

Councillor Bravo, Chair
Members Economic and Community
Development Committee
Toronto

October 18, 2023

Re: EC7.8

Shelter System Pressures and Responses, including Planning for Winter 2023/2024

Toronto did not always have a winter response plan for the unhoused.

The origins of Toronto's winter response.

A winter response plan first originated in 1996 shortly after what is widely known as 'The Freezing Deaths Inquest', a five-week [coroner's inquest](#) into the deaths of Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani who died in January 1996. The inquest was called in response to both local and national public concern that a cluster of deaths had taken place, all attributed to freezing temperatures but more significantly multiple systemic issues. I was part of the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness, a collection of 26 agencies, that had standing at the inquest and testified.

Jack Layton told this story of walking home with Olivia Chow one cold, snowy night. Both were city councillors and while they checked on the homeless people they encountered they realized there was more to do. When they got home, they learned of the first of the three deaths.

"A shiver ran down my spine. Is there anything more awful for a Canadian to imagine than freezing to death? How could this have happened in Toronto? Were there no shelters? Were there no emergency services for the homeless? Wasn't this the richest city in the country? What the hell was going on?"

Those questions were on the surface, but the deeper one was very personal. This was one of the people we had passed. His name was Eugene Upper. Although he lay on the other side of the street, I should have seen him, I thought. Like so many citizens with homes, we had walked right by people on the street that night – and other nights – and one of those people might have died. Yet we hadn't called for help. We had assumed, somehow, that others would step in.

Also, I knew that my job on city council required me to put plans and policies in place to prevent deaths on the street. I should have made sure that there were emergency phone numbers, more emergency beds, more emergency services, more housing. Guilt? You bet.

Front-page headlines proclaimed the tragedy. Word also spread like brushfire through the streets. From emergency shelters to all-night doughnut shops, wherever the homeless were hoping for refuge from the cold, there were whispered words: "Did you hear?" The next night faces of the homeless returning to their shelter beds were more anxious. All of them knew someone who would still be outside in the killer cold. Who would be next? From [Globe and Mail excerpt](#): 'Homelessness: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis', Jack Layton, 2000

In February 1996 the city opened the Moss Park Armoury as a warming centre.

In response to the inquest, Metro Council and its Metro Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons created an Inquest Response Team chaired by Professor David Hulchanski. Its membership included then Councillor Jack Layton, ten members of the community (including myself) and city staff.

Numerous positive policy outcomes resulted from the inquest and the Response Team's work. These ranged from expanded outreach funding to a managed alcohol program in a shelter to the initiation of the warming centre concept. By December an entire cold weather protocol was developed.

The city's first winter response victim.

In January 1997 on a Sunday morning a Toronto SUN reporter called to tell me that a homeless man had been found dead - frozen in an above ground parking lot at Adelaide & Simcoe. His name was Garland Sheppard.

City Councillor Jack Layton was in my co-op that morning. He hammered out a press release on my computer and then Councillor Olivia Chow sent it to the media. Jack then joined me to examine the parking garage site on Adelaide near University Ave. where Garland was found. We held a press conference calling for an improved cold weather alert system.

Why? Because it was close to -20C and the City had not called an extreme cold alert or opened warming centres.

Chronic neglect to the right to safe shelter.

Some of you will know that for the subsequent 25 years advocates have appealed to the city to do better when it comes to shelter provision, capacity and standards including its targeted response to inclement weather. **See Crowe Appendix A, B, C.**

The results of government neglect to safe shelter have been documented and investigated by community inquiries such as the [Shelter Inspection Report](#), coroners' inquests ([Grant Faulkner](#) death), a 2017 Toronto Ombudsman [enquiry](#) into cold weather

drop-in services and their 2018 [enquiry](#) into respite services, numerous press conferences and media coverage and exposés.

Neglect is when it takes 26 years for the city to change the temperature criteria that triggers the opening of warming centres from -15C to -5C. This despite medical evidence on the risk of hypothermia at 10C, appeals from health care workers and a soaring outdoor death rate. Furthermore, the city continues to ignore the harm to health and life without shelter no matter the temperature.

During these years homelessness tripled, clusters of homeless deaths continued, outbreaks of disease continued, and outdoor living/sleeping grew astronomically with multiple large encampments that are essentially refugee camps but without the aid.

Shelter Support and Housing Administration has a dubious history.

The City of Toronto has a superb level of public servants.

In our many human services divisions such as Toronto's Senior Services and Long-Term Care Division, Toronto Public Library, Early Learning and Child Care Services, Toronto Parks and Recreation programs (to name a few) I am not aware of a chronic history of poor delivery of service that threatens health and life. (Also see Appendix A, B, C)

I believe there is abundant evidence that the operations of the city's Shelter Support and Housing Division have not operated on the [precautionary principle](#) to protect dignity, health, and life.

These are only a few examples that I am directly familiar with and were reported in the media over the last two decades:

- A Salvation Army shelter for couples that would not allow same sex couples to share a room.
- A shelter that replaced bath towels with paper towels.
- A Salvation Army shelter that made people pick up their Personal Needs Allowance (money intended for personal needs not covered in the shelter – for example bus tickets, personal hygiene supplies) at an exact time every week and if people were not there to pick it up, they would lose out.
- Warming and cooling centres operated in the lobby of a public government building for years without provision of mats, cots, pillows, sufficient blankets, shower access or meals.
- Seaton House, the City's largest men's shelter proposed to check men's urine for alcohol before admission.

- Multiple shelters that had the practice of no doors on washrooms or shower stalls.
- The shelter division and public health department repeatedly held back information on tuberculosis, Norwalk virus, and Strep A outbreaks in shelters “to not discourage homeless people from enter the shelters.”

I will note that all the above were rectified when frontline workers and advocacy organizations exposed each scenario. There are many more.

Where has the city’s responsiveness and care for the most vulnerable gone?

Despite huge challenges with a homelessness crisis/emergency since 1998 it is true that in the past both the mayor’s office and shelter division created some innovative emergency shelter operations. Remember that it was in October 1998 that [Metro Council in a vote of 53-1](#) endorsed the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee’s [State of Emergency Declaration](#) that homelessness was a national (and local) disaster. On November 22 the Big City Mayors Caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities also endorsed the disaster declaration. That is the origin of National Housing Day.

A sense of urgency resulted in the following locations activated for emergency shelter, in some cases with Red Cross assistance:

- An empty warehouse in west Donlands for the innovative Street City
- The Schoolhouse
- Tent City with a planned city sanctioned move of the prefab structures to Commissioners Street (although it was cancelled)
- 2 Murray Street, an abandoned nursing residence
- Princess Margaret Hospital on Sherbourne, empty due to relocation
- Doctors Hospital on Brunswick, empty prior to its demolition for long-term care
- Moss Park Armoury – twice
- Fort York Armoury – twice
- City Hall, lower-level cafeteria
- Metro Hall – 2nd floor prior to rotunda
- Woodgreen Community Centre – after the Tent City eviction
- St. Lawrence Community Centre
- Regent Park Community Centre
- Sprung structures (although only 3 of the promised 4 were erected)

The 2023-24 Winter Plan, as proposed October 18 is inadequate and dangerous.

- Adding more beds to existing shelters will increase crowding, violence, and risk of disease transmission.
- Only one 40-person 24/7 respite site does not meet the need.

- Four warming centres that will open at a warmer temperature but displaces people depending on temperature is unethical.
- Questionable use of TTC vehicles to transport people to shelters and if those shelters predictably are full will likely become shelter buses.
- Nothing for encampments.

The entire plan is just so far from being an emergency plan in a human welfare emergency.

Instead consider these options that I propose the city implement.

Safe shelter

1. Request the Ministry of Defense for use of the Fort York and Moss Park Armouries for emergency shelter for refugees, replacing the current churches that are operating shelter. Staffing and operations should be managed by the Red Cross, and Doctors Without Borders, the latter who should ensure safe COVID precautions are implemented including vaccinations, HEPA filtration and K/N95 mask provision.
2. Request additional funding for refugee organizations to support people onsite with the paperwork and access to supports including housing.
3. Partner with a trusted community agency to create a campus of 100 tiny shelters that can be installed inside the Better Living Centre and the Queen Elizabeth building for people unhoused. In addition, shower trailers, a communal food and social area should be set up. Doctors without Borders and the Red Cross should collaborate to ensure COVID prevention measures. Encampments should also be supported with tiny shelters and similar supports.
4. If the above is inadequate the Metro Convention Centre should be considered for mass emergency shelter.

Housing

1. Partner with [Mike Holmes](#) and Home Depot to oversee the immediate restoration of the hundreds of empty [Toronto Community Housing](#) homes with the goal of move-in by December 1.
2. Issue an RFP to faith organizations who are willing to establish 2-6 modular or prefab permanent homes on their property.
3. Expropriate [214-230 Sherbourne](#) from KingSett Capital. The 59 [modular homes delayed](#) on Cummer Avenue in North York because the province will not issue a Minister's Zoning Order should be relocated to this site.

Supports

1. Convert the Metro Hall rotunda into an emergency triage area to provide fast-track access to ID, OW, ODSP and other supports. Toronto's [PAID project](#) should

receive funding for the ID component. City and provincial government staff should be seconded for the application process for social assistance.

2. Second city staff, who participated in COVID shelter work to assist in staffing temporary shelters.

Community Partnership

1. Create a funding table including Maytree, Metcalf, Atkinson, Donnelly and Toronto Community Foundation and the United Way to raise \$2 million to finance the above.
2. Declare November 22 as [National Housing Day](#) and both fund and support a housing rally and press conference at Nathan Phillips Square.

Bottom line. This is a humanitarian disaster.

Sincerely,

Cathy Crowe, long-time street nurse, C.M.
Visiting Practitioner, Department of Politics
Toronto Metropolitan University

Separate attachments of Appendix A, B, C

cc Mayor Chow
Toronto Ombudsman Office

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News

City of Toronto files injunction to stop carpenter from erecting wooden shelters for homeless

Victoria Gibson

805 words

19 February 2021

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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The City of Toronto has applied for an injunction to stop a local carpenter from erecting small, wooden shelters on city-owned land meant to shelter the homeless through the winter.

The carpenter named in the application, Khaleel Seivwright, has attracted attention during the pandemic for building small, wooden shelters for people living outside. Speaking to the Star in November, Seivwright said the shelters cost roughly \$1,000 a piece to build, and are designed to keep people warm — with foam on the outside, and a vapour barrier on the inside.

But city officials have raised alarms about the structures, issuing a letter to Seivwright in November that claimed he was interfering with efforts to relocate people indoors, demanding that he “immediately cease the production, distribution, supply and installation” of the structures, and warning that he could otherwise be held responsible for the costs of removal.

Days later, a GoFundMe page for the shelter project was updated to say that Seivwright wouldn't be dissuaded by the city warning: “The city has threatened to remove the shelters that we have been building and I want to be clear that we are going to continue to build them.”

Then, last week, a change of course. An update to the page dated Feb. 11 said no new shelters would be built, though maintenance on existing structures would continue. The city's injunction filing is dated the next day, on Feb. 12. Efforts by the Star to contact Seivwright by telephone, email and through the lawyer listed for him on the application went unanswered by time of publication Friday.

Encampments have increasingly sprung up across Toronto during the pandemic, with hundreds still believed to be living outside. That increase has come with an uptick in encampment fires, with a more than 250 per cent increase in reported blazes from 2019 to 2020, and an increase reported by health care workers in cold-weather afflictions like frostbite among the homeless.

The Star has spoken with occupants of the wooden structures in recent months, with several noting they stayed warmer than a tent and felt safer, with a lock at the door. At a committee meeting in December, Seivwright told councillors that the structures were meant to maintain a temperature of 18 to 20 C using only body heat, even as the weather dipped below freezing.

He presented the tiny shelters as a way to reduce fire risk. On his GoFundMe page, the shelters were described as an alternative to “sleeping in a tent with a propane heater.” But the city says any makeshift structures being used in encampments pose a “significant danger.”

On Wednesday, Toronto saw its first encampment fire death this winter. Firefighters were called to a Corktown park and found a wooden structure engulfed with flames. Once the blaze was extinguished, fire crews discovered a man inside. He was declared dead on the scene.

There has been no link made between Seivwright's shelters and the site of the fatality. Acting fire chief Jim Jessop, asked about the origin of the structure on Wednesday, said he didn't know for sure, and that question would likely be part of a now-ongoing probe into the blaze.

He told reporters the fire service wouldn't be inspecting any wooden structures in camps for fire safety. “Our job isn't to make structures that don't even comply with the building code safe,” Jessop said. But while he argued that

the fatality underscored the dangers of makeshift structures, homeless advocates argue the shelters are the best option in the current situation.

“It’s the safest and most humane way people are able to survive right now,” said Kimberly Curry, executive director of the charity Seeds of Hope, noting that the pandemic had slashed the options for the homeless population like sitting in a Tim Horton’s to warm up a while.

Meanwhile, she said, the shelter system was struggling with capacity. Mary Anne Bedard, general manager of Toronto’s Shelter, Support and Housing Administration said Wednesday that staff were in the Corktown park offering indoor spaces around 2:30 a.m., and noted the city had moved more than 1,300 people from encampments to indoor spaces during COVID-19.

But city stats show that Toronto’s emergency shelters for single men were at 99.9 per cent capacity — with just one bed left vacant, though other parts of the system had more space.

“In lack of anywhere else to go, his structures are saving lives,” Curry said.

Victoria Gibson is a Toronto-based reporter for the Star covering affordable housing. Her reporting is funded by the Canadian government through its Local Journalism Initiative. Reach her via email: victoriagibson@thestar.ca

Document TOR0000020210219eh2j001jm

News

Activists build 'foam domes' for the homeless outside of Mayor John Tory's condo building

Cheyenne Bholla

640 words

23 November 2020

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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On a snowy Sunday, activists put together “foam domes” outside of Mayor John Tory’s condo building.

The dome shelters function to give people experiencing homelessness a warm structure to sleep in. They’re made of two pieces of insulated foam and include a carbon monoxide detector.

According to the Encampment Support Network’s Instagram, the structures are big enough for someone tall to sleep in.

The action came after Tory named November 22 National Housing Day, with the Toronto sign lit in red in recognition.

Tory tweeted the proclamation Sunday morning which stated the need for “affordable and adequate housing,” referencing the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan that was approved by city council in December 2019.

The group, along with other volunteers and neighbours, started building the domes at around 10 a.m. Sunday morning, finishing the day with 12 structures.

These were then distributed to different areas in the city where they are needed.

Homeless advocates decided to build the structures in response to what they say is a lack of action from the city.

Sebastian Mendoza-Price, a volunteer, said the shelters aren’t the best, but help out those in the community that need it.

“People will die this winter whether it’s because of COVID or freezing to death if John Tory doesn’t step in and do something,” said Mendoza-Price. “I’m not sure there’s another way to make him pay attention other than literally going to his front door.”

Brad Ross, chief communications officer with the city, told the Star in an email that these structures can pose risks to those inside and in the surrounding area.

“Open flames, generators, propane tanks, and lack of access to water and sanitation, increases health and safety risks for those who live outside,” Ross wrote.

“To date this year, Toronto Fire Services responded to reports of at least 189 encampment fires. Sadly, one person has died in an encampment fire this year.”

Ross also said the city’s fire services have advised that the foam domes, also called green pods, contain rigid polystyrene, a “highly flammable material,” which can pose a risk when used close to a flame or heat source.

This, on top of the park bylaw prohibiting camping, tents and other structures in parks, is why the city is advising against the foam shelters, Ross said.

The city continues to urge against using encampments.

“The City’s Streets to Homes outreach team continues to engage with those living outside to encourage them to come inside where it is safest,” Ross said in the email statement.

Ross points to the city's Winter Service Plan to set up 560 additional spaces for those experiencing homelessness.

Since mid-March, the city has referred about 1,100 people from encampments to "safe inside spaces" and provides shelters and 24-hour respite sites to around 6,000 people experiencing homelessness each night, he said.

Nahum Mann was part of the organizing group of about a dozen that started the effort.

He said the group chose to do it Sunday and in front of Tory's building to make a statement and urge the city to do more for the homeless with the upcoming winter.

"All people want is housing. People don't even want these foam homes," Mann told the Star. Mann says DuraForm, the company that makes the material used for the shelters, says they are fire retardant.

"They want housing and really it's just about keeping people alive (and) keeping people safe in the winter while they wait for that."

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Document TOR0000020201123egbn000ma

News

Two decades of handing out compassion; Project Winter Survival says demand rising for kits used by homeless

Peter Howell Toronto Star

974 words

20 January 2019

The Toronto Star

TOR

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A5

English

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It was a bittersweet anniversary Saturday as volunteers for the Project Winter Survival homeless relief effort packed emergency kits and sleeping bags to prevent further Toronto street deaths during a weekend cold snap.

"Today is the 20th annual Engage and Change Project Winter Survival, and while some people said that's incredible, it's pathetic," said Jody Steinhauer, the founder of Project Winter Survival. She blamed the city of Toronto for failing to prevent two recent exposure deaths - and a suspected third - of homeless people on its streets.

"We should not have to be building survival kits in the city of Toronto to keep people from freezing to death," an impassioned Steinhauer told volunteers and journalists at the North York warehouse of the Bargains Group, the clothing wholesaler she heads.

She said Project Winter Survival has been besieged with requests for survival kits this year: homeless aid groups sought 21,000 kits, up 60 per cent from last year, while the number of homeless people on the street has jumped to 9,000 this year from 6,000 in 2018.

It's time for Toronto to make good on its many promises of homeless aid, Steinhauer said.

"I don't want to be doing this. So, for all of you, we need to put the pressure on the city of Toronto: open up 1,000 shelter beds, get people into housing long-term with support solutions so that next year at this time, we can be indoors and being proud."

(City officials have pledged to open three new 24-hour shelter sites for homeless Torontonians, but only one is currently operating: a 100-bed facility in Liberty Village, run by the St. Felix Centre. The other two are expected to open in March and April.)

Steinhauer was speaking after 100 volunteers, each of whom had helped raise funds and gather other donations for homeless relief, spent hours packing and boxing 3,000 black knapsacks and blue sleeping bags.

These life-saving gifts - to which several major banks, the Salvation Army, GoodLife Fitness, Nestlé Watersand other firms have contributed - will be swiftly distributed to 210 social service agencies, homeless shelters and outreach providers throughout the GTA.

Toronto police officers also carry some of the kits with them in their patrol cars to hand out to homeless people they find shivering on the streets.

Project Winter Survival traditionally packs its kits on the third Saturday in January, in an assembly-line effort marked by good humour, loud music and friendly competition to win a homemade "Stanley Cup" for the most efficient of two teams, one wearing orange toques and the other blue ones.

Each kit contains \$175 worth of donated clothing, food and personal care items.

But the timing for this year's event couldn't be better: Environment Canada issued an extreme cold warning for southern Ontario, with temperatures expected to drop below -24 C by Sunday night.

Steinhauer told the Star she's been contacted by representatives of homeless shelters who haven't been able to keep up with demand from people needing relief from the cold.

"We have a woman here from Out of the Cold who just told me last night they had to turn five people away. They didn't even have a mat for them."

The mass packing effort was assisted by members of 13th Division of the Toronto Police Service, longtime supports of Project Winter Survival.

Insp. Justin Vander Heyden told the crowd he was recently transferred to 13 Division and he's "very deeply touched" to see what his colleagues have been involved with for the past 11 years.

He admitted he wasn't fully apprised of the need for such a large-scale homeless relief effort until he witnessed it with his own eyes.

"I'm also a local resident and I didn't know that this was going on in my very own community. And I have to tell you, I'm a bit embarrassed by it," Vander Heyden said.

"But I'm so overwhelmed with pride that people have all come out here to give up their day for this amazing cause. These kits will probably go out to homeless people in the city tonight, probably within blocks of where we're standing right now. And my officers in 13th Division couldn't be more proud to be a part of this."

