

Report on London Homeless Coalition's Communications Strategy – July 2015

Process

A volunteer *ad hoc* group of London Homeless Coalition (LHC) members met for three facilitated workshops in June 2015 to develop an LHC communications strategy. The group identified LHC's purpose and current audiences; reviewed LHC's current communications in order to identify aims, gaps and opportunities; and identified, prioritized and strategized future communication outcomes that align with the coalition's mission and strategic priorities.

The London Homeless Coalition's Purpose – "Why" we do what we do

Having a clearly stated purpose will help make LHC communications more inspiring and more likely to influence our audiences.¹

- **What we do:** Help end homelessness by advising, shaping and coordinating community responses to homelessness, and related needs to the London area.
- **How we do it:** By advocating to governments and the larger community in order to drive change, by raising awareness about the issues related to homelessness in order to inspire action, and by collaborating with groups and individuals working to prevent homelessness in order to be more effective and increase our impact.
- **Why we do it:** All individuals in our community have the right to respect, dignity, compassion, and housing that meets their needs. Homelessness costs our community. We work to build a stronger, healthier community by advocating for poverty reduction, and stabilizing individual lives through safe, secure, affordable housing with appropriate supports.

¹ See the work of Simon Sinek: *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*.
YouTube video: <http://bit.ly/1fQ1qY0>

London Homeless Coalition's Strategic Priorities

1. **Our Governments** – *Poverty has a significant income component based on the gap between the cost of basic necessities, and social assistance rates. We will continue to lobby for a reduction in poverty as it relates to people's ability to obtain and retain housing.*
2. **Our Communities** – *Homelessness affects us all as citizens of London and area. We will ask our community members what they can do to be a part of ending homelessness.*
3. **Ourselves** – *We can end homelessness in London, but to do so we need to be collaborating together to form the components of a comprehensive system. We will build community collaboration with a common vision of ending homelessness.*

London Homeless Coalition Audiences
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- 1. London Homeless Coalition membership** – Individuals who have formalized membership with the London Homeless Coalition (submitted a membership application and been approved for membership by the Steering Committee).
- 2. Individuals with lived experience** – Individuals who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, homelessness.
- 3. Stakeholders** – Agencies, organizations and landlords that are involved in the work of homeless prevention and affordable housing; may have membership with LHC, but may also need additional communication from LHC.
- 4. Allies** – Agencies, organizations and individuals that are interested in the work of homeless prevention and affordable housing, and could potentially become members or advocates for LHC's work (includes faith-based organizations, service organizations, schools, etc.).
- 5. Politicians** – Decision-makers at all levels of government (doesn't include government administrative staff, who are included under Stakeholders).
- 6. News media** – Print, TV and radio news media, and their online channels.
- 7. General public** – People who know little or nothing about the issues of homelessness and affordable housing, and may have misconceptions or prejudices about people experiencing homelessness.

Communications Analysis

1. London Homeless Coalition membership

○ **Objectives**

- Coordinate a local response to end homelessness.
- Communicate meeting information to membership.
- Communicate information necessary for informed decision-making to membership.
- Increase membership knowledge of the issues surrounding homelessness and affordable housing.
- Communicate upcoming events and initiatives (including those of member agencies and organizations).
- Encourage information-sharing, networking and collaboration between members, member agencies, and organizations.
- Increase member participation in LHC activities.
- Grow LHC membership.

○ **Strengths and Successes**

- Strong meetings with clear agendas and minutes, excellent attendance from a core group of committed members.
- Capacity to administrate communications (Communications Coordinator role).
- Good membership list and robust e-newsletter software, good “open” and “click-through” rates on e-newsletter statistics.
- Good number of social media followers (Facebook, Twitter).

○ **Communication Gaps**

- Since not all members are attending all meetings, and there may be many non-members attending meetings only occasionally, information that's shared only at meetings may be missed by some.
- Not receiving sufficient information about agency events and initiatives to adequately relay that information to membership, post on website.
- May not be sufficient print materials for sharing with general public, allies and stakeholders.

