Toronto Community Housing 2006 Tenant Survey

Executive Summary

October 2006
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Introduction

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) seeks to provide quality housing for low and moderate income households and to create community conditions that minimize risk and promote resiliency. TCHC plans to achieve this by supporting:

- buildings maintained in good repair;
- safe communities;
- equitable and inclusive life opportunities;
- community access to social supports/services and connected to neighbourhood systems;
- tenants organized to influence the institutions that govern their lives;
- partnerships to create healthy communities; and
- organizational capacity to meet mandate.

The 2006 Tenant Survey is the second time TCHC has sought feedback from tenants about their services, having first done so in 2004. This year's results allow TCHC to compare their performance against the benchmark established in 2004 and establish priorities over the next two years.

Background

TCHC is the largest social housing provider in Canada, responsible for managing 58,500 units in over 350 different locations across the city of Toronto. TCHC is home to 164,000 people representing nearly 6% of the citizens of Toronto.

With this many units, TCHC plays an important role in meeting the challenges and complexities faced by the 164,000 individuals living in TCHC housing with low and moderate-income households.

Methodology

The research was conducted using a mail-based survey. The survey package contained a letter that outlined the reasons for the survey and reinforced the confidentiality of the survey. It also provided instructions to tenants on how to access a copy of the questionnaire in one of the seven additional languages available (Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish and Tamil), if required.

A random sample of 8,100 tenants was selected and Decima mailed a copy of the survey to each of these tenants, which yielded 3,168 completed surveys (a 39% response rate). To ensure responses were statistically representative of each CHU,
Decima mailed out approximately 300 surveys per CHU, in order to target 100 completed return surveys for each of the 27 CHUs.

As part of their continuing effort to ensure a high level of tenant participation in priority setting and decision-making, the TCHC recognized the importance of repeating 2004’s Tenant Survey.

The main objectives of the 2006 Tenant Survey were as follows:

- Gain in-depth insight from tenants on TCHC’s performance in key service categories and tenant opinions about specific issues (i.e. extent to which TCHC is meeting tenants’ needs and expectations across a range of services delivered)
- Provide analysis of overall survey results of services areas/issues
- Provide analysis of individual results for each of the 27 CHUs
- Develop tracking of 2006 results against 2004 results in order to identify progress and change
Conclusions & Recommendations

Overall, TCHC’s performance in the delivery of tenant services has remained consistent over the past two years. As planning begins anew for the next two-year timeframe, and there are key areas TCHC should target for improvement.

What Areas Should TCHC Target for Improvement?

Due to their high impact on “community pride”, there are five key areas that TCHC needs to target for improvement over the next two years. These areas are as follows:

1. Condition & Cleanliness of Buildings
2. Tenant Perception of Community Safety
3. Engaging Tenants in the Decision-Making Process
4. Quality of Service Related to Emergency Repairs
5. Condition of Unit

Condition & Cleanliness of Buildings
The current condition and cleanliness of common areas and garbage areas have declined significantly in the past two years. The wider implication of this decline is the negative impact it has on tenants’ sense of “community pride”. TCHC needs to focus on improving building conditions and cleanliness over the next two years. This can be achieved by establishing a "building improvement schedule" and proactively communicating this schedule to tenants so they are made aware of TCHC’s intentions to improve building conditions. In addition, CHU managers should engage tenant councils to create "building cleanup days" where tenants can play an active role in improving building cleanliness. Instituting programs like this will help TCHC serve as a catalyst for restoring and fostering tenants' sense of "community pride".

Tenant Perception of Community Safety
The gun violence experienced in Toronto in the summer of 2005 posed a threat to tenant perception of community safety throughout TCHC. In addition, the way tenants view safety in their community plays a large role on their overall sense of “community pride”. As a result, TCHC needs to make strides towards enhancing tenant perception of community safety. Ways this can be achieved include further partnering with Toronto Police Services and other security agencies, greater promotion of neighbourhood watch programs, and exploring ways to get tenants more actively involved in promoting community safety (e.g. tenant safety committee). Given the impact that tenant perception of community safety has on the overall sense of “community pride”, it is important that TCHC continue to address this issue.
Engaging Tenants in the Decision-Making Process
Over the past two years, tenants have increased their involvement with TCHC, but feel as though their participation has little or no impact on TCHC decisions affecting their building or issues of importance. This emerging feeling of disconnection and inability to affect change in their communities needs to be addressed by TCHC. Ways this can be achieved include recognizing and communicating tenant-driven policies and initiatives and promoting tenant attendance and participation at all TCHC meetings. Ensuring tenant participation in priority setting and decision-making is an important goal and, by engaging tenants, TCHC will play a vital role in instilling a sense of “community pride”.