Vander Heyden added that he brought his 11-year-old son with him to assist with the packing, because

"I want him to see how we treat our vulnerable people in this city, and what it takes to actually get it done together as partners."

Project Winter Survival has distributed more than 35,000 survival kits since Steinhauer founded her group in 1999, during a winter so brutal that then Toronto mayor Mel Lastman called in the Canadian army to help shovel snow.

The relief effort has not only saved lives, but also changed them, Steinhauer said, as she welcomed to the stage two former homeless people: Peter Armory, 56, and Barbara Berryman, 49, who today have both homes and jobs after getting through rough periods of their lives.

Armory, whom Steinhauer employs at the Bargains Group, was there with his son Joshua, age 5.

"I am a survivor of homelessness," said Berryman, who works as a photographer and is a budding novelist, as she thanked Steinhauer and Project Winter Survival.

Jody Steinhauer, founder of Project Winter Survival, says aid groups sought 21,000 kits this year, up 60 per cent from last year. The kits include a sleeping bag other supplies. "I am a survivor," said Barbara Berryman, who formerly lived on the streets. Richard LautensToronto Star

Document TOR0000020190120ef1k000me



Greater Toronto

Moss Park Armoury deal done to open space for city's homeless; THE BIG CHILL

David Rider Toronto Star Chief Samantha Beattie Toronto Star

609 words

6 January 2018

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

GT1

English

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Weeks after homeless activists demanded it, Moss Park Armoury will open as a temporary respite centre for Toronto's most vulnerable citizens.

Toronto Liberal MP Adam Vaughan told reporters at city hall Friday that Ottawa is giving the City of Toronto round-the-clock access to the east downtown National Defence site for two weeks.

The site, sheltering 70 to 100 homeless people from the cold, will act as a "bridge" to city use of a downtown provincial site as an emergency respite centre, Vaughan said.

He would not identify that "more permanent" site, referring questions to the Ontario government, which has not yet divulged any details.

Officials said final details on the agreements were still under discussion late Friday afternoon. The city offered no time for when people can seek shelter at Moss Park Armoury but that's not expected to happen before Monday.

Environment Canada on Friday predicted an overnight low of -25 C that, with the wind, would feel like a flesh-freezing -37 C.

Toronto had asked Ottawa, through the province, to give it round-the-clock access to Moss Park Armoury until April 15.

"My understanding is the province has come up with an alternative that meets the city needs," Vaughan said.

"This allows us to keep the armouries if needed in our back pocket for additional resource support if that's required ... What matters is getting people in out of the cold."

Cathy Crowe, a street nurse among frontline workers long calling for armoury use to prevent injury or even death if people are turned away from packed shelters in the bitter cold, said Friday of the Moss Park Armoury: "Open it fast and the mayor should ask for Fort York now, not in two months."

Councillor Joe Cressy, who supported colleague Kristyn Wong-Tam's failed Dec. 6 motion to ask Ottawa to open the two armouries, said of the news: "It gets us over a two-week hurdle but it doesn't get us until mid-April so it's all hands on deck," trying to find safe, suitable space for people.

Wong-Tam's motion failed when Mayor John Tory and a majority of councillors opposed it.

Tory says he now supports armoury use because city staff have warned him another temporary site, opened recently at the Better Living Centre at Exhibition Place, could soon hit capacity.

The city's almost 6,000 spots, including shelters, drop-in centres and motels, are constantly at near-capacity, and full in categories such as family shelters. That means dangerous temperatures are further straining an already strained system.

In response to the cold, the city on Thursday opened emergency warming centres at Metro Hall and Regent Park community centre with chairs but not beds.

Council also rejected Wong-Tam's bid for 1,000 new shelter beds, opting instead for 400 new "spaces," about half of which have now been introduced.

"It's clear that we're not prepared and we could have been in much better position if we had taken action sooner," Wong-Tam said in an interview. "We wouldn't have had to be opening warming centres during the middle of a crisis. It's not as if the mayor and council and shelter support and administration staff weren't warned - they just didn't take action soon enough."

As of Friday afternoon, there had been no reports of homeless Torontonians injured because of the cold.

With files from Samantha Beattie

and Alanna Rizza.

Document TOR0000020180106ee16000nb

News

Are we 'taking all measures' to warm those in need? Shelter system is full to overflowing, as advocates call out for opening of armouries

Edward Keenan Toronto Star OPINION

1,167 words

3 January 2018

The Toronto Star

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English

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CORRECTION: Rafi Aaron is a member of the Interfaith Coalition to Fight Homelessness. His given name was misspelled in a Jan. 3 column about the need to take further measures to protect the safety of the homeless. (January 4, 2018, page A2)

It's been cold out there.

Cold enough that the annual Polar Bear Dip at Sunnyside Beach, an event specifically designed to show defiance against the frigid winter weather, was cancelled due to frozen conditions.

Cold enough to cause havoc at Pearson airport, where hundreds of flights have been cancelled due to the deep freeze.

Cold enough that the New Year's Eve celebration at City Hall were shortened to just a half-hour long, with planned concerts and skating events cancelled.

"The city is taking all measures to protect the health and safety of the public, artists, volunteers and event staff," the city government said in a news release announcing the scaling back of festivities. And understandably so. After all, it's fr-fr-freezing c-c-c-cold.

But really, it isn't performers and partiers whose health and safety seem most endangered. I'm most concerned about the people living on the streets. Is the city "taking all measures to protect the health and safety" of the homeless?

One measure it isn't taking is opening armouries at Moss Park and Fort York as emergency shelters.

And that is the one thing that homeless advocates such as street nurse Cathy Crowe, Raffi Aaron of the Interfaith Coalition to Fight Homelessness, Gaétan Héroux of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and 35,000 petition signatories have demanded.

The minister of defence has offered their use. Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam proposed the concept formally to city council. A majority of council voted against it in early December. Council decided instead to pursue other avenues, including opening new shelter bed space at the Better Living Centre at Exhibition Place. Mayor John Tory has said repeatedly the city's shelter staff advise the armouries are unsuitable, and that other options the city is pursuing are better. He continues to say that.

Even as, in this bitter cold, the shelter system appears pretty much full. Family shelters have been at 100 per cent capacity every night recently, women's and youth shelters at 97 or 98 per cent - pretty much all shelters consistently over 94 per cent. The city has a target of shelters operating at 90 per cent capacity or less, because they are when over that capacity, it means people find beds unavailable - the low percentage that remain may not actually be suitable or accessible for a particular person. Hundreds of people per night stay in "warming centres" and other drop-ins where often conditions are reported to be inhumane.

Those seeking to find shelter spaces have been told there is no room available. Multiple reports from activists and journalists say they were told when they called or visited that the system was full and no beds were available.

There has been some kind of confusing - and frankly, enraging - back-and-forth discussion involving the mayor's office and some city staff publicly quibbling about "miscommunication" here - saying that space was available at times when the word went out to those looking for a warm place to spend that night that no beds were open.

I say it is enraging because whether it is an actual lack of beds or some kind of communication breakdown, the effect is that people looking for a place are told that one is not available - which means that for them, it is not.

On Tuesday afternoon, Toronto Ombudsman Susan Opler announced she would launch an inquiry into the communications issues and "the cold-weather needs of the city's homeless, and whether the city is providing services in a way that ensures people's dignity, safety and comfort."

Paul Raftis, the shelter division's interim manager, also announced he had ordered a review of communication issues.

In the meantime, we already know shelter demand is up 30 per cent this year. We know the shelter system is at or very near capacity - in a way that means, functionally, that there is sometimes no space for people when and where they need it. And we know all too well that it is freaking freezing outside.

Are we taking "all measures" to keep the homeless from spending the night outside?

No. I don't think it's possible to say we are.

I don't know exactly how or why opening the armouries became the sole immediate focus of advocacy. They have been used before (in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2004), they're centrally located and they have showers and cots.

Still, it's not clear to me why support for using them as emergency homeless shelters has become the one recognized litmus test for compassion.

But I do know that when it's this cold outside, and people are at obvious risk of freezing to death, and our shelter system is full enough that it is difficult to find space to stay, then we ought to open warm places. We have community centres with gyms and showers in every neighbourhood of the city. We have libraries and civic centres. We have City Hall and the great hall of Union Station and thousands of square feet of convention and exhibition space. We have heated buildings the city owns that sit mostly empty at night. If people are freezing, let them in.

You know, if we're taking "all measures." Or, at the very least, we have the armouries, which have become the most obvious of options due to the strong advocacy of so many people with experience on the front lines. The armouries are large and they are close to where many homeless people already spend their days and nights. Perhaps, as the mayor and city staff say, they are not ideal. But they most certainly are better than nothing.

If someone freezes to death on the street while the shelter system is virtually overflowing, and while we as a city have refused to do the one thing activists have been asking us to do, we'll have a hard time looking at ourselves in the mirror and claiming we did what we could.

There's a lot we could do, if we are serious about recognizing this as an emergency, and protecting lives and safety is our priority. It's been cold, and it's going to be cold. The forecast for the end of this week shows a high - a high! - of -17 C on Friday. We know people are looking for a warm place to sleep. We need to find them one, now.

Edward Keenan writes on

city issues ekeenan@thestar.ca.

Follow: [@thekeenanwire](https://twitter.com/thekeenanwire)

As temps drop, one measure the city isn't taking is opening armouries at Moss Park Fort York on emergency basis. Mayor John Tory says Better Living Centre is a good temporary solution. Todd Korol/ Star File Photo Randy Risling/ Star

Document TOR000020180103ee13000ew

Opinion

Open Toronto's armouries immediately, and save lives

Sarah Polley

823 words

3 January 2018

The Toronto Star

TOR

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A11

English

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On the afternoon of New Year's Eve I stand, in shock, looking at the scene before me in one of Toronto's 24-hour overflow warming centres. A young woman huddles under a blanket on a mat on the floor, inches away from dozens of other people.

It is freezing in here. She closes her eyes, trying to shut out the noise, the cold and the horror of having to be here. A man tries to make his way through the mats (there are no aisles between them). He stumbles and kicks her as he passes. It looks as though he may fall upon the other people, huddled where his feet are trying to walk.

It is crowded, and tonight it will be more so. There are only two bathrooms stalls, without a door to separate the space from the rest of the centre. Tension is running high. It feels unsafe.

People who work in this community say this is the worst they have seen it. The word "catastrophe" is used often, and it's appropriate. These places are hell holes at night. How, they ask, to even convince someone to come in here?

If I am to take honest stock of my experience of being here, for even 15 minutes, I can see how hard it would be to risk the violence, disease and claustrophobia of one of these 24-hour centres when faced with a choice between this and the deadly temperatures outside.

When I worked in the anti-poverty movement in the mid-'90s, I came here often, for meetings. The people I worked with warned that this apocalyptic scenario was coming. When I look around now, it looks like Dickensian London, a refugee camp or a humanitarian disaster in a Third World country. It's not what people imagine when they think of an affluent city in Canada.

Every morning these past weeks, we find ourselves shocked by the cold. Over and over again, we hear the calls, from people who have worked in this field for decades, for the armouries at Moss Park and Fort York to be opened to the homeless. These calls are ignored, with the mayor saying the use of the armouries would not be "safe" or "adequate." Could he honestly use those words to describe the scene I saw on New Year's Eve?

The armouries have showers. They have space. And they've been used before.

The armouries were opened in 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2004. Mayors Barbara Hall, Mel Lastman and David Miller all made calls to the federal government, asking for them to be opened, the first time prompted by the death of three homeless men. What is John Tory waiting for? A similar tragedy? To be sure, that is on the horizon.

We have no national housing strategy. We have a shelter system that is dangerously overcrowded. When these cold weather centres are closed in the spring, the catastrophe remains. We are in the middle of a genuine crisis. None of this is news and none of it is spurring enough action.

Instead, we treat the cold snap as a sudden emergency with makeshift solutions, such as these 24-hour drop-ins. As Joshua Tepper, a family physician who works with Seaton House and the Inner City Health Team says, "Almost every year I see our homeless freeze to death on the streets of our city. We live in Canada. It's not a shock that we have cold spells. How are we not more prepared for this? How is this a recurring crisis?"

We have a homeless population in need of shelter year round, and a shelter system that cannot contain the need. There is really no excuse for these ongoing band aid solutions.

Who are we, if we can wake up in the morning, decide it's too cold for our kids to go outside and play, and then do nothing about the people who are living and sleeping outside with no safe alternatives?

Someone is going to die. We need to wake ourselves from our inertia. These conditions are our responsibility to change, this horror is on our heads. We need real, lasting systemic change.

In the meantime, it's too cold to stay alive out there, and the overflow options available to the homeless to go inside are inhumane. Mayor Tory, have the decency and strength to reconsider your position. Make the call and open the damn armouries.

Sarah Polley is a Canadian writer, director and actor whose films include *Away From Her* and *Stories We Tell*.

Two men sit on a grate in front of Old City Hall in early December. Mayor John Tory needs to have "the decency strength" to ask that 's two downtown armouries be opened as shelters this winter, Sarah Polley writes. Richard Lautens/ Star

Document TOR0000020180103ee13000e7

News

With shelters packed and people at risk of freezing to death, why can't we do more?

Edward Keenan

1,200 words

2 January 2018

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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Read more:

[ombudsman probing 'confusion' over services](#)

[Providing a safe haven for people — their pets](#)

[Opinion | Sarah Polley: 's are in crisis, open the armouries now save lives](#)

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Correction- Jan. 3, 2018: This article was edited from a previous version that misspelled the given name of Rafi Aaron.

Edward Keenan writes on city issues ekeenan@thestar.ca. Follow: [@thekeenanwire](https://twitter.com/thekeenanwire)

A man tries to keep warm near a steam vent in downtown on a bone-chilling day. During 's current deep freeze, the shelter system has been at or very near capacity.

Document TOR0000020180103ee12000xh

News

City chilled to the bone \ Police say weather 'played a role' in death of Etobicoke man found in snow

SHAWN JEFFORDS, TORONTO SUN

518 words

16 February 2015

The Toronto Sun

TORSUN

Final

6

English

2015 Sun Media Corporation

Toronto Police want to speak with a taxi driver who many have been the last person to see a 29-year-old Etobicoke man alive early Sunday morning.

The Etobicoke man, identified by police as Mark Stroz, was found face down in the snow outside of his home in the Royal York Rd.-Eglinton Ave. area. He was spotted around 7 a.m. near his wheelchair by a person driving past the house.

He was taken to hospital where he later died.

Toronto Police Staff Sgt. William Hurley said cause of death has yet to be determined and an autopsy is pending, but acknowledged that it was bitterly cold.

According to weather forecasts, the temperature was -25C at the time, with a windchill making it feel like -40C.

"It was extremely cold, one of the coldest days of the year," Hurley said. "You would certainly have to think the cold played a role."

Hurley said Stroz was out with friends Saturday night and returned home by cab. Police have ruled out foul play but would like to speak to the cab driver, he said.

Hurley urged anyone who many have had contact with Stroz Saturday night to call 416-808-2200.

Meanwhile, the frigid weather wreaked havoc across the city Sunday, breaking watermains and freezing water in the harbour which resulted in the Island ferry getting stuck. Toronto Fire Services Capt. David Eckerman said the ferry was trapped in the ice for about 45 minutes.

The fire service's icebreaker was dispatched to free the vessel.

"With the extreme cold over night and the formation of ice the ferry got stuck," he said.

"We're out there every day breaking these channels and keeping them free of ice. That's not to say that large chunks of ice don't remain in these channels after we've gone through."

Environment Canada meteorologist Geoff Coulson said with the forecast calling for a low of -24C, temperatures could potentially set a record on Monday. The record for Feb. 16 is -23.9C, set in 1939. Overall, the city won't get a reprieve from the cold until next weekend, and even that will be short-lived, he said.

"The longer range models are still talking about the over-arching temperature trend for the second half of February and, unfortunately, for a good part of the month of March, to be colder than normal."

Jack Boland/ Sun Photos \ Above, a man, sitting over heated grates, peers out from his blankets at the corner of Richmond St. W. Bay St. yesterday. At left, a watermain breakage at Dufferin St. Eglinton Ave. W. turned the area into a skating rink as the arctic blast continued across . \ \ A person stays huddled under blankets while lying over a sidewalk air vent at Richmond St. W. York St. yesterday. At left, a pedestrian keeps warm by wearing an outfit inspired by Marvel's Venom character. \

Document TORSUN0020150216eb2g0000y

News

Elderly man mourned \ Found in snowbank

CHRIS DOUCETTE, TORONTO SUN

489 words

6 February 2015

The Toronto Sun

TORSUN

Final

52

English

2015 Sun Media Corporation

A friend stared blankly at the snowbank in an Etobicoke laneway Thursday where Bruce "BJ" James, 82, was found lying lifeless in the freezing cold hours earlier.

"I never knew my grandparents, so BJ was like a grandfather to me," John Fleming said, fighting back tears as he remembered the senior. "He had a great sense of humour and was just full of life."

"I'm going to miss him," he added, after stooping to pick up some loose change in the alley next to where James was found and wondering whether the money was dropped by his pal.

A person called 911 around 6:45 a.m. after the elderly man was spotted in the laneway at Bloor St. W. and Prince Edward Dr., Toronto Police said.

"The caller reported the man was lying on the ground, semi-conscious and bleeding," Const. Vic Kwong said.

The temperature was about -15C at the time, but felt more like -24C with the windchill.

James was whisked away in an ambulance, but by the time he arrived at hospital, he had no vital signs.

The senior was pronounced dead a short while later.

Four other people have died in frigid temperatures so far this winter.

Three were homeless and one died after consuming alcohol and passing out in the cold.

Investigators believe James was heading home from Gabby's, his favourite watering hole.

But they don't know whether he was planning to walk home or drive his car, which was parked in the laneway behind the bar just steps from where he was found.

Police say it appeared James had been drinking, but the elderly man's friends were quick to defend him.

"He enjoyed a drink of Jameson now and then, but I've never seen him get sloppy drunk," said Fleming, who gathered at the bar with others who knew and loved the elderly man.

The friends also made it clear James wasn't homeless, saying that the senior lived a few blocks away.

"I sometimes walked home with him, just to make sure he got there safe," Fleming said, adding that others looked out for him as well and would take him home.

He recalled one such night when he spotted a saxophone inside James' house and his friend picked it up to prove he could play the instrument.

"He was really good," Fleming said.

Music, particularly from the 1930s and '40s, was one of the interests he and James shared and would chat about for hours, he said.

The friends said James, who lost his wife, Dolly, in recent years, worked in the city's financial district most of his life and only retired from his job as a trader about four years ago.

Police said an autopsy was to be conducted to determine the cause of death.

photo of BRUCE JAMES "Full of life" \

Document TORSUN0020150206eb26000m

News | Toronto Star

Toronto experts to advise Ontario on how to end homelessness

445 words

26 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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A doctor at St. Michael's Hospital, a York University professor and a local anti-poverty activist are among 13 experts appointed Tuesday to help Ontario draft its promised strategy to end homelessness.

But after announcing its ambitious plan last September, Queen's Park has yet to set a deadline, nor a budget to meet its goal.

"That's a big part of what the expert panel is going to be about," said Housing Minister Ted McMeekin, who will co-chair the group with Treasury Board president Deb Matthews, the minister responsible for the province's poverty reduction strategy.

"We'll be struggling with definitions . . . and how we measure effectiveness," McMeekin said in an interview. "I'm giving them six months."

The province will develop an action plan based on the panel's recommendations and report annually on progress, he said.

"It's a natural outgrowth of the poverty reduction strategy," he added.

McMeekin acknowledged that it will be difficult to solve homelessness without a federal partner. But he said the province is looking into partnering with the private sector and helping municipal public housing companies leverage existing assets to free up money for repairs and new construction.

"When you see men to in our largest city. . .when you see that happening, it just breaks your heart — the faceless, nameless folk who are gone, sadly," he said. "We need to make sure we find ways to make sure that doesn't happen any more."