○ **Challenges**

- Some members unable to meet attendance requirements.
- Many attending meetings are not members, may not be regular attendees.
- Would prefer increased number of members from Aboriginal and lived-experience communities.
- Not all members, stakeholders and allies understand issues such as how services are funded.

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- Need to be watchful of “information overload” or e-newsletter fatigue (too many emails to members).
- Not all members are on social media.
- **Potential Tactics**
 - Leverage email list and e-newsletter platform by expanding member e-newsletters to contain more-detailed content about meetings, announcements and upcoming events or initiatives.
 - Grow email list to include communications contacts of stakeholder organizations and allies.
 - Enhance content on LHC e-newsletters (summaries of discussions, links to related resources).
 - Grow social media shares and likes on LHC posts by developing highly engaging social media posts.
 - Develop documents that encourage information sharing and awareness-raising.
 - Enhance website value for long-term members who may visit website rarely or not at all.
 - Regular schedule of presentations from agencies / organizations at LHC meetings; summarize presentations in e-newsletters for those not attending.
 - Provide more engagement opportunities for members (more networking events, small group events, workshops, etc.)
 - Hold focus groups as part of general meetings.
 - Develop task forces for specific issues (e.g. emergency response).
 - Coordinate event communications by involving Communications Coordinator, event planning committee members, and communications staff of involved organizations.
- **Priorities (identified by Communications Committee)**
 - Increase engagement with LHC communications (higher open rate on newsletters).
 - Increased early contributions to announcements.
 - Increased participation in surveys or activities.

2. Individuals with lived experience

- **Objectives**
 - Engage and involve people with lived experience in the work and decision-making of the LHC.
 - Communicate information about events and initiatives meaningful to people with lived experience.
- **Strengths and Successes**
 - Many LHC members and member organizations have front-line staff members who spread LHC messages to people with lived experience.
 - LHC events typically have a component for people with lived experience (e.g. food and refreshments, Free Store, memorial services).
 - There is a core group of people with lived experience who are engaged on social media.
- **Communication Gaps**
 - Because of lack of access to internet, email, and social media, not always connecting with people with lived experience to the extent that we'd like.
- **Challenges**
 - People with lived experience experiencing access barriers to Internet, social media, website, email.
- **Potential Tactics**
 - Develop communications specifically for people with lived experience (e.g. information about resources, changes to services, etc.).
 - Collaboration with LHC Outreach Coordinator on strategies for increasing lived experience membership attendance at meetings.
 - Engage with specific news media that people with lived experience may have access to (e.g. local talk radio), to share LHC messages, and engage people with lived experience.
 - Collaborate with researchers to communicate to specific populations (e.g. CURA and mental health community).
 - Implement "buddy system" for people with lived experience, linking them with peers or agency staff members to orient them to LHC meetings.
 - Hold small group initiatives or meetings specifically for people with lived experience, to seek their input into initiatives, events.
- **Priorities (identified by Communications Committee)**
 - Increased engagement and participation by people with lived experience.

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3. Stakeholders

- **Objectives**
 - Communicate information, initiatives and results to stakeholders.
 - Involve and engage stakeholders in the work of LHC.
 - Increase stakeholder participation in LHC activities.
- **Strengths and Successes**
 - Many stakeholders have membership on LHC.
 - There are many intertwined local networks of information about poverty reduction, homelessness, affordable housing, and related services.
 - Stakeholders already engage in cross-promotion of LHC events, especially via Twitter.
- **Communication Gaps**
 - Not all stakeholders attending all LHC meetings – some information may not be communicated.
 - E-newsletter statistics suggest that LHC e-newsletters are not being forwarded.
- **Challenges**
 - Not all stakeholders are LHC members, or on LHC email list.
 - Don't have database of all LHC stakeholders.
- **Potential Tactics**
 - Develop comprehensive stakeholder list.
 - Encourage members and member organizations representing stakeholders to have internal conversations about LHC information and activities.
 - Develop communication contacts at stakeholder agencies and organizations, to ensure that LHC messages are being relayed to those who need information.
 - Develop communications content especially geared to stakeholders (e.g. segmented e-newsletter, presentations).
 - Be even more strategic about reaching out to stakeholders (through e-newsletters and social media) to promote LHC activities.
 - Gain better understanding of how stakeholders use LHC website, and make adjustments to website organization or content.
- **Priorities (identified by Communications Committee)**
 - Develop communications (documents, infographics, videos) that simply and clearly share our messages.
 - Development of LHC speakers bureau.

