheard by other people in the waiting area.

Three (3) respondents provided general compliments and were pleased with the way staff assisted them. Four (4) respondents provided comments that were not related to this question.

**Communication Preference:**

Question 9, asked respondents; How do you prefer to keep in touch with the Central Housing Registry Office?

Multiple responses were received for this question although participants were asked for only one response. Due to the multiple responses it is difficult to ascertain definitively that the preferences shown in Table 1.7 are the most preferred means of communication in the descending order.

**Table 5 Communication Preferences**

Method	Number
Telephone	37
Posted Mail	27
In Person	20
Fax	1

Question 10, asked respondents; Overall, how satisfied are you with the process you went through to apply for Rent-Geared-To-Income Assistance?

Seventy-two percent (72%) of the 54 respondents indicated they are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the process they went through to apply for Rent-Geared to Income Assistance; with 46% reporting they are “satisfied” and 25% “very satisfied”. Twenty-two percent (22.2%) of respondents indicated they are dissatisfied and 5.5% did not respond to this question.

Question 11, asked respondents; Do you have any suggestions on how we could improve the application process?

Of the 54 respondents, 30 (55.6%) did not respond to this question. Only 24 respondents (44.4%) offered suggestions on how the application process could be improved. These suggestions have been grouped under several headings and outlined as follows:

1. Improve the dissemination of information required to complete the application form (Two respondents)
2. Improve communication between staff and applicants (Two respondents)
3. Develop sensitivity to unique needs of individuals (Two respondents)
4. Place the application form online for people to access (One respondent)
5. Provide assistance with filling out the application form (One Respondent)
6. Provide periodic up-dates as to where applicants are on the waiting list (Two respondents)
7. Develop better ways of addressing issues of “Priority” (One of the 24 respondents)

8. Reduce the long waiting list (Five respondents)
9. Shorten the application form and make it less cluttered (One respondent)
10. Use separate application forms for single persons and families (One respondent)

Question 12, asked respondents; Do you have any other general comments you would like to make?

Of the 54 respondents, 39 (72.2%) did not respond to this question. Only 15 respondents (27.8%) provided comments.

1. Take some time to listen to your clients
  - One (1) of the respondents suggested that Central Housing Registry front line staff need to take some time to listen to applicants' housing needs.
2. Provide periodic-updates
  - Two (2) of the respondents suggested that the Central Housing Registry should try to provide applicants with periodic updates of where individuals are on the waiting list.
3. Lack of empathy and understanding
  - One (1) of the respondents stated that when individuals require assistance and could use this service, they find that there is lack of empathy and understanding from Central Housing Registry front line staff.
4. Long waiting list
  - Two (2) of the respondents commented about the long waiting list. One of the respondents stated that he/she has been on the waiting list for two years. The other respondent reported he/she is still waiting indefinitely to receive a response.
5. Allow more people (landlords) to register with Central Housing Registry
  - One (1) of the respondents commented that the Central Housing Registry allow more people to register with them so that these individuals may rent their property out through "Rent Geared to Income" assistance.
6. Positive comments
  - Two (2) of the respondents provided general positive comments related to staff and the services they provide. One of the respondents expressed gratitude for the services received and complimented staff on their efficient and effective work. The other

respondent voiced his/her appreciation for the role that social housing plays in meeting the needs of low income seniors.

7. Other

- Six (6) of the respondents made comments that were not related to the application process.

**Limitations:**

Given the low response rate (18%) the results of this survey can not be generalized to the entire Central Housing Registry waiting list population.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this survey was to assess the level of applicant satisfaction with the Central Housing Registry's service delivery and to identify needs and establish priorities for areas that may require further development. The result of the Social Housing Application Process Survey shows that applicants are for the most part satisfied with the application process. Seventy-two percent (72%) of respondents expressed satisfaction with the process they went through to apply for Rent Geared To Income Assistance, and indicated that they were "always" or "usually" able to communicate with staff who speaks their language and aware of the information that is required to complete an application (77.8% respectively). Respondents reported they are "always" or "usually" able to understand the forms/written information that they have to fill out (72.3%) and find the waiting room comfortable (70.4%). There was an overall satisfaction with most aspects of services, respondents indicated that Central Housing Registry's staff "always" or "usually", are: friendly, courteous (83.4%), knowledgeable (79.9%), respectful (77.8%) and protective of their privacy (81.5%).

While most of the respondents in the survey indicated no problems with the services they receive from Central Housing Registry, concerns identified by respondents who did have difficulties were related to "use of the automated telephone system", "awareness of how to appeal a decision that one disagrees with", and "awareness of whom one needs to speak to when questions arise". Based on the ratings illustrated in Table 4, Question 7.1, 7.2, and 7.9, there may be some room for review and improvement.

Moving on to the suggestions offered by respondents to improve the application process, 1 to 5 of the 24 respondents suggested that Central Housing Registry should reduce the long waiting list, improve communication between applicants and front line staff and improve the dissemination of information required to complete the application form.

Of important note is that some of the issues raised by respondents in the general comment sections do not fall under the jurisdiction of Central Housing Registry. For instance, Central Housing Registry does not have control as to who is offered

units, and does not enlist directly with independent landlords for the provision of RGI assistance.