Local panel members include Dr. Stephen Hwang, chair of homelessness, housing and health at St. Mike's; York University professor Stephen Gaetz, director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Homeless Hub; and activist Mike Creek, who has experienced homelessness, poverty and mental illness. Creek is now a director of Working for Change, which encourages marginalized people to help shape public policy.

"A meaningful poverty reduction strategy should address an urgent issue like homelessness, so it's encouraging to see Ontario moving meaningfully in this direction," said panelist Pedro Barata, of United WayToronto.

"I don't think anybody is under any illusion about the seriousness, the scope and what a significant challenge addressing this issue is going to be," he said Tuesday. "But looking around the table, there is a very strong group with lots of experience and lots of knowledge that can certainly help us move closer to where we need to be."

Ontario has appointed a 13-member panel to study the best ways to end homelessness as part of the province's aim to get serious about poverty reduction.

Document TOR0000020150126eb1q0020k



Opinion | Editorial Coverage | T
We must all help end homelessness

727 words

12 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

Copyright (c) 2015 The Toronto Star

Re: Give them shelter, Editorial Jan. 11

Re: On the grates, Insight Jan. 11

Give them shelter, Editorial Jan. 11

Councillor Joe Mihevc is right, “we need something to be done yesterday” in response to the gentleman recently found dead in a bus shelter at Yonge and Dundas.

We are a group of organizations that work with people who sleep rough, struggle with severe health-related problems exacerbated by poverty, mental health and substance use, and are often inadvertently humiliated by the very systems that are meant to support and help them.

Short-term solutions like adequate drop-ins, shelter beds, and warming centres are important, but are not long-term solutions. What is striking, and frankly wrong, is the fact that people continue to fall through the cracks and the general public has become collectively apathetic.

What would happen if shelters, transit, social services, health care, and housing worked together to ensure that people in our community had safe affordable housing, access to services, a warm place and support?

What would happen, if anyone witnessing a man in a T-shirt in a bus shelter on a frigid winter night felt compelled to help him and had called 311?

Joe is right, we need to do something. What would happen if we did all of us?

Lynne Raskin, Chief Executive Officer, Southeast Toronto Network

According to your editorial, you are concerned with homeless women. Men are not homeless? Homeless men are not victims of all kinds of abuse?

Think about it for a minute: if you had printed a similar editorial that advocated for only blacks or Jews or the LBGT communities, you would be labelled bigots. But because you are discriminating against men, it's OK? Talk about sexism.

If corporations like yourselves are concerned with the homeless crisis, why not make a down payment for the \$2 million for the new facility you write about? If you are not living in the solution, creating a better, more humane world, are you not part of the problem?

Kenneth B. Munro, Toronto

On the grates, Insight Jan. 11

Big banks on Bay St. obtain billion dollar profits each year from high interest rates and transaction fees paid by Torontonians. Yet homeless people lying on steam grates, literally a few feet away from the doors of financial glass towers, risk their lives out in the cold.

Let's compel banks to pay a portion of their profits to act as responsible community partners and contribute to ending homelessness. Even a portion of one percent of a billion could improve and save so many lives.

Diane Sullivan, Toronto

Page 22 of 131 © 2023 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.

In your report on the failure of the city to implement a new shelter for homeless women, the writer concludes, “If the city wants to add a 24-hour women’s drop-in and maintain current service levels, a property tax hike above inflation would be needed, staff warned.”

The definition of warn is: to give notice, advice, or intimation to (a person, group, etc.) of danger, impending evil, possible harm, or anything else unfavourable. So, either the staff person or the reporter is implying that a tax hike to help the homeless would be a bad thing.

A strange conclusion at any time, but callous after people have been found dead on our streets – and not for the first time.

Perhaps we all need to be reminded that taxes are not an evil, but are the price we pay for a civilized society. And a civilized society would pay to avoid needless suffering or death for any of its members, especially the most vulnerable.

Eleanor O’Connor, Toronto

It is quite common to read articles that imply that people are at risk of freezing to death when the ambient temperature is survivable but, with the wind-chill factor, it is dangerously colder. Not true.

Wind chill affects only the rate at which a warmer object such as a person, loses heat. The homeless man found frozen in a van in Toronto died because of the outside temperature – there is no wind chill in an enclosed shelter.

In the early days of reporting wind chill, it was describes as making one feel like it’s colder; now it has gained the stature of actually being colder.

Bert Dandy, Niagara Falls

Document TOR0000020150112eb1c0020d

Greater Toronto

Crowding not the only obstacle in shelters; Strict rules, drugs, even jobs can prevent city's homeless from staying warm and safe

Sadiya Ansari Toronto Star

814 words

10 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

GT2

English

Copyright (c) 2015 The Toronto Star

Crowding at homeless shelters across the city may not be a new issue, but plunging temperatures and the death of two homeless men earlier this week are heightening concerns about the city's most vulnerable.

"We have been running at capacity since April 2013," said Bradley Harris, executive director of housing and homeless supports for the Salvation Army.

He runs five shelters across the city with capacity for 628 shelter beds, and with extreme cold weather beds bumping that number up to 675.

Thursday night, available beds had 93-per-cent uptake, with co-ed shelters at 98 per cent.

The city is working on a report due in March on reaching a 90-per-cent occupancy target, said Patricia Anderson, of the Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division.

But crowding isn't the only reason the homeless aren't accessing shelters. Strict rules, drug use, and even working can become reasons why a homeless person may end up out in the cold overnight.

For Heather, having to identify as an addict always made her feel uncomfortable.

"There can be a lot of judgment," she said.

Heather, 50, has been an addict for 30 years and says crack is her "drug of choice." She was homeless for nearly three years, ending in 2011.

On the other end of the spectrum, sometimes there is too much drug use near a shelter, she says. "It's right in front of your face, and it makes it hard to say no."

Heather has been refused entry at night into a shelter because she was high, and another time because she missed curfew. The stringent rules grated on her and at times were "humiliating."

That's why she appreciated Women's Residence, which she said had a 3 a.m. curfew, much later than more traditional shelters like those of the Salvation Army, which can have curfews as early as 11 p.m.

Curfews exist for good reason. Harris says it's a "consideration" to help those working in the morning get a good night's sleep, while also ensuring the safety and security of hundreds of people at a shelter. Exceptions can be made if arrangements are made in advance, he added.

But if someone doesn't show up to claim the reserved bed a few nights in row, it can lead to being temporarily barred from a shelter. So can breaking other rules, such as smoking indoors.

Harris says that could get you restricted for three to six months because of the serious potential for fire.

Behavioural issues, such as violence, can also get you temporarily barred, said Harris.

Mental illness may not always be a cause of homelessness but can be a result of it, says Tanya Gulliver-Garcia, a research co-ordinator for the Homeless Hub based at York University.

"You start to experience depression, anxiety and sleep deprivation, and those types of things can make you very shelter-resistant," she said.

Struggling with addiction and schizophrenia, Karen (not her real name) always found shelters to be too impersonal. She first went to a shelter as a teen and returned at various points in her life, including when she escaped a violent husband. But bad experiences made her hesitant to go back, even when it was "freezing cold," she said. The drop-in centre Sistering helped her get back inside.

Karen, 53, prefers drop-ins because there are fewer people, she doesn't have to provide as much personal information and she finds it be a warm, inviting environment. She is now housed and works at Sistering, as well as another drop-in centre in the city. But she wishes drop-ins had extended hours - Sistering is only open until 3 p.m. each day.

The Star recently reported the city missed a December deadline to make a 24-hour drop-in centre for women available.

During extreme cold weather alerts, the city does provide additional resources to homeless people, including more beds, two 24-hour drop-in centres, directing shelters to relax their restrictions, and providing TTC tokens at some drop-in centres to help people get to a shelter.

Researchers say other barriers to access include:

Having to line up to secure a spot, especially for those who are employed and can't be at a shelter hours before entry.

Language barriers that can make it hard to understand shelter rules.

Having to abandon pets: only one of 58 city-funded shelters is pet-friendly.

Accessibility: only 24 of 58 city-funded shelters have wheelchair-accessible units.

Having struggled with addiction mental illness, Karen always found shelters too impersonal. The drop-in centre Sistering helped her get back inside. Sadiya Ansari/ Star

Document TOR000020150110eb1a000px

Greater Toronto

How many deaths before we declare a weather alert? Public Health's strict adherence to policy leaving too many vulnerable people out in the cold

Edward Keenan Toronto Star

991 words

7 January 2015

The Toronto Star

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English

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We've been suffering under extreme cold weather this week in Toronto. It feels a lot like the "Polar Vortex" we came to know and fear last year, although I'm informed it's an "Arctic Mass" this time instead. Whatever it is, it's extreme. And it's cold. And it's weather.

If you don't believe that it is extremely cold, I invite you to step outside to read the rest of this column while exposed to the weather, and alert me to your conclusions when you're done.

I extend that invitation especially to the staff in the city of Toronto's office of public health, whose job it is to declare an Extreme Cold Weather Alert. When they do officially declare what everyone with access to the outdoors can feel, additional "warming stations" are opened to shelter the homeless and vulnerable, outreach workers are sent out to get people sleeping on the streets indoors and emergency homeless shelters relax their entrance requirements.

Plus, transportation money is provided to those needing access to open shelter beds. Basically a whole lot of life-saving resources are made available to people who might otherwise sleep on the street.

Public Health did not declare an extreme cold weather alert Sunday night, when the city of Hamilton did. A homeless man died sleeping in the back of a truck in a shipping yard in Toronto's west end.

Public Health did not declare an extreme cold weather alert Monday night. A man died after he was found lying in a transit shelter at Yonge and Dundas, suffering hypothermia in only a T-shirt and jeans.

Public Health did not declare an extreme cold weather alert Tuesday afternoon as protesters took over the mayor's office, demanding to know how many people have to die before we can officially confirm it is too cold to tolerate people sleeping outdoors.

Associate medical officer of health Howard Shapiro made the media rounds explaining that they declare an alert only when overnight temperatures are forecast by Environment Canada to be -15 or lower. Since temperatures for Tuesday night were forecast to be only -13, with gusts of wind reaching 50 km/h, his office would not make the call.

I'm not sure how the medical officers - the doctors who run Public Health - can square their rigid insistence on technical guidelines with the ethics of their profession. To deny the availability of potentially life-saving service interventions based on the minute specificity of weather forecasts - parsing it down to the distinction that a -17 low wouldn't be reached until Wednesday morning, so Tuesday night wouldn't qualify - strikes me as falling under the category of "doing some harm," but then I never went to medical school.

I explained my take on that to Shapiro, and he said that this extreme cold weather alert threshold was set to indicate an "emergency" level - unusually cold temperatures - and that if the guidelines were set simply at the level where there's a risk of hypothermia, it would be above zero. "We're trying to have a system where these alerts only come up so often," he said.

Cathy Crowe, a street nurse and researcher who has been studying homelessness in Toronto for more than a decade, told me she'd feared this would happen. She and a group of other advocates met with the public health

office in November, because they were pleased the department had been given responsibility for triggering the alerts that provide services for the first time this year.

She was aghast, then, to hear that they planned to adhere stringently to the -15 guideline, even though the city's instructions seem specifically to give them flexibility to declare an alert because of other factors like wind and sustained cold over multiple days. When I spoke with her Tuesday, she was pleading with the mayor by email to take action, and had scheduled a meeting with the chief medical officer for Wednesday afternoon.

Early Tuesday, when asked about this, Mayor John Tory said that any death - homeless or not - is too many, and then proceeded to emit an arctic mass of his own about how he couldn't comment because it is Public Health's call. By mid-afternoon, his office swarming with angry protesters, he announced that he's ordered the warming centres open, and the city then announced it would activate the full range of extreme weather services. At least the politicians responded, even if the official alert was still withheld.

Around 3 p.m., Environment Canada issued an Extreme Cold Weather Warning. Toronto Public Health, around the same time, issued a statement saying they expected they might get around to declaring an extreme cold weather alert on Wednesday.

"I understand this is because the threshold was not met. But if today and yesterday didn't meet the criteria and the threshold, then there's something wrong with the criteria and the threshold," said Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell, Tory's appointed adviser on poverty.

That's true.

"In my mind what this points to is the need for other measures outside what the threshold is," Shapiro said.

Also true. But if people apparently freezing to death on the streets isn't cold enough to trigger an alert designed to save people from freezing to death on the streets, what's the point of having it at all?

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[@thekeenewire](https://twitter.com/thekeenewire)

Activist Gaetan Heroux at a protest outside the mayor's office against the recent deaths of two men. John Clarke of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty spoke as protesters gathered at the mayor's office Tuesday. Tara Walton/
Star

Document TOR0000020150107eb17000q1

Toronto News

Cold weather alert policy questioned after Toronto street death

Rosemary Westwood

382 words

6 January 2015

Metro Canada

MOTTA

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English

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A Toronto councillor is questioning the city's cold weather alert policy after a man was found dead Tuesday morning in a bus shelter.

"If you do not have opportunities to find shelter that is warm and safe, and you're exposed to longer durations of extreme weather conditions, especially cold in the winter time, is -15 C adequate?" Kirstyn Wong-Tam said in a conversation with Metro. "Or should we be lowering that threshold to, perhaps, -10 C and then factoring in the wind chill?"

Wong-Tam was referring to the city's policy of issuing a cold weather alert - and opening emergency shelters - when Environment Canada is forecasting an overnight low of -15 C.

Dr. David McKeown, the city's medical officer of health, is responsible for gauging the forecast each morning and deciding if an alert should be issued. There is some discretion to include factors like wind chill and precipitation.

A cold weather alert wasn't issued Monday when the overnight low hit -14 C with wind chill, making it feel somewhere between -20 C and -24 C, according to Environment Canada data.

Police said freezing temperatures undoubtedly played a role in the bus shelter. A man in his 50s, wearing only jeans and T-shirt, was found unresponsive about 6 a.m. on Yonge Street just west of Dundas.

Officers at the scene said they were familiar with the man and described him as having a "troubled past." They said he has at times been homeless, though it's not known if he was without housing when he died.

An official cause of death has not been determined.

Despite the ongoing deep freeze, McKeown has no plans of issuing a cold weather alert for Tuesday when the overnight low is forecast to hit -7 C, feeling like -15 C with wind chill.

The forecast is "well below the Environment Canada cold weather warning level," McKeown wrote in an email to Wong-Tam and other politicians Tuesday morning.

"At this point the forecast for tomorrow, January 7, suggests that the conditions for an alert may occur. This decision will be made early tomorrow morning based on the updated forecast at that time," the email continued.

Document MOTTA00020150106eb16000rx

Opinion

City budget chops housing and compassion

Michael Shapcott

947 words

2 December 2012

The Toronto Star

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A15

English

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Toronto's already grim affordable housing crisis is set to get a whole lot worse as the city's draft municipal budget for 2013 proposes yet another massive cut to affordable housing investments - adding up to a staggering \$328-million loss in just two years.

Municipal budgets are about choices - choices about the kind of city we want to live in. The draft 2013 budget sets out a cold and harsh vision for Toronto, a city where the poorest and most vulnerable who are desperate to find and maintain a decent home are ignored and neglected.

As Toronto residents and municipal politicians review the draft budget over the next month or so, they also have choices. They can embrace the austere vision that relegates hundreds of thousands of women, men and children to desperate conditions, a growing burden of poor health and early death; or they can move toward a healthier and more equitable Toronto that provides sensible housing supports for those who need them.

The City of Toronto's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration is set to take a massive \$128-million cut in housing and homelessness investments in the draft 2013 budget - down from \$793 million in 2012 to \$665 million in the coming year.

The 2012 budget had, in turn, a \$137-million cut from its approved budget of \$993 million in 2011. That adds up to a 16 per cent cut this year - and a 33-per-cent cut over two years.

Hacking one-third of Toronto's spending on housing and homelessness programs over two years will have a devastating impact on affordable housing in the city, on the health and lives of hundreds of thousands of the city's poorest and most vulnerable residents, and ultimately on the population health of the entire city.

Toronto's affordable housing wait list stood at a record 87,301 households in October. That's 161,222 women, men and children desperate for a decent place to call home. The city's wait list has set a record every month - month after month - since the recession of 2008. And many desperate Torontonians don't even bother to sign onto the list because the wait is a decade or more in the most optimistic case.

Another sign of the deep impact of Toronto's affordable housing crisis: More than 946,000 visits to food banks, according to the latest data from Daily Bread Food Bank. People are hungry and rely on food charity due to low incomes and the high cost of housing.

Study after study confirms that people who are precariously housed, and those who are forced into the streets, suffer a heavy burden of illness and premature death.

Toronto's affordable housing crisis is bad for the health of the hundreds of thousands who are at the centre of the storm; the crisis is bad for the population health of the entire city; it's bad for the social and economic health of Toronto. A lack of affordable housing is a drag on our economy.

On the plus side, investing in affordable housing is good for the health of individuals and the entire community, and provides a boost to the economy through jobs and other stimulus.

In the planned 2013 municipal budget, a big chunk of the housing cuts - \$72 million - come from cuts by federal and provincial governments to housing subsidies that are passed along to the city and, in turn, distributed to affordable housing providers ranging from Toronto Community Housing to co-op and non-profit groups.

Not included in this figure are about \$21 million in provincial housing and homelessness funding to Toronto that will be cut on Jan. 1, 2013. Most of that spending is in another part of Toronto's municipal budget (Toronto Employment and Social Services). The city is proposing to fund those cuts temporarily over the next year as a short-term stopgap while it negotiates with the province.

The City of Toronto is planning to pile on its own cuts on top of federal and provincial cuts - the draft 2013 budget calls for \$56 million in city housing cuts.

Most of the huge cuts are planned for social and affordable housing spending. Last year's municipal budget called for \$569 million in investments in social housing - which helps subsidize existing housing for hundreds of thousands of the poorest Torontonians. This year, planned spending will be sharply cut to \$472 million. That means less money to help low-income households pay their housing costs, and less money to properly maintain the buildings.

The cost of these massive housing cuts: longer lineups at food banks, a rise in economic evictions as poor households cannot pay the rent, and unhealthy conditions in affordable housing as necessary building repairs are unfunded.

The city's affordable housing budget - which funds desperately needed new homes - will be cut in half from \$49 million last year to \$24 million this year. The cost of these cuts: Longer wait lists for affordable housing, and longer waits for those already on the wait lists.

Toronto's spending on homeless shelters and supports and services to help people who are homeless move to affordable housing have been flatlined in the 2013 budget at \$165 million. Freezing homelessness spending even as inflation erodes spending power, and the pressure on homeless services grows because of the housing cuts, will leave the city's homeless services struggling to cope with a growing tide with extremely tight resources.

Michael Shapcott is director of housing and innovation at the Wellesley Institute, an independent research and policy institute dedicated to advancing population health.

Document TOR0000020121202e8c200026

Editorial

Activists 'get ahead of the curve'

Carol Goar

Toronto Star

695 words

17 December 2008

The Toronto Star

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AA06

English

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Last night, 40 concerned Torontonians gathered in the 45th floor boardroom of a Bay Street investment firm, to talk about protecting the vulnerable from the harsh winds of the gathering recession.

The host of the meeting was John Andras, a portfolio manager at Research Capital Corp. He is a financier by day, a social activist at night.

The participants included business representatives, philanthropists, members of social agencies and street workers. They call themselves the Recession Relief Fund Coalition.

The purpose of last night's gathering was to finalize a declaration the group had sketched out two weeks ago. It calls on the federal government to create a Recession Relief Fund in next month's budget. The money would be used in two ways: to shore up non-profit agencies that serve the country's poorest citizens and to double the funding of Ottawa's Homeless Partnering Strategy (currently \$135 million a year) which allows communities to invest in permanent solutions to homelessness.

The coalition is also asking that social housing be included in the government's infrastructure renewal program and that Ottawa implement a fully funded national housing program.

This initiative has come together with extraordinary speed. While most charities are still figuring out how to cope with the imminent economic crisis, Toronto's homeless activists have identified their priorities and come up with specific proposals. Their declaration will be made public tomorrow.