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4. Allies

- **Objectives**
 - Communicate information and raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness in London and area.
 - Grow number of LHC allies.
 - Engage potential allies in the work of ending homelessness; convert to stakeholders where appropriate (including LHC volunteer opportunities).
- **Strengths and Successes**
 - Capacity for LHC outreach through Outreach Coordinator role.
 - Allies make up large number of LHC Twitter and Facebook page followers; decent ally engagement on social media.
- **Communication Gaps**
 - LHC website may not be easy to navigate for potential allies seeking information about homelessness in London, and the work of LHC.
 - LHC does not currently have a plan for engaging allies.
- **Challenges**
 - LHC may not have the capacity to grow and engage allies as much as we would like.
- **Potential Tactics**
 - Develop communications content specifically for allies; give members and stakeholders tools for engaging allies.
 - Invite allies to LHC meetings.
 - Grow ally email list.
 - Gain better understanding of how allies use LHC website, and make adjustments to website organization or content.
 - Outreach to faith-based communities; identify groups, prepare materials/presentations, identify LHC speakers and provide orientation.
 - Outreach to related agencies; same strategies as for faith-based communities
 - Outreach to schools with related programs (Western, King's, Brescia)
 - Outreach to new Canadians and related organizations.
 - Outreach to local business owners affected by issues such as panhandling.
 - Outreach to EMS, etc. – sensitivity training.
- **Priorities (identified by Communications Committee)**
 - Develop communications (documents, infographics, videos) that simply and clearly share our messages.
 - Development of LHC speakers bureau.

5. Politicians

- **Objectives**
 - Advocate to politicians about the issues surrounding homelessness and affordable housing.
 - Lobby politicians for decisions, policies and funding that lead to poverty reduction and elimination of homelessness.
- **Strengths and Successes**
 - Early LHC identification of emerging issues affecting people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.
 - Excellent LHC letter-writing campaigns and other advocacy to politicians regarding legislative changes, decisions.
 - Good MP, MPP and City Councillor attendance at LHC events (especially tied into election campaigns).
- **Communication Gaps**
 - Not all politicians are on LHC email list.
- **Challenges**
 - Full schedules and demand for attention of politicians; limited time to meet with LHC or review long documents.
- **Potential Tactics**
 - Be more strategic about engaging with politicians for poverty advocacy.
 - Grow email list of politicians, create communications specifically for this audience.
 - Grow politician awareness and attendance at LHC events.
 - Develop communications specifically for politicians (e.g. presentations, white papers, infographics, videos).
 - Increase politician engagement on social media.
 - Gain better understanding of how politicians use LHC website, and make adjustments to website organization or content.
 - Outreach to politicians – regular meetings with politicians to share talking points, documents, background material.
- **Priorities (identified by Communications Committee)**
 - Develop communications (documents, infographics, videos) that simply and clearly share our messages.

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6. News media

- **Objectives**
 - Increase news media attention on the issues surrounding homelessness and affordable housing.
 - Raise public awareness about homelessness.
 - Engage our communities in ending homelessness.
- **Strengths and Successes**
 - Strong spokesperson (LHC chair).
 - Good relationships with some news media allies.
 - Strong engagement with some reporters on Twitter.
- **Communication Gaps**
 - Not as much coverage as we would like on the issue of homelessness and poverty.
- **Challenges**
 - News media are most interested in newsworthy stories.
 - Reporters are usually overworked, working to tight deadlines.
- **Potential Tactics**
 - Develop strong relationships with local reporters.
 - Increase strategic planning of LHC news releases, with compelling story leads, informative backgrounders that clearly summarize key issues, interview subjects who can add depth and personal touch to issues, and clear calls to action for the public and allies.
 - Increase engagement with news media on social media (Twitter).
 - Organize LHC website resources to make it easier for media to find background information they need to cover stories.
 - Outreach to media on specific issues (e.g. panhandling, how to be compassionate citizens, responses to people with lived experience).
- **Priorities (identified by Communications Committee)**
 - Develop communications (documents, infographics, videos) that simply and clearly share our messages.