Quality of Service Related to Emergency Repairs
The turnaround time from initial request to completion of emergency repairs improved significantly over the past two years. However, repairs being done properly and the helpfulness of maintenance staff decreased significantly. Ensuring repairs are done properly and reinforcing the need for maintenance staff to be helpful to tenants will round out the overall tenant experience when it comes to requesting emergency repairs.

Condition of Unit
Tenants report the condition of the appliances improved significantly over the past two years. The only drawback in unit conditions is the bathroom and kitchen. Committing resources to upgrading bathroom conditions over the next two years will help improve how tenants' view their unit and is a visible way of showing TCHC’s commitment to tenants.

What Areas Should TCHC Closely Monitor & Maintain?
Due to their high impact on “community pride” and solid current performance, there are three key areas that TCHC should closely monitor and maintain over the next two years. These areas are as follows:

1. Ensuring Tenants Know How to Access Community Services & Supports
2. Efforts to Equally Value and Fairly Treat All People
3. Quality of Information from TCHC and Service Quality from CHU Office
4. Quality of Service from TCHC Response Line

Ensuring Tenants Know How to Access Community Services & Supports
Clearly, TCHC has been doing a good job of promoting and communicating the variety of community services and supports available to tenants. Access to this wider network plays a significant role in the quality of life for tenants who are elderly, physically disabled, or single parents. By continuing to actively promote and communicate available community services and supports, TCHC can play an important supportive role in helping improve tenants' quality of life.
Efforts to Equally Value and Fairly Treat All People
Tenant satisfaction with TCHC’s efforts to ensure all people are equally valued and treated fairly is a clear area of strength. Given the diverse, multi-cultural composition of TCHC tenants, it is important that tenants continue to see that TCHC consistently values and fairly treats all people. Maintaining consistent performance in this area will ensure TCHC continues to deliver on their core value of fair and equitable treatment.

Quality of Information from TCHC and Service Quality from CHU Office
Open communication is a core value of TCHC, and tenants’ view TCHC’s efforts to provide quality information and service positively. By performing well in these two areas, TCHC will continue to engage tenants and make them aware of TCHC initiatives to improve building conditions and support community safety measures. Ultimately, open communication and service quality form the foundation of the TCHC-tenant relationship and maintaining this solid foundation is essential for TCHC.

Quality of Service from TCHC Response Line
When tenants call the TCHC Response Line they are pleased with the politeness of staff and their ability to help tenants with their query. As an important link in the TCHC-tenant relationship, any performance improvements to the already solid performing TCHC Response Line will further build this relationship and help improve the overall tenant experience when interacting with TCHC.

Recommendations for the Next Two Years
Over the next two years, TCHC should focus on improving the condition and cleanliness of buildings, improving tenant perception of community safety, and engaging tenants in the decision-making process. These three areas have the greatest impact on tenants’ sense of “community pride”. The goals for promoting community services and supports, fair treatment of all people, and quality of TCHC information and CHU office service are to maintain current levels of performance.

Overarching Recommendations
Overall, TCHC’s performance has remained consistent over the past two years. Clear increases were seen in a number of areas ranging from tenant participation to opportunities to participate in environmental programs.

For each of the six key areas that impact tenants’ sense of “community pride”, there are three key operational recommendations for TCHC to consider. These are as follows:

1. Continue to review, assess, and improve current practices, procedures, and programs.
2. Establish targets for improvement in service quality indicators (SQIs) that can be objectively assessed every two years.

The 2004 Tenant Survey should be considered the benchmark and the 2006 Tenant Survey should be considered the first tracking wave that will be revisited every two years for improvements and declines in performance; and

3. Publish tenant survey results in the public domain so all stakeholders have an understanding of the benchmark and where TCHC has improved over the past two years.

**Looking Forward to 2008 TCHC Tenant Survey**

The 2006 TCHC Tenant Survey provides a point of reference for improvements and declines in performance compared to the benchmark results of the 2004 TCHC Tenant Survey. Conducting a tenant survey every two years will provide a basis for tracking both the evolving characteristics of TCHC tenants, as well as measure the impact of new policy and program initiatives.