"We wanted to get ahead of the curve," Andras explained in an interview. "Everybody could see the disaster coming.

"It's like having your foot caught in the track while the engine bears down. You don't know how hard it will hit, but you know it will hurt."

The coalition was conceived in late November. Andras and a couple of street workers were talking about the coming winter. The first signs of distress were already apparent. Charitable donations were drying up. Grant-making foundations were coping with massive financial losses. The city was bracing for a surge in welfare cases. And the province wasn't due to announce its housing strategy until next spring.

"We were getting very depressed," Andras recalled. "We decided we had to pull together a coalition of agencies and foundations."

The founding meeting took place on Dec. 2. Two weeks later, they had a plan ready to go. By mid-January, the coalition hopes to have Mayor David Miller on-board and similar declarations springing up across the country.

One of the reasons Andras was able to pull things together so fast was Toronto has a solid core of homeless activists, dating back to the mid '90s, when Ottawa and the province started slashing social housing.

Andras's first response, in 1993, was Project Warmth, which collected and distributed thousands of sleeping bags, winter clothing and footwear to the homeless.

Meanwhile, Cathy Crowe was carving out a new role as a street nurse, checking the back alleys and parks with a knapsack loaded with socks, mittens, nutritional supplements and duct tape for patching holey shoes.

And organizations such as Street Health were springing up to offer on-the-spot treatment to homeless people suffering from frostbite, dehydration, malnutrition, pneumonia, Hepatitis C and chronic diseases.

What they all realized was that their individual efforts weren't solving the problem. So they banded together to put homelessness on the political agenda. They enlisted community leaders, anti-poverty activists and a handful of enlightened developers.

They became a force to be reckoned with. They jolted former mayor Mel Lastman out of his torpor, badgered former prime minister Jean Chretien into providing housing funds and shamed Premier Dalton McGuinty into promising 20,000 units of affordable housing (which he has yet to deliver).

Now they've assembled the Recession Relief Fund Coalition.

"We want to move before we start getting headlines about people freezing to death," Andras said.

Budget day is approaching fast. The economic outlook is grim. Many groups will be competing for federal help.

Thanks to the coalition, the homeless will have a strong, clear voice.

Carol Goar's column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

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Document TOR0000020081217e4ch00033

News

Extreme cold alert, extreme warnings; City adds beds, services, outreach workers warn of frostbite, amputation

Joanna Smith

Toronto Star

465 words

11 February 2008

The Toronto Star

TOR

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A08

English

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Being on that corner makes him feel closer to his father.

Gazing south down Bay St. from his spot atop the subway grate on the corner of Queen St. W., he explained that his father was a foreman when several of the nearby bank towers were built.

His father died last June and when Matt, himself a former journeyman, began surviving on the sidewalks, he found himself gravitating to the shadows of his father's work.

Matt, 30, says he has a ticket to Saskatoon and plans to reunite with his wife there as soon as he can find enough cash to get his stuff out of storage. But he was planning to spend last night on that corner, even though the City of Toronto issued an extreme cold weather alert.

The city rolled out extra services like 80 more beds, extended hours at drop-in centres and free subway tokens to get the homeless into shelters as temperatures were expected to drop to "13C overnight, with a wind-chill factor of "26C.

"I'm out here, man," said Matt, who would not give his last name. "There are other people who need the shelters. I can handle the cold."

Lori Wolfshout, a street outreach worker with Toronto North Support Services, said she tries to tell people reluctant to go into shelters what could happen if temperatures drop.

"Basically we do the best we can do to let them know that it is going to be freezing cold outside and even if they choose not to go into a shelter, to possibly go indoors somewhere," Wolfshout said from the outreach van last night.

"You can get frostbite. You can lose your hands or feet. You could freeze to death," she said she tells them.

Timothy Walmsley, a client care worker at Na-Me-Res (Native Men's Residence), said it is hard to get people on the street to come into the shelter, with some not wanting to follow the strict house rules against drugs and alcohol.

"Some people prefer to actually continue with their addiction rather than come into a shelter for the night," he said.

City of Toronto spokesperson Brad Ross said capacity in Toronto's shelters reaches an average of 92 to 94 per cent during an extreme cold weather alert, adding that the city's contracts with motels means there would always be room for everyone seeking shelter.

This is the fourth cold weather alert in Toronto this year.

With files from Chris Jai Centeno

985954-671703.jpg | Richard Lautens star Matt, outside coffee shop at Bay Queen, said he would ignore the cold weather alert sleep outside. | ;

Document TOR0000020080211e42b0000t

Opinion

The poor haven't changed we have

Linda McQuaig

816 words

2 January 2005

The Toronto Star

TOR

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A17

English

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In recent years, the word "underprivileged" has fallen out of use.

Too bad; the word was helpful. It captured the fact that what separated the poor from the rest of society was mostly just privilege - the advantage of being born into the right family. In other words, luck had a lot to do with where one ended up in life.

This fundamental realization helped foster an attitude of sympathy and generosity towards the poor. After all, they were seen as being just like everyone else, only less lucky. So it seemed fair that society should provide them with some support, to make up at least partly for the headstart the rest of us got.

This sort of approach has been brusquely pushed aside in the last two decades, replaced by an aggressive new right-wing ideology with a much harsher attitude towards the poor.

According to this new ideology, the rich are rich because they've contributed more to society, and they therefore deserve their big fortunes. (Many rich people find considerable merit in this theory). Similarly, the new ideology holds that the poor are poor due to their own shortcomings, perhaps laziness or some other character defect.

Thus, the role of privilege - while more pronounced than ever in the lives of the rich and more lacking in the lives of the poor - has been airbrushed out of the picture. Our willingness to embrace this new ideology explains why our streets are increasingly filled with homeless people. The poor haven't changed; we've changed. Egged on by this new mean-spirited ideology, we've kicked the supports out from under them.

Indeed, from the point of view of the poor, what we've delivered in the past two decades amounts to a series of body blows.

Most devastating were the deep cuts made to provincial welfare payments in 1995 by Mike Harris' Conservative government. This blow was compounded by the fact that both Ottawa and Ontario cut off funding for new social housing in the 1990s.

This left Ontario's poor, now with even smaller incomes than before, at the mercy of the private rental housing market - where they faced ever-rising rents and little security. Then in 1998, the Harris government made their situation even more precarious by eliminating crucial rent control protections.

So, while we as a society have grown collectively much richer over the past two decades, we've played Russian roulette with the fate of the most vulnerable members of society. When large numbers of them have ended up faring badly - indeed living on our sidewalks - we've mostly just stepped over them, seeing in their blanket-wrapped idleness proof of the validity of the new ideology.

Despite massive budget surpluses in recent years, Ottawa has been slow to restore what it took away. Cathy Crowe, of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, says however that Ottawa is at least willing to listen. By contrast, she says, the key ministers in Dalton McGuinty's government in Ontario refuse to even meet with her committee. Ontario remains tied in last place (with Newfoundland and Labrador) for the province that spends the least on social housing, Crowe says.

Ironically, the new right-wing ideology may ultimately be more expensive.

To prevent the poor from actually freezing to death in large numbers, we've maintained a crude, barebones shelter system where they can sleep overnight in grim, crowded dormitories.

But the shelter system turns out to be more expensive than providing the poor with rental supplements.

According to a city housing report, rental supplements - which allow the poor to live in regular apartments - cost \$11,631 a year per person. The cost of keeping someone in a shelter is about 40 per cent higher - \$16,156 a year. The city figured this out when it set up an emergency program that provided rental supplements for more than a hundred homeless people who'd been evicted from the tent city where they'd been living near the city's waterfront.

A follow-up study last spring determined that 89 per cent of this hardcore homeless crowd were still living in their rental housing a year and a half later, and costing the system substantially less than if they'd been drifting in and out of shelters. Furthermore, they were eating better, returning to school, even finding jobs. In other words, with a little bit of support, they were actually making significant strides at overcoming their "underprivileged" backgrounds.

So it seems that our keen embrace of right-wing ideology in the past two decades may not only be mean, but also stupid - unless our goal is to punish the poor, in which case we're doing a very fine job.

Linda McQuaig is a Toronto-based author and commentator. lmcquaig@sympatico.ca

252238-173499.jpg | ;

Document TOR0000020050103e1120003i

The Perfect House
Globe Real Estate
Buddy, can you spare a decent place to sleep?

JOHN BENTLEY MAYS

810 words

24 September 2004

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

G2

English

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Despite Toronto's famous affluence, hundreds of folk still sleep on city streets, in laneways and under bridges. Some run the risk of freezing to death this winter.

A more civilized, humane place would declare such a situation intolerable. Toronto seems generally content to enjoy its wealth and the city's new-found status as a huge, gleaming, high-tech metropolis, and ignore the chronic, seeping sore of homelessness as sternly as possible.

One place the plight of wretched citizens is not being ignored, however, is Dixon Hall. Since 1928, this enterprising community group in the old immigrant district called Corktown has been providing emergency shelter for hundred of neighbours who've lost the roofs over their heads, along with jobs and careers and often the very ground under their feet.

In 1986, the people at Dixon Hall decided to go a step further, and find permanent homes for the homeless. So began the process of gathering private and public money, securing architects, getting the necessary permissions from city officials — a long, frustrating procedure that ended, in phases between 2000 and 2003, with the creation of the affordable rental housing at 30 St. Lawrence Street.

It's not the big answer to Toronto's homelessness problem. There are only about 60 places for people to live. But this attractive development is a small promise of what's possible, if the city ever decides to get serious about homelessness.

Designed for Dixon Hall by the Toronto office of Hilditch Architect, the \$3.6-million project sits between an elevated expressway deck and an old factory, on a battered wedge of ground that once belonged to the public works department. Its location is not lovely.

Before its quite recent gentrification, Corktown itself was not a lovely place to be. The largely industrial area was settled thickly in the 19th century by Irish newcomers, and allowed, over generations, to deteriorate into a decayed patch of the east-side inner city. If any traditional sense of belonging had survived in Corktown, it was dealt a serious blow in the 1950s, when the North American expressway craze hit Toronto and a concrete knife was driven into the heart of the neighbourhood.

While it cannot repair damaged human community, architecture can provide forms that make community possible.

At 30 St. Lawrence, Hilditch has drawn on Corktown's tradition of rooming houses on tight laneways, updated the concept to accommodate new technology and safety requirements, and given the area its first new residential street in many years. The dwellings line either side of the tiny, unnamed laneway. A line of Victorian-style row houses stands on the north side.

On the south side, a long, low business-like building recalls the small brick industrial plants that were once going concerns on downtown Toronto's back streets and laneways.

The result is a residential development that seems to belong in Corktown. "Architects once felt that they had to invent a new form of housing for poor people," says Charles Rosenberg, a member of the Hilditch team. "But sometimes the answer is not difficult."

From an urban and architectural point of view, however, 30 St. Lawrence still has some problems — none of which, as far as I can tell, is an outcome of what Dixon Hall or Hilditch has done. As you might guess from the address, the entire little complex is entered through a gateway off St. Lawrence. That would not be a cause for concern, were the new street open all the short way from St. Lawrence to Percy Street, which the lane abuts at its west end. It isn't.

After a local outcry threatened to stop the social housing project altogether, Mr. Rosenberg says, the client and architect agreed to construct a high wall between their development and Percy Street. This wall — an ugly affair, with an array of menacing metal prongs running along its top edge — ensures that, for the time being anyway, 30 St. Lawrence is an isolated enclave, partitioned from the neighbourhood it belongs to visually, and even culturally. Corktown, after all, has long been a place for people like those at 30 St. Lawrence — single folk and families struggling against poverty and addiction to make new, stable lives for themselves.

If Toronto ever decides to accept poor people, and stop building real and psychological walls to keep them at bay, the kind of infill architecture Hilditch has provided at 30 St. Lawrence will get the honour it deserves. Instead of putting the needy away into institutional barracks different from ordinary housing, Hilditch has made a pleasant, ordinary streetscape that could become a valuable contribution to Corktown's urban regeneration — if only somebody would tear down that darned wall.

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Illustration

Document GLOB000020040924e09o0003j

FEDERAL ELECTION 2004: REALITY CHECK

National News

Direct line difficult to draw between Martin's 1996 budget and rise in deaths of homeless

JEFF SALLOT

637 words

28 May 2004

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

A4

English

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Ottawa ONT

The Statement: "Deaths due to homelessness in this city took a rapid rise immediately after Paul Martin cancelled the affordable housing program." – NDP Leader Jack Layton, Toronto, May 26, 2004 The Message: People died because of Mr. Martin's 1996 budget.

The Reality: It didn't take long for the campaign to get personal. Mr. Layton's statement on Wednesday night provoked a storm of protests yesterday from the Liberal Leader's camp.

What was the NDP Leader talking about? NDP media officer Ian Capstick says Mr. Layton was referring to an increase in the number of deaths among Toronto's homeless after Mr. Martin's federal budget in 1996.

In that budget, the Liberals said they would phase out the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.'s remaining role in social housing. (The Liberal government changed course again four years ago and promised new federal financing for affordable housing.) So, what happened immediately after Mr. Martin's 1996 budget?

It's hard to say, exactly. To Toronto street nurse Cathy Crowe, it seemed that the number of homeless people dying began to go up about that time.

Ms. Crowe, who is the executive director of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, an advocacy group for the homeless, said nobody kept figures that are accurate enough to determine exactly what happened in 1996. A lack of affordable housing certainly contributed to the increase in deaths, she said, but so did other factors, such as cuts to social programs by the province and the municipality.

The scientific data do not give a complete picture.

However, there is no doubt that the death rate among homeless people in Toronto under the age of 44 is higher than among the general population in the same group, says Dr. Stephen Hwang, who conducted what may be the only scientific studies on the plight of the city's homeless in the mid-1990s.

His study found that the death rate among homeless single men in Toronto between 25 and 44 was 3.7 times the rate for single men of the same age group in the general Toronto population.

(Incidentally, the death rate among the Toronto homeless men was lower than for homeless men in Boston, Philadelphia and New York, but Dr. Hwang wasn't sure why. And Mr. Martin has not taken the credit, so far. We'll check back later.) The second study by Dr. Hwang found an even more dramatic difference in the single female population aged 18 to 44. The death rate among the homeless women was 10 times that of their peers in the general Toronto population.

Dr. Hwang, who is with the inner-city health clinic of St. Michael's Hospital, conducted the Toronto studies using data from 1995 to 1997. But the numbers were crunched together, and so there are no data that could determine whether anything changed after the 1996 budget.

But were the homeless dying from exposure to the harsh conditions of Toronto winters?

Dr. Hwang said there were some very dramatic and highly publicized freezing deaths. But, in fact, far more died for other reasons, such as drug overdoses and AIDS.

As a public-health professional who works among the poor, Dr. Hwang said he supports the call for additional affordable housing because homelessness has an adverse effect on health, as do a number of other factors.

As a scientist, Dr. Hwang is uncomfortable drawing a direct line between Mr. Martin's 1996 budget and deaths of homeless people.

But that's what Mr. Layton did. It seems to us his very serious assertion is not proven. And that puts Mr. Layton into the Pinocchio zone.

Illustration

Document GLOB000020040528e05s0001a

Homeless advocates criticize Ont. Tory promise to get people off the streets

BY JEN HORSEY

CP

435 words

28 May 2003

17:43 GMT

The Canadian Press

CPR

English

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TORONTO (CP) _ Advocates for the homeless sharply criticized Wednesday the Ontario government's promise to sweep the homeless off the streets, calling the idea misguided and unconstitutional.

"The Tory plan is foolish. It's misguided and it's unconstitutional and illegal," Michael Shapcott, who works with the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, said at a news conference.

In a pre-election platform released earlier this month, the Conservative government pledged "responsible care for the homeless" that included empowering teams of outreach workers to remove the homeless from the streets if they were in need of help.

"It won't help the people who really do need help," said Shapcott, citing an overcrowded shelter system and lack of services.

He also said the plan threatens to drive underground those homeless people who don't want to be forced into care.

"Once they hear the province wants to round them up, it will make them harder to find and harder to serve," he said.

A similar plan attempted in British Columbia in 1990 was overturned after courts deemed it unconstitutional, Shapcott said.

His group urged the government to build more affordable housing and invest in social services to prevent people from ending up on the streets.

"Homeless people are suffering from years of Tory cuts," he said.

Christine Bujold, spokeswoman for Community Services Minister Brenda Elliott, said the policy is intended to help, not hurt, the homeless.

"Obviously homelessness is a complex issue. We feel that the very humane thing to do is to try to prevent people from freezing to death on the streets," she said.

Bujold said through the joint-ministry Provincial Homeless Strategy launched in 1999, the government funds programs that aim to prevent homelessness and serve people already on the streets.

Among those initiatives is \$4.8 million for projects that help people get off the street, transition people out of hostels and help those at risk of losing their housing, according to a ministry news release Wednesday.

And in 2001, the Health Ministry paid \$14.9 million for supportive housing for at-risk people with serious mental illness, according to the news release.

Following the news conference Shapcott, along with several others, laid flowers on a grate near Queen's Park where a homeless man died several years ago.

Meanwhile, a study released Wednesday by the Ottawa-based lobby group the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives said Ontario's welfare rates are so low that those dependant on the system are living well below the poverty line.

City columnist

News

'Wet shelter' better than street; Agencies want grant to study feasibility of 'harm-reduction' shelters for addicts

Susan Clairmont

877 words

26 March 2003

The Hamilton Spectator

HMSF

Final

A03

English

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It's a gritty reality that some substance abusers will never get clean.

There will always be the perpetual drunks who souse themselves with bad wine, cheap liquor or, in a pinch, bottles of mouthwash and rubbing alcohol. There will always be the "huffers" who get their high by sniffing gasoline or paint stripper out of plastic bags.

In an ideal world, we'd find a way to cure them all. But in the real world, perhaps the best we can do for some is help them manage their addictions in a safe environment. Keep them alive for just a little longer.

"Harm reduction" is the theory behind a proposal to open Hamilton's first wet shelter -- a hostel that would allow the city's most serious and homeless alcoholics and addicts to drink homemade wine and beer doled out by trained staff members. Clients would be drunk in a safe environment where they cannot be a threat to themselves or others.

It's a novel -- and controversial -- concept. Ottawa has a wet shelter. So does Toronto. Hamilton could be the third city in Canada to develop a program that recognizes being drunk in a warm, safe place is a step better -- albeit a shaky step -- than passing out in a park or gutter.

A group of Hamilton agencies that provide services to the homeless and people with addictions has applied for a grant from the Trillium Foundation to fund a wet shelter feasibility study.

The agencies plan to study the need for such a centre, examine existing models and evaluate the costs involved in opening a similar centre here.

Front-line workers are seeing a more urgent need for this kind of intervention, says Paul Johnson, executive director of Wesley Urban Ministries, one of the groups behind the feasibility study. There are more homeless in our city now than a few years ago and therefore the number of homeless with chronic and debilitating addictions has also risen, although Johnson is quick to point out the numbers are still quite small.

Local agencies are trying to find "some creative ways and more humanistic ways of dealing with this," he says. Right now, those chronic substance abusers are "very much pushed to the margins, under the bridges and in the alleyways."

Serious, chronic addicts are prone to injuries because they get drunk or high on the streets and then fall down, step into traffic or otherwise put themselves in harm's way. They can become angry and disruptive, sometimes even violent, when they are high. These are the homeless whom police and emergency room physicians know well. And their self-destructive behaviour can lead to irreversible brain damage or death.

In a controlled shelter environment that serves alcohol, overall consumption can be reduced and the use of more harmful substances can be decreased. The theory is similar to the one that prescribes methadone to heroin addicts.

Staff from Wesley Urban Ministries recently paid a visit to the Annex, the groundbreaking wet shelter (or harm-reduction shelter as it is more formally known) in Toronto. The shelter is part of Seaton House, the country's largest men's hostel.