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7. General public

- **Objectives**
 - Communicate information and raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness in London and area.
 - Grow number of LHC allies.
 - Engage our communities in ending homelessness.
- **Strengths and Successes**
 - Good news-media coverage of LHC events.
- **Communication Gaps**
 - Difficult to find basic information about homelessness on LHC website (information is geared to members and informed stakeholders or allies).
- **Challenges**
 - Stigma and prejudice against people experiencing homelessness.
 - Lack of awareness and apathy about the issues surrounding homelessness and affordable housing.
- **Potential Tactics**
 - Develop communications materials (e.g. infographics, videos, presentations) that members and stakeholders can use to inform and engage new allies.
 - Grow awareness about issues surrounding homelessness on LHC social media.
 - Assign volunteers to “greet” general public near LHC events, and invite them into event space, conversation.
- **Priorities (identified by Communications Committee)**
 - Develop communications (documents, infographics, videos) that simply and clearly share our messages.
 - Development of LHC speakers bureau.

Calls to Action

Including strategic calls to action in LHC communications will help audiences focus on next steps, and encourage them to become involved in the work of LHC a way that will fulfill one or more of LHC's objectives.

Each LHC communication should ideally contain at least one strategic call to action. Below are some possible calls to action that can be used for LHC communications.

- Come to LHC meetings or events.
- Join LHC (membership application).
- Learn more about homelessness in London and the work that LHC does; click links, read documents, visit LHC website or social media.
- Become advocates for homeless prevention, people with lived experience, and LHC; share LHC's messages and information, book LHC speakers for presentations.
- Get involved with agencies working to end homelessness; volunteer or donate.
- Sign petitions and/or send letters to politicians (specific initiatives).

Communication Priorities (suggested by Communications Committee)

1. Research and compile resources for LHC website (to provide information to new members, public, media).
2. Summarize meeting presentation and discussions (so that members who can't attend meetings will have a better understanding of what happened).
3. Engage people with lived experience in conversations and plans.
4. Buddy system to encourage people with lived experience to come out to meetings.
5. Outreach to businesses impacted by panhandling, etc. (awareness-raising, connection to support services).
6. Presentations for stakeholders and allies (awareness-raising).
7. Education and awareness-raising for EMS, police, emergency room staff, etc. (awareness-raising).
8. Outreach to politicians (awareness-raising and advocacy).

Recommendations

- A. The ad hoc communications group is recommending that the London Homeless Coalition:
1. Formally adopts the LHC “Why” statement developed by the ad hoc committee.
 2. Identifies and prioritizes its communications objectives annually.
 3. Develops an annual written communications plan, with strategies and performance metrics for the priority objectives.
 4. Develops a written communications plan for all significant events (e.g. Soup N Bread, memorial services, World Homeless Action Day), which includes objectives, strategies, and performance metrics.
 5. Uses clear calls to action in all its communications.
- B. The ad hoc communications group is also recommending that the London Homeless Coalition approves the following priority objectives and strategies for the following audiences, for the remainder of 2015:
- 1. Membership**
 - a. Communicate information necessary for informed decision-making to membership more effectively.
 - i. Revise LHC e-newsletters to include meeting summaries.
 - ii. Grow email list to include communications contacts of stakeholder organizations and allies.
 - b. Increase membership knowledge of the issues surrounding homelessness and affordable housing.
 - i. Develop documents that encourage information sharing and awareness-raising.
 - ii. Regular schedule of presentations from agencies / organizations at LHC meetings; summarize presentations in e-newsletters for those not attending.
 - c. Communicate upcoming events and initiatives (including those of member agencies and organizations) more effectively.
 - i. Coordinate event communications by involving Communications Coordinator, event planning committee members, and communications staff of involved organizations.