The timeframe over which future research should be conducted should reflect the time it will take the TCHC to implement changes intended to improve services, tenant experiences, and overall “community pride”. Decima recommends a period of at least two years, making the 2008 TCHC Tenant Survey the next wave of tracking TCHC's performance from 2006-08.
Key Highlights: TCHC Overall

The 2006 Tenant Survey was organized into four categories: Quality of Housing; Community Safety; Building Community; and Community Engagement. Results are provided below.

Quality of Housing
Overall, the current condition and cleanliness of TCHC buildings and units has remained stable since 2004.

a. Current Building Conditions
   Close to half of TCHC tenants have a positive opinion about the overall condition of their building. This extends to specific building conditions such as the exterior and laundry room. However, tenants are less positive about the current condition of building common areas, elevators and garbage areas. In fact, common areas and garbage areas experienced a significant decrease compared to 2004.

b. Building Cleanliness
   Slightly more than half of TCHC tenants feel the cleanliness of parking lots and garages, building exteriors, and laundry rooms are above average. This is similar to 2004. Investing the necessary time, budget, and resources to improve the current conditions and cleanliness of all building areas should be a priority for TCHC over the next two years.

c. Unit Conditions
   Overall, TCHC tenants have a positive opinion about the condition of their unit. In particular, tenants are most positive about the condition of their unit’s appliances, kitchen, and windows and window locks. In fact, tenant assessment of their unit’s appliances increased significantly compared to 2004.

   Conversely, tenants have a negative opinion about the condition of their unit’s bathroom, walls and ceilings, carpets and floors, and kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans. In particular, tenant assessment of the condition of their bathroom decreased significantly from 2004.

   Improving the condition of unit bathrooms, walls and ceilings, and carpets and floors will have a positive impact on how tenants view their unit.

d. Maintenance Services
   On a positive note, TCHC is completing general maintenance and emergency repairs more quickly than in 2004. On the downside, TCHC experienced some significant declines regarding helpfulness of maintenance staff and proper completion of general maintenance repairs.
In general, TCHC tenants feel the overall quality of service related to general maintenance or repairs is above average. Compared to 2004, a significant increase was made in the percentage of repairs completed within two days. Conversely, the helpfulness of maintenance staff and whether the repairs were done properly decreased significantly compared to 2004. The ease of requesting repairs and helpfulness of maintenance staff remain strong points, but the speed of repairs and effectiveness of EasyTrac could use improvement. Ultimately, TCHC is doing some key things right when it comes to general maintenance or repairs. But closer attention needs to be paid to the speed of repairs and doing repairs properly. Improving in these two areas will increase the overall tenant experience with general maintenance or repairs.

More than half of TCHC tenants have a positive outlook on the overall quality of service related to emergency repairs. A significant increase was seen in the percentage of repairs completed within 24 hours compared to 2004. In addition, areas of strength continue to be the helpfulness of maintenance staff - despite the significant decrease from 2004 - and repairs being done correctly. Continuing to perform emergency repairs quickly will positively impact the overall tenant experience in this area.

Ultimately, TCHC is doing some key things right when it comes to general maintenance and emergency repairs. But closer attention needs to be paid to the speed of repairs and doing repairs properly. Improving in these two areas will increase the overall tenant experience with maintenance services.

**Community Safety**
Compared to 2004, TCHC continues to perform consistently in the area of community safety. In light of the challenges resulting from the gun violence Toronto experienced in 2005, TCHC's ability to maintain its tenants' perceptions of community safety should be seen as a positive development.

a. **Neighbourhood/Building Safety**
   Overall, more than four-in-ten TCHC tenants feel safe in their community. In particular, close to half of tenants feel safe in their neighbourhood and in the areas outside and inside their building. These findings are consistent with 2004.

b. **TCHC Community Safety Services**
   TCHC Community Safety Services continue to perform well in terms of the professionalism of community safety officers and the ease of requesting assistance. Where TCHC is weak and needs to focus on improving is in the timeliness of arrival by safety officers and the ability to resolve problems successfully.
c. **Making Tenants Feel Safer**
   As in 2004, tenants continue to feel strongly about the effectiveness of a number of initiatives in making them feel safer. In particular, tenants cite more support from police, increased safety measures (e.g. lighting, locks, cameras), more safety program partnerships, and more community safety staff as the most effective ways to make tenants feel safer.