The Annex was born out of a coroner's inquest into the 1996 freezing deaths of three homeless men in downtown Toronto. One of the first innovative approaches taken to the city's homeless alcoholics was an overnight bottle storage service offered to all clients. This was intended to eliminate a client's need to guzzle a bottle before entering the hostel or to choose a night on the street over a night in an alcohol-free environment.

Now the Annex has more than 100 tenants who receive up to one glass of homemade wine or beer every 60 to 90 minutes, from 10 a.m. until midnight. Clients line up for refills and anyone who is clearly impaired is refused service.

Clients are also allowed to bring in their own alcohol, which is handed over to staff who then ration it out.

The Annex is funded in part by the City of Toronto and with grants from various service clubs.

The wet shelter is not without its critics. One Toronto doctor has publicly referred to the program as "palliative care for the terminally ill" and says that couching it as "harm reduction" is not being honest.

All of Hamilton's shelters prohibit alcohol on the premises. That means the homeless alcoholics and solvent abusers don't go there at all, or at best only go for a few hours, until they need their next fix.

A wet shelter would offer a realistic alternative. It would even out the behaviour of binge drinkers, give staff a chance to make some inroads with even the most lost members of our society and make the community safer by taking some of our most volatile members off the streets.

"Right now, we very much shun those people and push those people to the margins of the community," says Johnson. "A harm-reduction shelter doesn't push people away."

Susan Clairmont's commentary appears regularly in The Spectator. sclairmont@thespec.com.

Document hmsp000020030326dz3q00007

News

Toronto's million-dollar men --- They're homeless, drunk and very costly to care for

Scott Simmie

Toronto Star

1,927 words

21 July 2002

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

A01

English

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An impaired man weaves his way down a hallway before lurching to a precarious halt.

He staggers, bobs, staggers. He then attempts, unprovoked, to drop kick another man before falling unceremoniously to the floor. Art Manuel, program supervisor at the Seaton House harm reduction program, helps him to his feet. Firmly.

"What were you into, buddy? Were you outside drinking?" asks Manuel. He quickly assesses that the guy's hammered - out of control. Manuel knows that the safest place for this man is in bed, and resolutely guides him to his room.

"Doug, I need you to do me a favour. I need you to sleep it off and give it another shot another time," he says.

Though not ideal, this is a relatively good outcome: A person who is hard to house - who some might consider a hopeless case - has a roof over his head and someone to keep an eye on him.

Compare that with the following scenario:

A dishevelled and unkempt man, not unlike the person just described, passes out on a park bench. He appears to be having difficulty breathing. When a bystander asks if he's okay, the person is unresponsive.

Concerned, the Samaritan calls 911. Within minutes, a dispatcher has notified the police, the fire department and an ambulance. The man is taken to an emergency room, or perhaps directly to a detox centre.

Two days later, someone has a seizure, topples from the curb and opens a nasty gash on their forehead. Emergency crews arrive to find the same person who'd passed out two days earlier.

"That intervention costs between \$2,500 and \$3,000," says Boris Rosolak, manager of Seaton House men's hostel. "You do that a couple of times a week for a year, and that's a couple of hundred G's right there."

They're known as "million-dollar men" - and it's not because of their income. Rather, it's due to the staggering resources that can be drained by someone who is homeless and who frequently commands the attention of emergency services or other costly interventions.

"You start adding it up and it's amazing," says John Jagt, director of hostel services for the city.

Though he hasn't seen a true "million-dollar man" (or woman) in Ontario, he's seen people well en route to the club. A few years back, the city's hostel department added up what taxpayers spent providing services to three homeless men during a one-year period. The totals, in this limited sample, were \$112,000, \$151,000 and \$186,000.

"And that's without counting any of the human cost or the social cost. That's just on the financial level. Forget about the harm caused to the neighbourhood, or to the individual himself," says Jagt.

Certainly not every homeless person racks up bills like this. But they're not as rare as you might think.

"What we've found over the years at this shelter is that there are quite a few men like that; men who need an awful lot of services," explains Dr. Tomislav Svoboda, a physician at St. Michael's Hospital and medical director at Seaton House.

Not surprisingly, the folks with the greatest number of needs tend to consume the greatest amount of resources - and across several fields of service. Svoboda says such people are often struggling with addiction problems, serious issues of mental or physical health, financial troubles, legal woes, and lack both housing and social relationships.

"The list goes on and on. And they're all serious problems," he explains.

The difficulty, he says, is that our systems tend to operate as silos, treating each problem in isolation from the next. That's fine for what he calls "high-functioning" people who have one or two major needs at a time (and who can navigate and self-advocate through the system). But it doesn't work for someone with a multiplicity of problems requiring services from multiple silos.

As a case study, he mentions a homeless, alcohol-dependent man who develops pneumonia. The man collapses, is taken to emergency, admitted to hospital and treated. His pneumonia under control, he's released to the street, where he quickly becomes ill again. Or gets beaten and robbed of identification. Or gets drunk and falls down.

"It's that revolving door. And it happens like that for the hospitals, for the police, for the prisons, for parole - all of them. And that ends up costing tonnes in direct social services costs," says Svoboda.

"My concern in calling them million-dollar men is that it's putting the blame on them. I'd say it's a million-dollar system," he adds.

Svoboda has seen some of the numbers to back up what he's talking about. As part of his Ph.D. thesis, he's been examining the use of health, legal and social services by a large sample of homeless men.

Though he's yet to crunch the final numbers, he's seen enough data to know these men rack up pretty impressive bills. As a result, Svoboda strongly believes - and other studies support - that it's cost-effective to provide supportive housing that offers health and social services on site. The average cost for each man in the Seaton House Annex is about \$75 per day - just over \$27,000 per year.

"It's the thousand-dollar solution to the million-dollar man," says Boris Rosolak.

That is the basic concept behind the Annex harm reduction program at Seaton House.

Established following an inquest into the 1996 freezing deaths of three homeless men, the project was initially known as a "wet hostel," where clients were allowed to check their bottles at the door. The rationale was to eliminate or reduce the harmful practice of someone guzzling their entire supply of booze before entering (or sleeping outside entirely) because of the hostel's rules banning alcohol.

The concept worked. And since late 1996, the program has evolved to embrace a much broader definition of "harm reduction." The 105 tenants can receive up to one glass of homemade wine or beer per hour, from 10 a.m. until midnight (some are rationed to one drink every 90 minutes). When it's time for their next drink, they line up like clockwork. (People who are clearly soused will be refused service.)

In addition, tenants are allowed to bring in their own alcohol, providing they hand it over to staff, who store and ration it. The goal is to reduce overall consumption and to decrease the use of more harmful substances.

As the program grew, so too did public acceptance. Police and emergency services found there were fewer calls than in the past. And, with \$350,000 raised by the Rotary Club of Toronto, the Annex was able to build a 37-bed infirmary with on-site health care.

The program now even includes palliative care, complete with spiritual guidance, all under one roof.

"So we've taken two silos - St. Michael's Hospital and Seaton House - and we're combining them into what we call a fusion of services," explains Svoboda.

For someone like Ken, that has made a real difference.

Now 54, he's been struggling with alcohol more than half his life. Much damage has already been done, and Ken has a propensity to over-drink and fall. On this day, he's sporting a blackened right eye, a heavily scabbed forehead and a deep gash that's hidden by his hair.

Compared to the old days, Ken says this is pretty minor stuff.

"I used to go out there and buy a few bottles of wine. I used to do that usually every day," he says.

Now that he has stable housing, regular meals and a sense of belonging (albeit to a somewhat unusual community), Ken says he's no longer drinking as heavily. Because he's not drinking as heavily, he's getting into fewer predicaments.

"For me, it's meant I don't go out there and hurt myself," he says. "Here I'm out of harm's way."

It's within the context of that safety, say those who work with the program, that progress can be made with some of these men. Over time, a few of them will decide they'd like to stop drinking or enter a program.

Most, however, will not make that difficult choice.

"We have a lot of guys dying in our program. The question is, are they more likely to die out where they're bingeing three times a week on the street, or are they more likely to die in a program where they're getting alcohol day in and day out?" asks Svoboda.

That's a tough question. And the program is not without its critics.

Dr. Graeme Cunningham, the director of the addiction division at the Homewood Health Centre, describes alcoholism as a "terminal" illness. By serving alcohol, he believes the program is contributing to that end.

"The treatment of alcoholics is not to give them alcohol, it's to teach them to live sober," he says. "I need to be very frank: I see it as palliative care for the terminally ill. And if that's the decision you've made, I'm all for it. But let's not call it harm reduction, let's call it what it is."

Seaton House's Rosolak says he doesn't necessarily disagree with that definition. But it's simply not realistic, he believes, to think the majority of Seaton annex residents could live a life of sobriety.

"Societally we have to make a choice. A lot of our guys have lived with mental illness, they've lived with pain, they've lived with debilitating lives. And this is a way of coping. To ignore that, to say abstinence is the only model, recovery is the only model - if only the world were that simple," he says.

Jagt knows that programs like this make sense from the standpoint of cold, hard cash. But he also believes they serve a role in a compassionate society.

"What do you do with a hopeless drunk? He's old, he's lonely, scared. What would tough love do for a guy for whom death would be an improvement? Do we really want to lay blame, to say: 'You've made some bad choices, therefore you deserve to die on the streets of Toronto?' So what's the alternative?"

At 2 p.m., 12 men are lined up at the Annex's "bar," waiting for their rationed cup of alcohol.

Ken is one of them. He balances a can of wine on his walker and wheels down the hall, careful not to stumble. "I'd like to get my own place. I've been waiting about a year for housing. But in the shape I'm in, I'd be better off staying here. I don't want to stay here indefinitely, but it's for my own good."

He pauses for a second.

"Mind you, it's crappy wine," he laughs.

Down the hall, someone in the infirmary is dying of liver disease.

Andrew Stawicki/ STAR HAPPY HOUR: Seaton House Annex resident Al Prosser waits for a drink. A {ldquo}harm reduction{rdquo} program at the hostel allows residents one drink per hour, from 10 a.m. to midnight.

Document tor0000020020722dy7100001

News

Toronto budget chief seeks cash for homeless --- But Shiner won't back more school pool cash

Katherine Harding and Paul Moloney

Toronto Star; Ron Bull/toronto star

735 words

19 February 2002

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

B03

English

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Toronto budget chief David Shiner said he was going to work through the night yesterday to spare some of the \$2.6 million scheduled to be cut from the city's hostel programs.

"Counselling services are a real concern to me.... It helps people help themselves to get out of shelters. I think the cut is too large of a cut," he told reporters after listening to more than seven hours of public presentations on proposed spending cuts in Toronto's 2002 budget. The reductions are aimed at limiting this year's residential property tax hike to 4.8 per cent - \$87 on the average home assessed at \$261,000.

The budget advisory committee, which Shiner heads, is scheduled to make its final recommendations about Toronto's 2002 budget today. Council will vote on the final budget early next month.

More than 100 people turned out at Toronto's city hall yesterday to plead with city councillors.

Politicians were urged to maintain support for hostels, day care and the environment, while at the same time keeping a lid on taxes. They were also asked to help rescue 85 swimming pools that could be closed because Toronto District School Board trustees say they can't afford them any more.

Shiner said he wouldn't be looking for more money for school pools. The city has committed to keep paying the board \$3.2 million for community swim programs. But that money will save only 22 pools.

"I'm extremely disappointed in the board of education. They had an opportunity this week to discuss the issue and come back with some real proposals," he said.

The contentious proposal to pare \$2.6 million from the hostel program would cut at least 27 support staff positions, including counsellors whose goal is to help homeless people get back on their feet.

That could sound the death knell for the Seaton House Annex shelter that serves men with alcohol problems, who have no money, family, little education and may suffer from schizophrenia, manic depression, dementia and psychosis, councillors were told.

"It tracks Toronto's most vulnerable men from out of the parks and under bridges to the care of a multi-disciplinary team," said Seaton House's Dr. Tomislav Svoboda.

Seaton House counsellor Tony Salmon said literally hundreds of residents are prone to harm themselves or others and need the support services that the budget committee is now proposing to scrap.

"Our hospital emergency wards, detoxification units, mental health wards cannot cope with this huge and constant demand," Salmon said. "If we don't want our most vulnerable people freezing to death in back alleys, then we need adequate services to help them."

Councillors were criticized for paying lip service to improving the environment but not backing it up with cash.

A transit fare hike is virtually inevitable due to the budget committee's refusal to provide an adequate operating subsidy to the Toronto Transit Commission, said Shelley Petrie, of the Toronto Environmental Alliance. "This budget creates smog," she said.

A proposal to charge parents of about 4,820 children an extra \$644 annually for day-care service also drew fire.

The city has been paying rent since 1998 for "exclusive use" child-care facilities in the schools, covering both subsidized and non-subsidized spaces. But the budget committee now wants fee-paying parents to shoulder the full cost.

"It came as an absolute surprise," said Jane Mercer, executive co-ordinator of the Toronto Coalition for Better Health Care.

The Toronto Board of Trade had a different message for councillors: figure out the city's core services and reduce those that aren't.

A recent mail survey of 1,220 of the board's 9,000-plus members showed business would spend 60 cents of every dollar on roads, public health, transit and infrastructure, with 40 cents split among fire, recreation, social housing, police and economic development.

The city is currently barred by provincial law from hiking property taxes on the commercial sector.

The survey found 56 per cent would consider relocating if taxes went up significantly.

"We find that they have a very low tolerance for any more tax increases," said Elyse Allan, president and chief executive officer of the board.

Document tor0000020020219dy2j00022

National News

Bid to jail the homeless under fire Cabinet minister running for premier's job sparks outcry with plan to clean up Ontario

RICHARD MACKIE

With reports from Gay Abbate and Allison Dunfield

658 words

15 February 2002

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A12

English

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Jim Flaherty has made himself and his politics a major issue in the race to become Ontario's next premier by promising yesterday to sweep the homeless from streets and parks across the province and to jail them if necessary to keep them out of public places.

His plan widened the schism in the Progressive Conservative Party and was condemned as "disgusting and inhumane" by Elizabeth Witmer, a rival candidate for the Tory leadership and a former health minister.

Other Tories, opposition politicians, advocates for the homeless, people living on the streets and Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman also ridiculed and attacked the Finance Minister's scheme.

Mr. Flaherty, who is pushing the right-wing envelope in the leadership race, said he would empower specially trained police to round up people they suspect are living in public places and take them to shelters, addiction rehab centres, hospitals or jails.

"It will be illegal to live in public places," he told reporters in front of some homeless people's belongings piled on University Avenue in downtown Toronto.

"I think we can, at the end of the day, virtually eliminate homelessness in the province of Ontario," said Mr. Flaherty, who is the author of the provincial law banning squeegee people and aggressive panhandling.

Mr. Lastman said he likes the idea of getting the homeless off Toronto's streets but cannot support the creation of a special squad to carry it out because it will only lead to people freezing to death.

Having squad police conducting nightly sweeps will only force the homeless to move around and perhaps hide out in deep ravines where no one can get them coffee and a blanket or find them to make sure they seek shelter, Mr. Lastman said.

"I don't want to be responsible for people freezing to death."

Although having people sleep on the streets hurts Toronto's reputation, every large city has a homeless problem, he said.

Byrd, a 49-year-old man who has lived on Toronto's streets for two years, said he is there not by choice but was pushed there when he lost his job.

"If there were affordable housing we would not be having this problem of homelessness."

Cathy Crowe, a street nurse with the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, said the Flaherty proposal would do nothing to help the approximately 1,000 people who sleep on Toronto streets each night.

The homeless do not choose to live on the streets and often are afraid to enter shelters for fear of catching diseases such as tuberculosis, she said, adding that shelters in Toronto are about 98 per cent full, so it is almost impossible to get in.

Mr. Flaherty had no estimate of the number of people who would be caught up in the program. "An accurate number of people living on the street cannot be given," the papers explaining his program said.

He also had no estimate of the cost of the proposed police squads, the jail cells or the spaces in hospitals, rehab centres and homeless shelters. And he had no explanation of where the money would come from in view of his continuing promises to cut overall government spending.

But his announcement did capture the sought-after attention.

Veteran Tories described it as pushing another so-called wedge issue designed to differentiate his candidacy from those of his four rivals. Mr. Flaherty is considered to be far behind the front-runner, former finance minister Ernie Eves, and needs an issue that will cut into Mr. Eves's support.

Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty said the proposal is an attempt "to score some cheap political points" and shows Mr. Flaherty's unsuitability even to seek to be the leader of a party.

Illustration

Document glob000020020215dy2f0005x

News

Make street people illegal: Flaherty --- Proposal lacks compassion for poor, critics say

Theresa Boyle

Toronto Star

826 words

15 February 2002

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

A01

English

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Conservative leadership candidate Jim Flaherty wants to eliminate homelessness by making it a crime.

"It will be illegal to live on the streets, it will be illegal to live in public places, that's right, on the streets and in the parks," the MPP hoping to be Ontario's next premier told a news conference yesterday.

He immediately came under fire from social activists, municipal politicians, opposition critics and even his Tory leadership rivals who denounced the proposal as a cruel attack on the poor.

"I find his plan absolutely disgusting. It is inhumane and it is totally lacking in compassion," scoffed leadership contender Elizabeth Witmer, charging that Flaherty is ignorant of the root causes of homelessness.

Flaherty made his announcement on University Ave., steps away from where some homeless people had set up camp. With three police officers hovering nearby, he said he would create a special designation of police constable to scoop homeless people off the streets.

"Beginning in an urban area with a serious homeless problem, we will allow for the hiring and training of special constables who would be given powers to identify and provide alternatives to the homeless living on the street," he said.

Homeless people would be taken to shelters, mental health facilities, hospitals, detoxification centres and crisis intervention centres, Flaherty said. "And as a last resort, if there is disorderly conduct, to jail."

Flaherty called it a "compassionate, tough love" approach and said his goal was to eliminate homelessness. New York City has been successful in this regard, he said, adding that the city has seen a huge decrease in the number of people who have died on the streets.

"The reality is many people who find themselves on the streets have mental illnesses, they're off their medication, they have addiction problems," Flaherty said. "These issues have to be grappled with."

Flaherty has positioned himself to the right of his four challengers in the race to replace Premier Mike Harris. Members of the Conservative party vote for a new leader on March 23.

Beric German of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee was aghast at Flaherty's proposal and charged that Tory government policies have resulted in more people living on the streets. "There's no doubt that the cut in welfare led to a huge number of people being homeless."

Shortly after coming to power in 1995, the Tories slashed welfare rates by 21.6 per cent, cancelled all affordable housing projects and stopped funding second-stage housing, used by women and children escaping abusive partners.

"Criminalize homelessness? What are they going to do? Build huge prisons?" German said. "This is something that sends fear into everyone's heart ... People who are vulnerable will have to hide. If they hide, outreach workers won't find them and many of them may perish."

Flaherty said that because of new mental health legislation brought in by his government - known as Brian's Law - it's easier for police to apprehend people who are mentally ill.

Witmer introduced Brian's Law when she was health minister. It was named for Ottawa sportscaster Brian Smith who was shot and killed in 1995 by a mentally ill man. Witmer also introduced mental health courts aimed at taking people with mental health problems out of the justice system and providing them with health and social supports.

"He has taken a 180 degree turn. He's going to criminalize these people once again," Witmer said, adding that care and treatment should instead be provided in the "least restrictive environment" possible.

NDP Leader Howard Hampton said Flaherty's plan would violate civil liberties. "I think any attempt to implement this kind of policy would run afoul of the Charter of Rights, human rights protections in this province and would probably land Ontario before the United Nations."

Suzan Fraser, a lawyer who works with many mentally ill and homeless clients, said the places Flaherty proposes the homeless be taken to - shelters, hospital, crisis intervention centres - are already full.

"There is a shortage of safe beds and a shortage of shelter beds," she said. "I think this is ludicrous. It's like punishing orphans for not having parents."

Leadership candidate Tony Clement said people in need want a hand up, "not a hard right hook."