2. Individuals with lived experience

- a. Engage and involve people with lived experience in the work and decision-making of the LHC.
 - i. Collaboration with LHC Outreach Coordinator on strategies for increasing lived experience membership attendance at meetings.
- b. Communicate information about events and initiatives meaningful to people with lived experience.
 - i. Develop communications specifically for people with lived experience (e.g. information about resources, changes to services, etc.).
 - ii. Collaborate with researchers to communicate to specific populations (e.g. CURA and mental health community).

3. Stakeholders

- a. Communicate information, initiatives and results to stakeholders more effectively.
 - i. Develop comprehensive stakeholder list.
 - ii. Develop communication contacts at stakeholder agencies and organizations, to ensure that LHC messages are being relayed to those who need information.
 - iii. Develop communications content especially geared to stakeholders (e.g. segmented e-newsletter, presentations).
 - iv. Encourage members and member organizations representing stakeholders to have internal conversations about LHC information and activities.
 - v. Begin developing an LHC speakers bureau.
 - vi. Be even more strategic about reaching out to stakeholders (through e-newsletters and social media) to promote LHC activities.
 - vii. Gain better understanding of how stakeholders use LHC website, and make adjustments to website organization or content.

4. Allies

- a. Communicate information and raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness in London and area more effectively.
 - i. Develop communications content specifically for allies; give members and stakeholders tools for engaging allies.
 - ii. Invite allies to LHC meetings.
 - iii. Grow ally email list.
 - iv. Gain better understanding of how allies use LHC website, and make adjustments to website organization or content.
 - v. Begin developing an LHC speakers bureau.

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- vi. Outreach to faith-based communities; identify groups, prepare materials/presentations, identify LHC speakers and provide orientation.
- vii. Outreach to related agencies; same strategies as for faith-based communities
- viii. Outreach to schools with related programs (Western, King's, Brescia)
- ix. Outreach to new Canadians and related organizations.
- x. Outreach to local business owners affected by issues such as panhandling.

Politicians

- b. Advocate to politicians about the issues surrounding homelessness and affordable housing.
 - i. Be more strategic about engaging with politicians for poverty advocacy.
 - ii. Grow email list of politicians, create communications specifically for this audience.
 - iii. Grow politician awareness and attendance at LHC events.
 - iv. Develop communications specifically for politicians (e.g. presentations, white papers, infographics, videos).
 - v. Increase politician engagement on social media.
 - vi. Gain better understanding of how politicians use LHC website, and make adjustments to website organization or content.
- c. Lobby politicians for decisions, policies and funding that lead to poverty reduction and elimination of homelessness.

5. News media

- a. Increase news media attention on the issues surrounding homelessness and affordable housing.
 - i. Develop strong relationships with local reporters.
 - ii. Increase strategic planning of LHC news releases, with compelling story leads, informative backgrounders that clearly summarize key issues, interview subjects who can add depth and personal touch to issues, and clear calls to action for the public and allies.
 - iii. Increase engagement with news media on social media (Twitter).
 - iv. Organize LHC website resources to make it easier for media to find background information they need to cover stories.
 - v. Outreach to media on specific issues (e.g. panhandling, how to be compassionate citizens, responses to people with lived experience)
- b. Raise public awareness about homelessness.

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- c. Encourage public engagement in homeless issues, with the goal of eliminating homelessness in London.

6. General public

- a. Communicate information and raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness in London and area.
 - i. Develop communications materials (e.g. infographics, videos, presentations) that members and stakeholders can use to inform and engage new allies.
 - ii. Organize LHC website resources to make it easier for general public to find basic information about homelessness and homeless prevention.
 - iii. Grow awareness about issues surrounding homelessness on LHC social media.
 - iv. Assign volunteers to “greet” general public near LHC events, and invite them into event space, conversation.
- b. Grow number of LHC allies.

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