**d. Tenant Participation in Safety Activities**
Since 2004, tenants have significantly increased their participation in safety activities. More tenants have attended TCHC or neighbourhood meetings to discuss safety, more tenants have talked with friends and neighbours about their safety concerns, and more tenants have joined a safety committee or group. These three positive developments illustrate an increased level of tenant engagement in community safety.

As the character and composition of TCHC buildings and CHUs changes, maintaining tenants' perceptions of community safety may become more challenging. Two ways TCHC can help meet this challenge are by:

1. Working closer with police and other community safety agencies to implement safety programs and continue to provide support to community safety initiatives.
2. Encouraging tenants to get more involved in the community safety initiatives of their building and community. Tenants need to be made aware of the impact they can have on community safety.

**Building Community**
In comparison to 2004, TCHC continues to perform consistently regarding their communications with tenants and tenant relationship with staff. One area where TCHC made significant gains is the ability of staff to provide the kind of service that helps tenants solve their problems.

**a. Communications**
The majority of TCHC tenants have a positive view about the overall quality of information they receive from TCHC. The areas of communication where TCHC performs best are in providing information in the right language for tenants and the usefulness of the information. Areas of communication where TCHC performance is not as strong are keeping tenants up-to-date and providing information promptly. These findings are consistent with 2004.

**b. Relationship with Staff**
The majority of TCHC tenants feel the overall quality of service they receive from their CHU office is above average and, for the most part, all other findings in this area remained consistent with 2004. TCHC is doing a good job at informing
tenants of how to contact staff, but there was a significant decrease from 2004 regarding the helpfulness of staff.

To improve communications with tenants, TCHC needs to ensure they keep tenants up-to-date on matters of importance and that the information arrives promptly. Regarding tenant relationship with staff, TCHC needs to reinforce with property management staff the importance of being helpful to tenants. Improvements in these two areas will positively impact TCHC-tenant communication.

c. TCHC Response Line
Half of TCHC tenants have a positive opinion about the overall quality of service they receive from TCHC's Response Line. Overall, this year's findings are consistent with the 2004 results.

The politeness of response line staff and ability to help tenants who call continue to be strong points of TCHC's response line. In addition, improvements have been made in response time with significantly more tenants saying the wait time during business hours is acceptable.

Community Engagement & Involvement with TCHC
Overall, TCHC tenants appear to feel less engaged in the decision-making process regarding their building and community. This is despite the fact their involvement with TCHC has increased since 2004.

a. Participation in Community
Compared to 2004, significantly more tenants have access or know how to access the community services and supports they need in their neighbourhood.

Significantly fewer tenants feel their participation has an impact on TCHC decisions about their building or issues of importance.

b. Involvement with TCHC
Tenant involvement with TCHC is on the rise as significantly more tenants know who their tenant representative is and attended a TCHC meeting in the past year. In addition, the majority of tenants know that a community information meeting has taken place in their building over the past 12-18 months.

While awareness of TCHC activities is good, actual tenant decision making in their community appears weak.

TCHC needs to consider ways to re-engage tenants in the decision-making process. Tenants are displaying a willingness to be involved in TCHC initiatives, but need to know their voices are being heard and are impacting decisions. By
re-engaging tenants, TCHC can better meet the needs of tenants and foster a greater sense of inclusion. This can only improve TCHC-tenant relations.

"Community Pride"
Since 2004, TCHC has improved significantly in terms of making sure all people are equally valued and fairly treated. Regarding “community pride”, TCHC continues to perform consistently in fostering this feeling.

a. "Community Pride"
   Compared to 2004, significantly more TCHC tenants feel they live in a neighbourhood where people are willing to help their neighbours. In addition, the majority of TCHC tenants are proud to live in their neighbourhood and also have a strong sense of belonging to their community. These findings are consistent with 2004 results.

b. Discrimination Issues
   The proportion of tenants citing racism and discrimination against gays and lesbians as serious issues remained consistent with 2004 results. Age discrimination, discrimination against people with physical or mental handicaps, and discrimination based on socio-economic factors are considered to be serious issues by one-quarter of tenants.

   Overall, TCHC is doing a good job at treating people fairly and making people feel equally valued and maintaining a consistent sense of “community pride”. By improving building conditions and making community safety top priorities, TCHC can positively impact “community pride”.