He accused Flaherty of hurting the party. "The best way to scare the dickens out of Ontario voters is to put Dickens in our party's platform - as Jim seems bent on doing."

Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman said Flaherty's idea would simply drive homeless people to hide, The Star's Katherine Harding reports.

"And if they hide we can't get them shelter," he said. "We can't even get them a hot drink to keep them alive. I don't want to be responsible for people freezing to death." The Star's view, A22

Document tor0000020020215dy2f0000q

News

City's homeless succumb to 'American-style' deaths --- Tuberculosis, hypothermia rarely seen in past, says researcher

Andrew Chung

Toronto Star; Ken Faught/toronto star

654 words

28 December 2001

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

B04

English

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The way homeless people are dying in this city is changing, a trend that closely resembles the reality that has existed for years in large American cities, says a researcher at St. Michael's Hospital.

It's a cause for alarm that four homeless men have died recently - two since Christmas Eve - of causes not typically seen here, even five years ago, said Dr. Stephen Hwang, a member of the hospital's inner city health research unit.

Two men died recently of tuberculosis, casualties of an outbreak in Toronto shelters in which 14 people were diagnosed with the disease. Whereas public health officials see two to three cases at Seaton House in a year, this year there were nine.

Public health warned shelter and hospital workers of the outbreak before Christmas, and a spokesperson said no new cases have been reported since then.

On Christmas Eve, Seaton House resident John Deparnay, 46, was found dead in an alley behind Dundas St. E. and Mutual St. Police consider the death to be suspicious. Yesterday, Detective Constable Walter Brasca said there was evidence Deparnay was physically thrown out of the restaurant he was found behind, though he was not a regular there. An autopsy has failed to show a cause of death, and police are still searching for witnesses.

On Boxing Day, Donnie Gordon - another Seaton House resident - was found dead near Yonge and Queen Sts. This time, it's suspected that Toronto's cold killed him. He wasn't dressed properly, regional supervising coroner Dr. William Lucas said.

Hwang studied 201 homeless deaths between 1995 and 1997.

"In my study there were no deaths due to tuberculosis and very few due to freezing or hypothermia and relatively few due to homicide," Hwang said.

"The concern is that certainly we may be seeing a trend towards new causes of death among homeless people, new to our city."

In the past, homeless people mostly died of accidental injuries, poisonings, overdoses and AIDS, Hwang said.

He emphasized that American cities have seen tuberculosis outbreaks in shelters for years. And homicide, he noted, is one of the leading causes of homeless deaths in the U.S.

Is that the direction we're heading? "We're seeing warning signs to suggest that may be happening," Hwang said. "There's enough going on that warning bells should be going off in people's minds."

The deaths have caused sufficient alarm to prompt some activists to organize a march on New Year's Eve to the old Princess Margaret Hospital on Sherbourne and Wellesley Sts., which they demand the city open up as an emergency shelter.

Their march starting point will be the coroner's office. "That's where they seem to be taking homeless people," said Beric German of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee.

German said shelters are overcrowded and, in his words, the situation is "becoming more dire" every year.

Councillor Jack Layton agrees. "We wouldn't have people jammed in and contracting tuberculosis at this rate if we had affordable housing being built," said Layton (Ward 30 Toronto-Danforth).

Homeless people generally have a higher mortality rate than the rest of the population.

In fact, Hwang included some shocking statistics in his study which tracked 8,933 homeless men; for example, the average homeless person in Toronto dies by age 46. Homeless men aged 18 to 24 have an eight times higher risk of death than the general population.

The most recent deaths are important to keep tabs on, Hwang said, because "they could suggest a deterioration in the social fabric of the city that may affect the most vulnerable members of the community."

For instance, social conditions and housing are more important to the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis than medication, Hwang said.

Document tor0000020011228dxcs00023



News

Staff at a downtown men's hostel remember him as "a character."

Christian Cotroneo

Toronto Star

313 words

27 December 2001

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

B03

English

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He was found dead early yesterday near a street corner known as the Slab at Yonge and Queen Sts.

While police have not released his name, staff and residents at Seaton House have identified him as 53-year-old Donnie Gordon.

One resident, who refused to be identified, described Gordon as "your regular alcoholic. ... He just lived one day to the next to drink."

For the past three months, the resident lived with Gordon at the Annex, a substance abuse program at Seaton House.

Gordon and friends would spend much of the day at the Slab panhandling. As night wore on, they would drink, before trudging back to the residence in the late hours.

"Every night, they stumbled in, one by one," the Seaton House resident said. But this time Gordon didn't come back.

While police haven't revealed the cause of his death, his friend says it was probably the usual: one part alcohol, two parts freezing cold.

Gordon's friend is no stranger to cruel winter. He said he spent all of last winter sleeping outside, often keeping his shoes and jacket on. Underneath, he stretched out a mattress and six blankets.

After zipping into a sleeping bag, he would layer another helping of blankets on top.

Gordon is the second of the city's homeless to die this week. The body of Jean Deparnay, 46, was found around 8:15 a.m. Monday north of Dundas St. E. near Mutual St. He was also a resident at Seaton House.

If the deaths affected other residents at the shelter, they didn't show it last night. Grim-faced, they stood outside, alternately spitting and smoking.

"Anyone know if all the bars are closed?" asked one man.

"They're open," came the ready reply.

Document tor0000020011227dxc0002d

NEWS

Aid workers taking city's temperature to keep us cool

Christian Cotroneo

STAFF REPORTER; JIM ROSS/TORONTO STAR

857 words

8 August 2001

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

A01

English

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The air in Mary Zarines' living room falls on visitors like a warm, wet blanket.

Without air conditioning or fans and with all the windows closed, even the walls of her Willowdale home seem to sweat.

The childless widow doesn't get too many visitors, so neighbour Reg Hoult called the Red Cross hotline, concerned about how she was faring in the heat.

When Gabe Zelea, a paramedic from Emergency Health Services, arrived soon after, he immediately noted swelling in Zarines' legs and asked about her health.

His partner, Khalid Salim from the Canadian Red Cross, roamed the house with a device measuring temperature and humidity.

The humidity reading in the house was 68% 10 percentage points higher than outside. Coping with that is like wearing 30 kilograms of clothes, Zelea said.

Salim and Zelea are one of two teams patrolling the city after Mayor Mel Lastman announced that temperatures had reached emergency proportions yesterday.

"Basically, we're calling a heat emergency because our system tells us that there's over a 95 per cent chance there will be an increase in heat-related deaths," said Liz Janzen, Toronto Public Health's regional director.

According to the city's new Hot Weather Response plan, an emergency is declared when there's an overwhelming likelihood 90 per cent or greater that five people in the city will die each day as a result of the heat. The longer it lasts without relief, the higher that daily total theoretically climbs.

The effects of heat creep up on sufferers, and many of its victims aren't aware of it until it's too late.

"Most people can understand a cold emergency," Zelea said. "When the cold is nipping at your butt, you can feel it. But when you have a heat emergency, I don't think people quite understand the effect it has on your body.

"More people are affected by heat than cold. Instead of freezing to death, people are boiling to death."

Heat illness can affect anyone, causing headaches, rapid breathing, fainting and confusion, but when it strikes certain people it becomes deadly.

"If you also then have a chronic health condition or you're very frail this could actually tip you over" into health crisis and death, Janzen said.

And the fans in most homes are hardly a relief; they may, in fact, lull people into a false sense of cool.

"It's like a convection oven," Zelea said.

"Even though you're moving the air, you're actually circulating the heat with it. This is why fans are really not effective."

"The heat isn't really dissipating and it's still pretty hot at night," Janzen said. "We have a lot of people who are homeless right now who are not accessing shelters and we hope that they will access this overnight, during this extreme heat."

During such a heat wave, a shelf of cold air high above the city acts like a lid, leaving the city to stew in the warm, dirty air trapped below.

The city responds by sending its weather data to the University of Delaware, which compares it to a database to separate heat-related deaths from normal fatalities.

The university's research facilities receive the weather data from Toronto, analyze it and make recommendations, but the final call is the city's.

Whenever a dangerous weather front is in a city the size of Toronto, statistics suggest there are between four and five additional fatalities.

But because people don't typically die of heat alone, that number remains an estimate based on computer weather models.

But the Red Cross hopes to get help and information out to anyone at risk before it's too late.

The group is staffing its heat information line 416-480-2615 from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. for its third day.

At the Yonge St. office, five operators fielded over 190 calls from people concerned about their health that's up from about 25 callers during Monday's heat alert.

"We're quite busy today, I think because we're going on the third or fourth day of the high temperature weather," Tanya Elliott of the Red Cross said. "Those who are being exposed to the heat or don't have adequate air conditioning or access to good water are going to start to feel the effects by now for sure."

Some callers are referred to 911; others are given free rides to cooling centres, community halls or malls.

Other Red Cross teams flooded the streets with bottled water, distributing more than 3,000 bottles to the homeless yesterday five times more than they delivered Monday.

Marny Hamilton of the Red Cross said getting people to take water is critical "because people get dehydrated with this heat very quickly and they do not recognize they're in a vulnerable state."

RELIEF WORKERS: Red Cross staff pick up bottled water yesterday for distribution on the street to people suffering after two days of 35 C temperatures.

Document tor000020010808dx880001q

NEWS

Outreach workers dispute street death statistics --- Official tally doesn't tell whole story, they say

Catherine Dunphy

KEN FAUGHT/TORONTO STAR; STAFF REPORTER

753 words

8 March 2001

The Toronto Star

TOR

1

GT05

English

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The homeless are dying on our streets. Aren't they?

Most outreach workers say the number of deaths is horrifying - at least two a week. They say substandard shelters are taking a toll, affordable housing is non-existent, and help for the poor and sick is vanishing.

But bureaucrats say the homeless death toll last year was 36, not 102, and that credit goes to Toronto for increasing the number and quality of shelters it provides. That means fewer people are dying on the streets or freezing to death in city ravines.

In fact, deputy coroner Bonita Porter thinks it may have been two winters since anyone died because of the weather.

"I'm not aware of any homeless deaths in a cold month," she says.

She heads up Project TIDE - Tracking Indigent Deaths Everywhere - which has recorded deaths among Toronto's homeless since May, 1999.

A homeless death is one in which the person has no fixed address and dies in a public place, hostel or hospital.

Toronto's hostels and shelters must report all on-site deaths to Project TIDE. So do all city hospitals.

For the last eight months of '99, Project Tide documented 27 homeless deaths, all but one of them male. None was younger than 20. Nine deaths occurred outside: two in November, one in December and the others in summer.

The numbers for 2000 haven't been tabulated yet, but the unofficial toll is 36 deaths.

"I don't think we are missing many," Porter says.

Street nurse Cathy Crowe thinks differently.

Street workers have informally recorded such deaths for a few years. But their details mostly come from the grapevine, not police or officials.

Just last weekend, she said, they learned of three more deaths, including that of Seaton House resident Dusty Fiske, 42, a man well known in the homeless community, and a woman found in Kensington Market whom police have not yet been able to identify.

Crowe says neither police nor the coroner's office was interested in helping workers track the woman's identity.

"They just don't seem to care," she said. "I hate to think how many more deaths there are out there that we don't know" - and which may not be attributed to homelessness.

Greg Coyne died of pneumonia New Year's Day at Seaton House. He was 32 and hadn't had a place for 12 years.

"Being on the street all that time, that's what led to his death," said another nurse.

Abdul Dewani died in a nursing home weeks later, but had been on the streets for years.

Only the death of the Happy Hobo, John Dunn, 69, hit the news - because he preferred the outdoors, though he could afford a home.

For the record, he died of natural causes. And this is the record of which Porter is cautiously proud. "It may mean," she says, "that all of the initiatives keeping people out of the cold or not dying in the cold in some respects could be considered a success."

That's what city epidemiologist Joyce Bernstein believes.

Harm-reduction programs at places like the Seaton House Annex mean chronic alcoholics barred from regular shelters now have a place to stay.

"The word is out. Men who wouldn't have visited there before are staying there," she says. "They're not freezing to death outdoors anymore, because usually alcoholics are the most vulnerable outside."

'They're not freezing to death outdoors'

Toronto hostel manager John Jagt says new teamwork between hostels and St. Michael's Hospital has ensured that many more of the homeless are getting medical care.

But Stephen Hwang, director of St. Michael's inner city clinic, has done studies indicating that homeless men staying in shelters are eight times more likely to die than the general population if they're 18 to 24 years old, and four times more likely if they're 25 to 44.

There were 201 deaths among the 9,000 homeless men he studied from 1995 to 1998. Average age at death: 46.

"To the extent that we might be getting people into shelters, we might be helping them," Hwang said. "But we don't know for sure."

AT RISK: Figures suggest winter deaths may be dropping among 's , but life on the street takes its toll eventually, street workers say.

Document tor000020010713dx38007j8

News

Hard lives and hard deaths; Five area residents who spent their final years battling mental illness on the streets and in homeless shelters

Denise Davy Social Issues Reporter

The Hamilton Spectator

1,203 words

13 May 2000

The Hamilton Spectator

HMSF

Final

A15

English

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Stanislaw Kowalski

Kowalski came looking for a better life when he moved here from Poland in 1950. Somewhere along the way, something went wrong. On Nov. 21, 1997, at the age of 82, Kowalski was found face down in a parking lot, covered in newspapers.

Kowalski was born in Poland. During the war, he spent time in Nazi and Soviet concentration camps. After moving to Canada, he worked on sugar beet and tobacco crops in southern Ontario. But he never stayed at anything for long.

Perhaps it was the impact of his time spent in the camps that prevented him from keeping his own place. More likely it was an undiagnosed mental illness. He lived occasionally in a rooming house or nursing home but always returned to the streets.

A friend said he rejected institutions, even banks, because he was afraid someone was going to hit him or take his belongings. That fear meant he sometimes slept outdoors even when it was freezing.

Kowalski was once found by two hunters in an abandoned steel operation east of Beamsville. He had such severe frostbite and gangrene his legs had to be amputated. When he was asked by one hunter why he lived in an old shack when there were shelters with beds, Kowalski said he didn't want to bother anyone.

Margaret Jacobson

Many homeless find temporary respite in rooming houses or second level lodging homes. Not Margaret Jacobson. Jacobson was one of the city's hard core homeless. She slept on park benches and in doorways, only occasionally coming in from the cold when temperatures fell below freezing.

Jacobson was born to missionary parents in the British West Indies. Her family moved to Canada when she was a teen. Shortly after she arrived, symptoms of her schizophrenia surfaced and Jacobson had to be hospitalized.

It would be the first of many hospitalizations in the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital. Her final release was in 1972. After that she rejected all institutions, including shelters, except for occasional visits to the Wesley Centre's overnight shelter, where staff knew her as Princess Margaret.

She once lived in a garbage dumpster in an apartment building. Her death was as sad as much of her life. It was a cold winter night on Dec. 6, 1995. Jacobson had come to the Mr. Sub Shop on King Street East to get warm. But she was delirious and disruptive to customers. She fell and hit her head. By the time an ambulance arrived, she was lying in a pool of blood. She was taken to the hospital and died shortly after.

An autopsy showed she died of natural causes. Her body was so riddled with cancer her skin had started to blacken. Those who knew Jacobson knew her death came early because of a difficult life. She was 51.

Donald Dupuis

Dupuis earned the nickname Hightower for his six-foot-plus frame. He sometimes had an apartment but mostly lived in abandoned buildings with other homeless.

Dupuis died on July 3, 1996, in a fire that tore through the abandoned Terminal Hotel on King Street East. He was 29. Not much is known about his life except that the hotel where he lived had become a home for street kids and transients.

Dupuis was asleep when the fire broke out on the third floor. Firefighters determined he was putting on his shoe when smoke overcame him and he lost consciousness. He was on his bed.

Dupuis's death prompted a call to action to help street people.

Mary Popowich

Popowich was found dead on a second floor balcony on Barton Street East on Oct. 23, 1992. She was 65. The probable cause of death was respiratory failure, which surprised no one since Popowich suffered from pneumonia, emphysema and bronchitis and smoked heavily.

Popowich was schizophrenic and had been in and out of mental institutions for years. She was discharged from the Queen Street Mental Health Centre in Toronto in 1992. After that she lived mostly on the streets.

Her last days were spent sitting outside the old Wesley Centre on Rebecca Street. She had open sores on her legs and a hacking cough. Everything she owned was stuffed into an old grocery cart.

Many tried to get her the medical help she so desperately needed but they felt their hands were tied by the province's Mental Health Act. Popowich's death shed light on the lack of services for homeless women. Mary's Place shelter for women was opened as a result.

Jonathan Field

Field was happiest when he was playing his bass guitar. Even better when he was teaching children how to play, as he did in Britain for a short period while he was visiting his parents.

But life wasn't always so simple. Field began to drink when he was in his late teens. Few knew it then, but he was trying to drown out the voices in his head.

"He thought people were out to get him," said his mother, Irene.

Despite his mental illness, Field managed for a while to live a relatively normal life. He had a girlfriend. They had a daughter. He supported them by running a flyer distribution business and reading gas meters. On and off he played in bands.

His father Ed said, "When he was coherent he had a great sense of humour."

It was about eight year ago that things began to fall apart. The relationship ended, he lost his job and eventually he took to the streets. His addiction worsened and he pawned his guitar to buy alcohol.

He couldn't stay at anything long. He'd find a place to live but eventually end up back on the streets. He'd call his parents late at night asking for help. They'd make midnight trips here from Whitby and help find him a room in a rooming house or second level lodging home.

For a while things were quiet. Then he'd be back on the streets.

A few years ago Field booked himself into a detox program. It was there he was told he was schizophrenic. He was admitted to a psychiatric hospital and put on medication. The drugs helped stabilize him for a while but without proper follow-up, he ended up back on the streets.

In the last few years of his life, the men's hostel at Mission Services was his most frequent home. Mission Services had put him up in an apartment across the street. That's where he was found last Nov. 18, the day after he died. He was 38.

The cause of death has still not been determined but his parents blame the system. They say the supports weren't there.

Photo: The Hamilton Spectator File Photo | Margaret Jacobson was in out of the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital until 1972 when she turned her back on all institutions turned to the street. | Photo: Jonathan Field: His parents blame the system for his at 38.

Document HMSP000020051121dw5d00e6s

Toronto News

City tries to get homeless out of deadly cold Extra mattresses, bus tickets given out, but still some street people insist on staying outside

LILA SARICK

The Globe and Mail, With a report from Caroline Alphonso

502 words

18 January 2000

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A22

English

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Toronto -- Shelters for the homeless crammed in extra mattresses and distributed bus tickets yesterday in an effort to prevent people from freezing to death on one of the coldest nights of the year.

The second cold-weather alert of the season was called by the city's medical officer of health Sunday and is expected to last until tomorrow night.

During an alert, declared when the temperature dips below --15, the city's shelters add 78 extra beds to their usual 4,500 and are encouraged to open earlier in the evening, said John Jagt, director of the city's hostel services.

Outreach workers who patrol the city's parks and sidewalks deploy every available van and worker to encourage those who sleep outside to seek shelter.

But even on the coldest nights, a couple of hundred people still prefer to sleep outside in the downtown area, said Denise Toulouse, co-ordinator of Anishnawbe Health's Street Patrol.

During a cold-weather alert, the street patrol sends out all three of its vans and two people on bicycles to distribute blankets and warn those who insist on remaining outside that "it's more than just a regular winter night."

Sunday night, one van saw 98 people who were remaining outside, down just slightly from the 120 to 130 visited on an evening. The bike patrol checked 28 people who find shelter in less accessible places such as ravines.

The cold weather -- the temperature dipped to --22 yesterday -- continues to strain the city's hostel system. On Sunday night, just 48 beds out of 1,200 were available for men, Mr. Jagt said. More beds were available for young men and for women; a new shelter for 60 women opened on Queen Street West last night.

The hostel division continues to open shelter beds at a furious rate, trying to keep ahead of the unceasing demand. Since mid-December, when the city's lease at Fort York Armoury expired, 240 beds have been added to replace the 100 that had been used at the armoury, Mr. Jagt said.

The building has become a symbol for protesters frustrated with the inability of all levels of government to address the city's growing homelessness problem. Yesterday, about 30 people marked Martin Luther King Day, a U.S. holiday, with an attempt to take over the armoury and use it for housing.

About half a dozen people entered the building but were evicted by military police. No arrests were made.

Under the watchful eye of about a dozen Toronto police officers, protesters from Toronto Action for Social Change and a group called Homes not Bombs chalked apartment numbers on the outside brick walls of the building and read aloud from the late civil-rights leader's writings.

Illustration

Document glob000020010806dw1i003an

Toronto News

Homeless enlist grates, experience to do battle with winter's coldest night Medical health officer issues cold-weather warning; street workers on alert

The Globe and Mail

430 words

17 January 2000

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A14

English

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Toronto -- On the coldest night of the winter so far, Dean Howey, a lanky, 30-year-old Albertan, abandoned his steam grate near Roy Thomson Hall in favour of a warm supper and a foam mat in a church-hall basement. But only because it was Sunday, he said.

As the temperature headed for --19, Toronto's medical officer of health declared an extreme cold weather alert lasting through tomorrow night and street workers launched special efforts to try to keep homeless people from freezing to death.

Mr. Howey, who described himself a former Edmonton factory worker who fell prey to drugs, said the cold doesn't worry him after nearly 12 years on the street.

It was his custom to spend Sunday nights at St. Patrick's, a Roman Catholic church near the Art Gallery of Ontario where there is sleeping space for 150 people one night a week all winter. It's part of a rotating program involving dozens of churches and synagogues.

Because he has friends in the big, open room, his claustrophobia doesn't bother him as much as it does elsewhere, he said. "I'm so used to being in the outdoors now, I can't stand having walls around."

He will be back at King and Simcoe Streets tonight, he said. As he saw it, freezing to death is a risk faced mainly by those too drunk or disturbed to take care of themselves.

"Basically, the majority of the street people have the smarts either to be on a grate themselves or be in a shelter or a doorway or something," he said.

There was a time when he had an apartment, a common-law wife, a child and a job as a bagger in a plant that made the sort of insulation you have blown into your attic, he said. Heroin and cocaine ended that, but he is off drugs now, he said. "I don't see myself on the street until the day I die."

If history is a guide, however, a few of the homeless will die on the streets this winter. The health department offered the following numbers for those who wish to help.

-- Cash donations: United Way of Greater Toronto, (416) 777-2001

-- Sleeping bags and blankets: Project Warmth, 233-3030

-- Clothing: Chill Out, 934-1227

-- Food: Daily Bread Food Bank, 203-0050

-- Volunteer work: Street Helpline, 392-3777

Illustration

Document glob000020010806dw1h002rb

Toronto News

Charity out of sleeping bags for homeless Donations of warm clothing far short of demand, raising fears people will freeze to death

JOHN SAUNDERS

The Globe and Mail

522 words

2 December 1999

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A22

English

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Toronto -- Cody Brown, a 42-year-old Oneida living in the rough in midtown Toronto, had seven layers of shirts and jackets on his back and a knapsack for his belongings. What he lacked last night was a sleeping bag.

"There's a lot of people that really need them," he said as he headed for a below-freezing night in a Rosedale Valley lean-to. "I'm serious. I need one right now, and they said they haven't got any."

Roland Armitage, who drives a food van for the Anishnawbe Street Patrol, a native-run charity, could not help. "We haven't got any on board," he said. "None whatsoever. Every stop, we're asked for sleeping bags."

John Andras, a stockbroker who spends his days in a climate-controlled office 15 floors above Bay Street, is co-founder of Project Warmth, a central source of new and used sleeping bags, blankets, coats, hats and mitts for Toronto's homeless.

As a mild fall gave way to chilly normal temperatures this week, the supply nearly hit bottom, he said. He began to worry about people freezing to death.

Project Warmth hopes to distribute as many as 40,000 sleeping bags and blankets in the coming months through the street patrol and dozens of other agencies, but collections are off to a poor start, he said.

The six-year-old volunteer group had 10 sleeping bags in stock at its Eastern Avenue warehouse at one point this week, compared with a previous low of about 500 last January, he said.

Part of the problem was the weather -- it was "such a warm November that people's minds weren't on the effects of cold on the homeless, and now that we're starting to get the cold weather, we've really hit crunch time," he said.

"We've gone out to the people of Toronto basically on hands and knees, because if we don't succeed in getting the supplies that the agencies need, there are going to be a lot of people at very, very serious risk in the next month or two.

"Really, a sleeping bag can mean the difference between life and death for someone on the streets. It doesn't guarantee that someone is going to survive, but it makes the chances better."

The group has issued an emergency appeal for used sleeping bags and other items, with Toronto-area Canadian Tire stores serving as the collection points. Money is also accepted. People who wish to donate can call (416) 233-3030.

The demand only grows, Mr. Andras said. "All the shelters are at 100-per-cent capacity. The 11 new shelters that were supposed to be coming on line haven't all come on line yet, and I don't know what's going to happen when the Fort York Armoury is closed to the homeless, which it's supposed to be on Dec. 15."

Illustration

Document glob000020010827dvc201qoh

NEWS

Homeless remember those who died on street --- 400 gather at memorial to grieve for friends

Catherine Dunphy

BORIS SPREMO, CM/TORONTO STAR; STAFF REPORTER

538 words

7 May 1999

The Toronto Star

TOR

1

English

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The homeless don't forget. They can't.

"I don't know why I'm not dead yet, too," says a woman, 28, whose street name is Apple.

Between her emotions and the beer she has consumed, it's a struggle for her to print the name of a dead friend on the white cotton sheet covering a cardboard coffin. Her friend died last week.

This is the seventh time in eight years the homeless have held a public memorial ceremony for their friends who've died on the street. Yesterday, about 400 people came to Nathan Phillips Square at noon to remember and grieve.

About half of them later marched with the symbolic casket to the campaign headquarters of the provincial Progressive Conservative party.

Among the names on the sheet were those of Drina Joubert and Edmond Yu. Her freezing death in 1985 and his shooting death by police in 1997 each launched ground-breaking inquiries.

Apple's friend jumped to her death in front of a subway last Thursday.

"She was this good kid, in her 20s, who used to call me Dad," said Apple's friend Martin Lang, a volunteer at the drop-in centre at 519 Church St. for 19 years.

Lester Pawis, 60, also died last Thursday. A familiar figure for years at Bathurst and Queen Sts., his death shook the street people.

"He was an icon, a beautiful man," said Cathy Crowe, a community nurse who was with him when he died in a hospital intensive-care ward.

There's already an impromptu shrine to Pawis at his favourite corner. There will be a service at Council Fire on Dundas St. E. for the woman who jumped in front of the subway.

"It's too painful. I've been going to memorials and funerals once a month for four years now," said Michael Crawford, a former homeless person who now works out of the Queen St. W. community health centre.

He told the crowd to tell Premier Mike Harris they're sick of so many homeless people dying.

"Wally, Al, Kat, Lee-Anne, Patrick, Lester - their deaths were all caused by one thing: government policy," he said.

Former psychiatric patient A. J. Rhomer said police told her and her panning partner to stop sleeping in the doorway of an unused building on Bloor St. near Bathurst because it upset the neighbours.

"The police told us to go to a park, where people can't see us," she said. "I say we have got to start sleeping in visible areas so people can see us and know we are homeless."

Rhomer, who's been on the street since she was evicted from her apartment in March, said she used to walk Yonge St. from Davenport Rd. to Finch Ave. and back when she was homeless in the winter of 1994-'95. "That's what kept me alive. Only when you lie down does hypothermia come."

WORD ON THE STREET: Trevor Littlejohn gestures his approval of a speaker at yesterday's memorial for victims at Nathan Phillips Square.

Document tor0000020010830dv5700e46

Homeless man freezes as cats' rights debated.

By MURRAY CAMPBELL in Toronto.

405 words

8 February 1999

South China Morning Post

SCMP

English

(c) 1999

The man was found dead, surrounded by his few meagre possessions, on a hot-air vent outside the buildings where thousands of civil servants and politicians work.

At the same time, still more politicians a few blocks away were arguing about whether cats ought to be licensed and whether elephants and kangaroos should be banned as pets.

The juxtaposition of the two events last week revealed the contradiction of Toronto as a city expressing great concern about the welfare of its feline population while leaving thousands of humans to fare for themselves on its freezing streets.

The 54-year-old homeless man died within sight of the sixth-floor office of Ontario Premier Mike Harris.

He regularly bunked down on the warm grate by 11pm but was gone by the time office workers trundled by in the morning.

His death, from natural causes, has reopened the debate about how a country with a history of strong social programmes has got to the point where thousands of homeless now roam its major cities.

"It is absurd and obscene that people are dying in the streets in the midst of wealth," said provincial opposition politician Howard Hampton.

The federal and provincial governments withdrew from housing programmes earlier this decade as they fought to contain spiralling budget deficits.

A recent report found that 26,000 people - including 5,300 children - were dependent on Toronto's noisy, crowded and often-dirty overnight shelters.

It recommended that the Ontario administration spend nearly C\$300 million (HK\$1.6 billion) more on housing and programmes for the poor. "This is not only a disaster, this is a national, disgusting shame," said Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman.

The Harris Government, which recently cancelled plans to build subsidised housing, has earned a reputation for being tough on social policy, and nothing that government ministers said in the wake of the homeless man's death helped.

Mr Harris, asked if he felt any responsibility for the death, simply shrugged and walked away.

Meanwhile, Toronto councillors seemed to have no more pressing problems on their agenda than to debate for five hours whether cats should be allowed to roam freely.

In the end, the animal-control bylaw they passed will require cat owners to buy C\$35 licences as well as banning exotic pets. Cats may also be impounded if they trespass on property.

Document scmp000020010910dv28001hf

NEWS

Added beds keep homeless warm City's 4,277 spaces almost at capacity as temperatures drop

By Jack Lakey Toronto Star

341 words

31 December 1998

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

C8

English

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Toronto's emergency measures to help the homeless on frigid nights have begun to pay off by keeping people from freezing to death, says Councillor Jack Layton.

"I thought for sure we were going to have somebody dead," said Layton (Don River), of the brutally cold weather and high winds that blew in Tuesday night.

"We can really be thankful that there are lots of new (hostel) beds out there available, and so many people volunteering and working to help people who don't have anywhere to go.

The city's health department issued an extreme cold weather alert yesterday morning, which triggered a series of emergency responses to get street people out of the cold, and extra help for those who won't come inside.

A cold weather warning wasn't issued Tuesday night because the forecast did not call for temperatures below minus 15C - the starting point for an alert.

But in hostels operated or subsidized by the city, a total of 4,277 beds were available Tuesday night, plus beds provided by volunteer groups through the Out of the Cold program.

All but 120 of the city beds were filled, but the remainder provided enough flexibility in the system to allow for people who might have shown up late at night, said Anne Longair of the city's hostel services department.

Another 76 beds were opened last night at seven locations as part of the cold weather alert, Longair said, to ensure that nobody in need of shelter would be turned away.

After Toronto City Council passed a resolution calling homelessness a national disaster, a renewed political push - led by Layton - was undertaken to find solutions.

One of the obvious answers was more temporary hostel beds. About 350 new beds have been added since last winter, in addition to those opened during a cold weather alert, which have eased the strain on the system, Layton said.

Document tor0000020011206ducv01cwt

NEWS

'My heart felt . . . sadness' Students new to Canada reflect on the homeless in Toronto - and voice surprise the problem exists in the 'best' nation

1,365 words

30 December 1998

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

B4

English

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Many of them have been homeless, whether by war, famine, or floods. They left their homelands for a new life, a better life, a different life.

None of them ever expected Canada - the land of their dreams -andToronto - the city of their choice - would have homeless people, too.

What follows is a selection of letters written about this situation by a class of Grade 11 students in the English as a second language program at Western Technical Commerce to Star feature writer Catherine Dunphy.

After the war broke out in Sudan, I was living in the south part. One day, there was a very big attack from the army and the police . . . We ran away from the town to the countryside. We did not know where we were going . . . We faced many problems . . .

After we got there, we did not know where to stay and also what to eat . . . From what I passed through with my family . . . it made me understand what any person who has war in their country looks like or what a homeless person is.

Adaw Wekathian Dut

In my country (Ukraine) . . . there was a woman and she had three sons and one daughter and they never helped her. She had a small house and she didn't have a job. She didn't have any food at home and she was always sitting in front of her house and asking for some food. My mom and I always gave her some food. I think we should help (the homeless) at least a little bit.

Ilona Tuchak

I think there should be no homelessness in Canada because the government offers a lot of help. And I don't understand why they are still asking for money. Sometimes I feel compassion for them, but I realize if I give money they will use it for drugs, so I am helping them get worse.

Carmen Bonilla

As you know, in our world some people have a problem of food, a place to live and so on, and on the other hand some people have enough to eat, to drink, and have a very nice place to live. This means in one world, there are two different lives. The worst life is to be homeless and to be on the street . . . I'm from East Africa, Ethiopia. In 1985 in my country there was a drought and so many people were moving from one place to another place to find food . . . I think being homeless is like you don't have happiness.

Elias Hagos

In Toronto, there are about 5,000 homeless people sleeping on the street and almost dying, some of them.

After I knew that, I couldn't sleep that night: I was imagining . . . the whole night how it could be possible . . . Toronto is the best city across Canada and (it is) known by population of the world that Canada is the best place to live . . . But there are thousands and thousands of people homeless and sleeping on the street . . . That makes me really disappointed because, when I was in (Bangkok), I thought Canada is the most equal . . . country to live

and it has OHIP, social service and good security. There should be enough for everybody to be able to afford to live, meaning no homeless people.

Soe Hla Mehm

I had been with homeless people in Kurdistan. About more than 10,000 people were homeless and without food. When I was in Kurdistan some people died from not having food.

Suleyman Adiman

I work in a Coffee Time shop. I always meet these homeless people. Most of them are young. Sometimes they want to buy coffee or doughnuts and most of the time they are short of money or they don't have (any) at all . . . When the business is slow, I like to talk to the homeless. I always give them some advice to change their life. I am trying my best, but I am a poor person myself.

Senait Tesfagiorgis

I saw women, men and teenagers on the street when I first came to Canada. I never thought I would see homeless people. If you see the Third World people, they have a reason to live on the streets to survive with a lack of food, shelter and money. When I see the same thing in Canada, my heart felt . . . sadness.

Feven Gola

When I was in Sri Lanka . . . there was a civil war . . . we had to move to another place.

When they were displacing us, there was bombing and shelling . . . therefore many people lost their houses . . . After the displacement, a lot of people didn't have food or drink and they stayed under the tree, even the rich people . . . I never forget this event.

Yasochara Vilvaratnam

Why do they like the homeless life? Some people has good health and strong bodies. They can work at the factories and some restaurants, because they can speak English and they can look for a job . . . Some people are old people and have bad health . . . the government can give them some money. I have to help these people.

Htoo Ko Ko

I would like to share some experiences from my country Romania with you. One young woman, 25, was a nice person, quiet and respectful. She had been working every day hard. She had her own apartment, nice furniture . . . Alexandra was a beautiful woman. Until one day at work, in an accident, she got blind from cement powder. She had to go to the court (to get a pension) as she cannot work anymore . . . she had to pay a lot of money to have the lawyer, but does not have the money, so . . . the boss of the factory, wins.

Alexandra cannot support herself to get another job . . . after, we heard that she is on the street.

It was in January, very cold and freezing . . . after three days people found her body frozen . . . on the stairs in the front of the mall.

Dida-Steliana Olteanu

I had seen a lot of homeless . . . I always worry about them. Five years ago in Turkey I saw a man, he didn't have anything . . . sometimes he came in our house. My mom always gave him some food and I gave him some money . . . Sometime he cried about the past because he had family, place to live, money, food. But he doesn't have (any)thing now . . . one day, he saw his family in the newspaper. His family had died by car accident.'

Fatima Seyli

When I go downtown and see homeless people sitting around on park benches and in the library, most of them look drunk . . . A lot of them beg for money, it's disgusting . . . The homeless people I see are almost all adult people. They look healthy. Why don't they get jobs?

Abdi Nasir

I used to live near the Nile River in Sudan and in 1988 a flood came to my village and we tried to protect our houses, but the water was too high and strong . . . We didn't find places to stay or protect our bodies from the cold and there was a heavy rain most of the days.

You can't imagine which condition we were in and the children suffered from hunger and illness and a lot of families missed some of their members and they were affected by malaria and other diseases.

The water was very dirty and not good for the health.

We stayed in that bad condition a lot of days . . . until the water began to dry and the cars from other towns came full of clothes, food and medicines . . . And I can't forget those days (being) homeless until my death.

Sabah Gnip

Photo: HEARTFELT LETTERS: ESL students wrote about their homelands their experiences in Canada.; Star Photo (DICK LOEK) SPEAKING OUT: Clockwise from left, Dida-Steliana Olteanu, 21, Feven Gola, 21, Elias Hagos, 21, Ilona Tuchak, 16, are among Betty Ann Taylor's Grade 11 ESL students at Western Technical Commerce, who wrote to The Star.

Document tor0000020011206ducu01cpf

NEWS

Crisis deepens for city's homeless Hostels have run out of mattresses for first time in their history

By Catherine Dunphy and Peter Edwards TORONTO STAR

748 words

7 November 1998

The Toronto Star

TOR

SA2

A5

English

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Nine days after Toronto City Council declared homelessness a national disaster, there are not even enough mattresses for all the homeless wanting shelter.

"This is the first time in history we are a couple of hundred mattresses short in hostels. This truly is an emergency," David Hulchanski said yesterday outside Doctors Hospital.

The University of Toronto professor and member of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee wants the city to immediately open up Doctors Hospital to house people forced to sleep on streets.

Police arrested 13 people Thursday after activists, most from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, talked their way into the mothballed hospital and refused to leave.

The city has promised to open the Brunswick Ave. hospital as a temporary shelter for between 50 and 100 people on Dec. 1.

But Bob Rose, an outreach worker at Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre, said emergency shelter is needed immediately.

He works with psychiatric patients he says are too frightened to go to hostels when they are discharged from the hospital.

"I'm losing them to the streets," he said. "Twice I've gone out and found one guy and pulled him off the street because he's scared of the Seaton House hostel and the hospital doesn't want him. I need alternatives."

Rose said the situation is so desperate, some of his patients end up competing for a piece of park in which to sleep.

Other anti-poverty activists pointed out that homeless shelters are already packed - and the worst is yet to come as temperatures drop.

"It's potentially life-threatening - even this week," Dr. Stephen Hwang of St. Michael's Hospital said yesterday in an interview. There were 3,886 people in Toronto shelters Wednesday night, which is 98 per cent capacity, said Joanne Campbell, general manager of the city's shelter, housing and support division.

Homeless people can die of hypothermia at temperatures as high as 15C, and people with brain injuries, drinking problems or on some psychiatric medications are particularly vulnerable, said Hwang, who has studied the homeless in Canada and the U.S.

"Recently a (Toronto) homeless man died of hypothermia at only 10 degrees," Hwang said.

"Some schizophrenics are increasingly susceptible to hypothermia because they take neuroleptics, drugs which cause the blood vessels near the surface of the skin to dilate and lose heat more rapidly," he added.

Five homeless people died over the past week, Cathy Crowe of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee said yesterday.

Homeless people often can't escape the cold, said Crowe, a nurse who works with the poor. Shelters have been full since the summer.

However, many residents of the west-end neighbourhood around the former Doctors Hospital say they shouldn't have to take too much of the burden of housing the poor, since the area already has a Salvation Army hostel on College St., the Scott Mission on Spadina Ave., two drop-in centres and a community centre.

"We certainly don't want to be responsible for anybody freezing to death, but this definitely doesn't add to the glory of the street," said Catherine Cragg of the Sussex-Ulster Residents Association.