TCHC Programs
Compared to 2004, the opportunity for tenants to participate in TCHC programs like recycling, composting, and gardening has significantly increased.

a. Opportunity to Participate
   Due to its more widespread presence, significantly more TCHC tenants have the opportunity to participate in recycling programs than they did in 2004. In addition, the opportunities to compost and participate in gardening programs also significantly increased over the past two years and show these programs are becoming more common in the CHUs.

b. Participation in TCHC Programs
   In general, tenant participation in TCHC programs is low. This could stem from lack of program awareness or lack of access - particularly for funding-oriented and development programs. The Green Plan stands out as the program tenants
are most likely to have participated in, followed by the tenant participation and the Building Renewal Program.

To improve participation, tenants need to be made more aware of the array of TCHC programs they can become involved in. This can be achieved through more timely and open communication with tenants. As for composting and gardening programs, encouraging tenants to participate in these programs can have a positive impact environmentally and in terms of building a stronger sense of “community pride”.

c. Recycling
Recycling is an accessible and popular program with TCHC tenants and this is reflected in their level of participation. In addition, tenants show strong interest in having TCHC provide additional environmentally-friendly information and programs.

The majority of tenants reside in buildings with a recycling program and consider themselves to be active recyclers. This level of participation in recycling is surely aided by accessibility to recycling bins and the ease with which tenants can bring their recyclable items.

Displaying posters and flyers in buildings, holding information sessions on recycling, and mailing recycling information to apartments receive the most support from tenants regarding encouraging others to recycle.

Mirroring society's wider concern for the environment, tenants are keenly interested in conservation programs and information on environmental, health, and quality of life issues. Providing these programs will help TCHC and tenants become more environmentally friendly.
CHU Rankings

We conducted an analysis that breaks the 27 CHUs into four tiers. This analysis represents the views of the tenants in each CHU on each of the "overall" measures that were asked in the survey. These overall measures include:

- Overall condition and cleanliness of building
- Overall condition of unit
- Overall quality of service related to general maintenance or repairs
- Overall quality of service related to emergency repairs
- Overall safety of community
- Overall quality of information from TCHC
- Overall quality of service from CHU office
- Overall quality of service from TCHC Response Line
- Having a say and participate in decisions TCHC makes about building and community
- Participation has impact on issues/decisions that matter
- Having access or know how to access community services and supports needed in neighbourhood
- Overall satisfaction with TCHC's efforts to equally value and fairly treat all people

Our analysis shows which CHUs have tenants with the most positive views about the questions listed above. Tier 1 includes the CHUs whose tenants have the most positive views across the overall measures, while the CHUs in Tier 4 have tenants with the least positive opinions.

Tier 1 CHUs
- North Toronto (CHU 15)
- Downtown-West (CHU 9)
- Beaches-East Toronto (CHU 14)
- Seneca/Don Valley (CHU 3)
- Scarborough-McCowan (CHU 26)
- Davenport-Midtown (CHU 25)
- Etobicoke-Lakeshore (CHU 7)

Tier 2 CHUs
- Downsvie (CHU 19)
- Spadina-Downtown (CHU 10)
- Eglinton/Lawrence (CHU 2)
- Scarborough-Warden (CHU 5)
- Don River (CHU 12)
- Scarborough-East (CHU 4)
Tier 3 CHUs
- Bloor West-Central (CHU 8)
- Don Valley-East York (CHU 20)
- Humber Village (CHU 1)
- Don Mills-Agincourt (CHU 22)
- St. Lawrence (CHU 11)
- North York West (CHU 17)
- Scarborough North (CHU 23)

Tier 4 CHUs
- St. Jamestown (CHU 16)
- Sherbourne-Dundas (CHU 13)
- Scarborough-Kennedy (CHU 21)
- Regent Park-Oak Street (CHU 27)
- York Weston (CHU 6)
- Etobicoke-York (CHU 24)
- North York-Etobicoke (CHU 18)

In order for the CHUs in Tier 1 to maintain their ranking in the top tier, managers for these CHUs need to continue performing consistently, while still striving for overall improvements in areas like building conditions and continuing to support community safety measures.

Managers for the CHUs in Tier 4 should target areas like improvements to building conditions. Continued efforts to support and enforce community safety measures should also aid in gradual improvement over the next two years.