Plans to turn Doctors into a temporary shelter are unlikely to be affected by yesterday's provincial government announcement it will be demolished to make way for a long-term care facility. Construction is due to begin next spring.

Dick Nellis, who lives across the street from Doctors Hospital, said he wishes the city would hurry setting up shelter in the building.

"I think the alternative is too horrible and that's people dying in the cold," Nellis said.

Churches have opened up their Out of the Cold program, allowing some 500 people a night to sleep on mats, Sister Susan Moran of Our Ladies Mission said.

However, it isn't nearly enough, Moran said.

"There's so many more people on the streets than there has ever been," Moran said. "It's just tripled."

A recent effort to clear the homeless from church grounds around Metropolitan United Church on Sherbourne St. has driven more people into the Don Valley, where there are some 200 homeless, Beric German of the disaster relief committee said.

STAR COLOUR PHOTO (RON BULL): COLD COMFORT: A person huddles in a makeshift shelter on Spadina Ave. north of College St. yesterday.

Document tor0000020011206dub7015e4

News

Cold drives city's homeless to shelters Emergency measures introduced New Year's Eve to bring Toronto's destitute inside

BY ISABEL VINCENT

The Globe and Mail

699 words

2 January 1998

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A6

English

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TORONTO -- With a report from Estanislao Oziewicz. Social workers launched emergency procedures New Year's Eve when bitterly low temperatures forced many of the city's homeless to seek refuge in shelters and missions.

Officials at shelters across the city added extra mats and beds to meet the influx of destitute people trying to escape the cold. Temperatures dipped to --15 Wednesday night.

"We were full last night," said Brother John, director of ministry at the Good Shepherd Centre, a shelter for the homeless that can accommodate 75 people in downtown Toronto. "People just didn't want to stay outside it was so cold."

Officials monitoring the Street Help Line, a service for homeless people seeking emergency shelter, said they received double the number of calls New Year's Eve that they usually get. However, they refused to specify the exact number. Many of the calls came from people reporting homeless people who were sleeping outdoors.

"We have been ready for an emergency alert since mid-November," said Sandra Seaborn, co-ordinator of the Street Help Line, which has been funded by both the old City of Toronto and what was formerly Metro Toronto. Ms. Seaborn said the service tries to find emergency accommodation for homeless callers at hostels and shelters throughout the city.

In addition to providing extra emergency spaces at hostels and shelters, municipal workers increased street-patrolling efforts, dispatching personnel on mountain bikes and in a van to search for homeless people sleeping outside and encourage them to go to shelters. They also issued extra public-transit tickets for community and drop-in centres to help the homeless seek accommodation at shelters throughout the city.

Some homeless people who live outdoors lost one of their shelters under the Gardiner Expressway in Toronto yesterday. About a dozen firefighters put out a blaze that destroyed mattresses, a shopping cart, a children's wagon and other accoutrements of the homeless under a downward ramp of the expressway exiting at Spadina Avenue.

Beneath the ramp, a barricade of debris had been built to provide some privacy and protection from biting winds. The fire was fanned by strong winds coming off Lake Ontario and badly scorched a 30-metre section underneath the ramp.

A can of camping fuel, which may have been the source of the fire, was found at the site. By the time firefighters and other emergency crews had arrived, whoever lived at the site had disappeared.

Toronto's emergency procedures went into effect Wednesday morning after the city's medical officer of health issued an extreme-cold-weather alert, which was lifted yesterday morning.

"It is a short-term emergency response to a serious social problem," Dr. David McKeown said in a news release Wednesday. "[We] hope that by co-ordinating our resources and temporarily increasing some services we will

avoid the kind of situation in which homeless people can't find space or don't know where to go for help when it is extremely cold."

The emergency-weather-alert system was created last year in a bid to prevent homeless people from freezing to death. The number of homeless in Toronto was estimated in a recent United Way report at 168,000. The report, issued in November, defined homeless people as those with no permanent shelter and those who are "precariously housed" or have inadequate shelter.

Last year, before the emergency procedures were in place, a homeless man froze to death in Toronto. On Wednesday, Fredericton police found a frozen body in a downtown alley. The body of the unidentified man was covered with snow and found in an area that police say is frequented by alcoholics.

Although most social workers say the emergency procedures are helpful, many believe they should be put into effect at higher temperatures.

"We think it [the cold-weather alert] should go into effect at --5 or --10 degrees," said Cathy Crowe, a street nurse with the Queen West Community Health Centre. "By the time it's --15, people can already develop hypothermia."

Document glob000020011205du12000ny

NEWS

Rent changes will hurt poor mayor says Numbers of homeless will rise, Hall fears

By Paul Moloney Toronto Star

370 words

14 August 1997

The Toronto Star

TOR

A8

English

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Proposed rent control changes will lead to more homelessness, Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall says.

The province's new Tenant Protection Act, which would scrap the current Rent Control Act, will reduce the stock of low-cost apartments in the city, she said yesterday.

The law would lift rent controls once a tenant moves out or is evicted. Landlords could then raise the rents on those vacated units to whatever price they choose and the new rent would be subject to annual rent controls.

Known as Bill 96, the law is expected to be passed this fall to take effect Jan. 1.

Hall said low-income renters already move frequently and she fears some landlords will find ways to pressure even more to vacate their homes so rents can be hiked.

"Unscrupulous landlords will move people out, find a range of ways to do that. They'll make changes to their properties, move the rent up and those low-cost units will be lost."

"That legislation alone . . . will have a major impact over a short period of time on homelessness in our community."

Hall was speaking at a breakfast meeting with officials of the Toronto Christian Resource Centre, a downtown agency that works with homeless and hard-to-house people.

Since becoming mayor almost three years ago, homelessness has been a consistent source of letters to her office from citizens demanding action, Hall said.

The City of Toronto and Metro governments have responded by putting more money into street patrols and shelters, and volunteers have run wintertime shelters in churches, through the Out of the Cold program, she said.

"There's widespread outrage in the community when somebody freezes to death. We've seen many, many citizens show their concern by coming out and getting involved in programs."

Hall said she had thought the freezing deaths of three homeless men in the winter of 1995-96 would spur the provincial government to act, but there has been little response.

Some fear the new megacity council, which takes office Jan. 1, won't place a high priority on fighting homelessness, Hall said.

Document TOR0000020080122dt8e00i6h

NEWS

Demonstrators target Leach for 'inaction' over homeless Inquest jury's advice ignored, group says

By Donna Jean MacKinnon Toronto Star

370 words

30 January 1997

The Toronto Star

TOR

A4

English

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About 40 activists demonstrated in front of Housing Minister Al Leach's office yesterday, declaring the province has failed to do anything about housing the poor.

The Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness wanted to remind the government of a coroner's jury recommendation that a plan be developed for more affordable housing.

It was one of 23 recommendations that came from an inquest last July into the deaths of three homeless people on the streets of Toronto last winter.

"We know there are solutions and after a whole string of freezing deaths last winter, the coroner agreed," said coalition spokesperson Michael Shapcott.

The jury also recommended that the government report back within six months on measures it has taken.

But the coalition has not heard from the coroner's office, officials say. Meanwhile, another homeless man, Garland Sheppard, was found dead in a Toronto parking garage last Sunday.

"The latest death of a homeless person is a grim way to mark the (six-month) anniversary of the verdict of the coroner's jury," Shapcott said.

"If the Harris government, especially Al Leach, had started working on an action plan six months ago, we might have moved ahead."

Shapcott said the Tories have taken a step backward by "dumping the responsibility of social housing on to municipal taxpayers who have to shoulder everything else."

Municipalities previously had no responsibility for social housing.

Shapcott estimated 50 to 100 homeless people die every year in Toronto from various causes, although nobody knows the exact number.

A ministry communications officer told the demonstrators yesterday Leach wasn't in his office, but they continued to demand a meeting with him.

After Shapcott made several phone calls, John Mathewson, Leach's executive assistant, appeared and said he would take a letter from demonstrators to the minister.

Mathewson repeated to the angry group seven times that "the government of Ontario takes this matter seriously."

But Shapcott had the final word.

"If you provide decent housing, nobody will choose to live on the street," he said. "And there's no question, the money has to come from government."

Document TOR0000020080121dt1u00fq8

NEWS

Freezing victim died 'for nothing,' brother says Mentally ill man had a family 'who cared very much for him'

by Rebecca Bragg Toronto Star

1,266 words

3 December 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A6

English

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He was found with his hands frozen to his face and his shoes tucked under his arm, as if he feared they might be stolen while he slept.

His last home had been a tiny lean-to made from a car hood and wood scraps piled against a railing underneath the eastbound ramp to the Gardiner Expressway at Bay St.

The last sounds he heard likely came from the parking lot he lay beside, perhaps commuters complaining of the cold as they crunched through the snow to or from the warmth of their offices.

His emaciated body turned to ice, just steps from the country's wealthiest financial district.

That was last Feb. 1. And for a time, nothing was known about him, not even his name. Much later, his identity was learned from matching a fingerprint to his immigration file.

Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani, 41, known to his family as Salah, had been lost in the city for three years.

A coroner's inquest into the freezing deaths of Kompani and two other homeless men in Toronto last winter turned up almost no information to cast light on his whereabouts during those years.

At the inquest, detectives investigating his case testified they believed Kompani, an Iranian immigrant, had relatives in Canada but had been unable to locate them.

His body, along with a bag containing four binders filled with his writings, lay unclaimed in the morgue from February till the end of July, when a distraught sister and brother-in-law came forward.

They lived in Kingston and had not learned of his death until an acquaintance in Toronto heard of it through media reports, they explained.

Kompani's younger brother, Jimmy Company, 36, owns a pizza franchise in Thunder Bay.

He remembers Salah, the eldest of five children born to an upper-class family in North Tehran, as brilliant, handsome and well-educated. He had a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Kentucky.

But Kompani suffered from a mental illness that caused him to fear contact with others, even those who loved him most. He had been diagnosed by doctors in the United States, Iran and Canada with paranoid schizophrenia.

"I don't want people to think when they see these people on the street that they are all homeless and they don't have anyone," Company said.

"Some of them do have someone, but they cannot get help. He had a family who cared very much for him.

"By accident and by a mistake of the doctor or the shelter, he found himself on the streets without any help and he died, for nothing."

As a boy, Kompani was both "lively and quiet," Company said.

He was a straight-A student who liked soccer and swimming, led study groups for his friends and was determined to become "somebody." He dreamed of becoming either a physician or an engineer.

In 1977, Kompani, who read English dictionaries for pleasure and made lists of new words as a memory tool, began his studies at the University of Kentucky.

He stayed in Lexington for 10 years, but was unable to find work there in his field.

According to stories in the Lexington Herald-Leader, he had several clashes with the law.

In 1985, after assaulting another student and then resisting arrest, Kompani needed so much psychiatric treatment that two years passed before he was judged fit to stand trial.

Rather than face a prison sentence, he was allowed to return to his family in Iran in 1987.

In January, 1991, Kompani successfully claimed refugee status after arriving in Vancouver and satisfying immigration authorities he had been persecuted in Iran.

He was optimistic about the future, Company said, and "just looking for somewhere to live his life in peace."

After coming to Toronto, Kompani bunked in with his brother and another roommate in their apartment in Richmond Hill.

He worked with Company in a pizza restaurant, but grew despondent when he couldn't find engineering work.

He also was becoming increasingly fearful that people intended to harm him, Company said.

Twice, after Kompani became so delusional that his brother feared he might commit suicide or hurt someone, Company went to a justice of the peace and had him committed to hospital for treatment.

"I knew he was getting worse," he said. "We couldn't do anything. He had an illness. He was scared of people. He thought they were going to hurt or kill him."

One of Kompani's great fears was that immigration authorities were going to put him in prison. Although his immigration status was not an issue to authorities, it worried Dr. Stephen Stokl, his psychiatrist at York County Hospital in Newmarket, where he was admitted briefly in 1992 and 1993.

As Stokl testified at the inquest, he had suspected Kompani of being an illegal immigrant who might also have been abusing the welfare system. He noted these opinions on his medical records.

"Civic and country concern" prompted Stokl to write a letter to immigration authorities to "alert them to what was going on," he told the inquest. But, Stokl said, he asked Kompani's permission first.

Stokl also testified that while Company obviously cared a great deal for his brother, he was no longer able to handle him at home. So when Kompani was discharged from the hospital, arrangements were made for him to go to Porter Place hostel in Newmarket.

Company says the arrangement was always intended to be temporary, a "time out" period until his brother was well enough to come home.

But his mental condition deteriorated steadily during the 100 days he lived at the 25-person residence. Eventually, Kompani's aggressiveness grew beyond the hostel's ability to cope and in April, 1993, police took him back to York County Hospital after he attacked a staff member's dog.

After reviewing Kompani's file, another psychiatrist concluded that he was "just looking for a place to stay," Stokl said.

This doctor gave Kompani directions using public transit to Seaton House, a 571-bed hostel in downtown Toronto, noting in his records: "I hope he does make it there tonight."

Said Company, still bitterly angry that no one phoned him so he could have taken his brother home: "And then I lost him."

Kompani never arrived at Seaton House and, apart from a brief encounter with a police officer who found him living in a North York bus shelter two months later, had no further known contact with authorities.

In the three years that followed, friends and relatives spotted Kompani a couple of times reading in a North York library. He refused to speak to them, Company said.

Once, a friend took him home and gave him food and clothing, but he fled before family members could arrive.

"All the time he was on my mind," Company said. "I was wondering, Where does he live? What does he eat? Why doesn't he get in touch with family members? But there is no one to give answers.

"It is hard for me to believe that he was living on the street while I was living in a warm place with food, everything.

"I am not going to forgive myself."

Photo (PHIL ANDREWS FOR THE STAR): BROTHER MOURNED: Jimmy Company holds a picture of his brother, Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani, who was found frozen to next to a parking lot last winter.

Document TOR0000020080121dsc300glr

NEWS

Sign bars homeless from bridge shelter 'Metro is saying, go freeze to death somewhere else'

by Jack Lakey Toronto Star

540 words

3 December 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A6

English

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Metro's transportation department has posted a sign under a downtown bridge warning homeless people that they aren't allowed to "camp" there or seek shelter.

The sign is to discourage street people from setting up "squats," but it has angered homeless advocates who say Metro is more concerned with bad publicity from people freezing to death on its property than helping people.

"It's like Metro is saying, go freeze to death somewhere else, we don't need the trouble," Metro Councillor Jack Layton (Toronto-Don River) said in an interview.

Shortly after the sign went up, a man who had spent the past year living under the bridge - on Bathurst St., between Front St. and Lake Shore Blvd. W. - was escorted away by Metro works officials to the Scott Mission, a hostel on Spadina Ave.

James Froh, a street patrol co-ordinator for the Anishnawbe Health Centre, which helps homeless people, said the man lived in a lean-to under the bridge because he cannot cope with living in a hostel.

Froh said the man is now wandering the streets without even the lean-to for shelter. As long as street patrol workers knew where he was, Froh said, they could check on him and bring him hot food, particularly on cold nights.

But since Metro has roused him, the street patrol workers have seen little of him, he said.

"Metro could have done this in the summertime, when the weather was warm. To me, it is unconscionable and cruel to do this in cold weather.

"There is no space in the shelters right now for single men. There are already 100 men sleeping on the floor of Seaton House every night, and the really cold weather hasn't started yet."

The sign under the bridge states: "Erection of structures (whether temporary or permanent) for use of shelter/camping is prohibited."

Doug Floyd, Metro's transportation commissioner, said the sign was put up and the man was "relocated" because a complaint had been received from the Metro Convention Centre, which operates a parking lot nearby.

Floyd refused to describe the specifics of the complaint, saying that he was interested in "protecting the privacy" of the man, even though he didn't know his name.

"It's unfortunate, but the individual was creating a bit of a problem," Floyd said, adding that similar signs have previously been posted in the Don Valley and elsewhere.

Layton noted that Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani, 41, froze to death last winter while living in a lean-to under a ramp to the Gardiner Expressway, and speculated that Metro is trying to avoid similar problems this winter.

"Metro is supposed to be helping put roofs over people's heads, not sticking up signs and dragging people away," said Layton, who chairs Metro's transportation committee.

"We shouldn't have the transportation department bulldozing over the homeless without first talking to the social agencies."

Star photo (ANDREW STAWICKI): NO PLACE FOR SHELTER: Luc, a 45-year-old man, gets a warning from Metro against building a shelter under Bathurst St. bridge - where he lives.

Document TOR0000020080121dsc300gkr

Front

Death toll rises for homeless

Canadian press

427 words

26 September 1996

Kitchener-Waterloo Record

TKWR

Final

A3

English

Copyright (c) 1996 Kitchener-Waterloo Record.

TORONTO -- "People are dying on the streets of this city," says Cathy Crowe of the Coalition Against Homelessness. "Isn't there something wrong in this province when homeless people die?"

Crowe said Richard Roy, who died over the weekend in a Toronto park, was just the latest in a growing number of people who have succumbed to the harsh realities of life on the streets.

Crowe, a community health nurse who works with homeless people, said eight of her patients have died so far this year. But Roy's death has hit particularly hard.

The 49-year-old was something of a community leader among the homeless and a driving force for a coroner's inquest into the freezing deaths of three homeless men last winter.

"His death has really rocked the community," Crowe said.

In July, a coroner's jury made 47 recommendations including more funding for hostels, an advisory body to look into Toronto's housing problems and a special hostel where alcoholics are allowed to drink.

But even as the five-week inquest was under way, two more homeless people died. Crowe said the Ontario government has failed to act on the jury's recommendations.

"They have never consulted us, they have never called us, they have never replied to our requests for a meeting."

Government officials were not available for comment.

Figures on homeless deaths are difficult to track, but Diane Patychuk, a researcher for the city of Toronto, said on average about 40 "officially homeless" people die each year in the city.

The actual death rate among Toronto's estimated 25,000 homeless people may be higher, Patychuk said. People who have an address on their death certificates don't show up in the statistics, even if they're actually homeless.

"The fall and winter months are the worst," Patychuk said.

Advocates say the number of people sleeping in Toronto's doorways, alleys and shelters is growing dramatically.

"There's a crisis going on right now -- the hostels and the day shelters are filling up," said Gaetan Heroux, a worker at a downtown drop-in centre.

Crowe said too many street people like Roy die unmourned.

"His cannot be just another nameless death on the street," she said. "He used to have a job, a life. He had children, grandchildren -- he was a person."

Black & White Photo: canadian press Social activists in say the city's people -- like this man sitting on a ventilation grate last February -- face another deadly winter.

Document TKWR000020060129ds9q00sfc



LETTER

Tragic and sad

55 words

8 August 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A20

English

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Re the coroner's inquest into the freezing deaths of three homeless men.

It is tragic that Eugene Upper's 15 minutes of fame came only after he had frozen to death last winter in a Toronto Transit Commission bus shelter on Spadina Ave. How sad.

Rev. E. Ross Woolley

Etobicoke

Document TOR0000020080120ds8800hmb

News

Homelessness helped kill men, jury finds Panel disregards directive, recommends sweeping changes to hostel system

BY GAY ABBATE

The Globe and Mail

1,130 words

31 July 1996

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A1

English

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TORONTO -- Three men froze to death on Toronto's streets last winter in part because they were homeless, a jury ruled yesterday, ignoring a directive from the coroner and recommending sweeping changes to the city's hostel system.

In making their findings, the five jurors disregarded coroner Murray Naiberg's request that they not address the broader issues of housing and other social ills, but only determine the immediate cause of death. Dr. Naiberg had pointed out that all three men had the option of going to a hostel the night they died, and also that the law allows only a determination of the specific cause of death taking into account only the evidence heard, not the arguments of counsel.

But juror Ian Prittie said that to exclude such a critical issue as housing "would be irresponsible of us."

Mr. Prittie said later that the jury, which began hearing evidence on June 24, wanted to come up with solutions covering the full range of problems that led to the three deaths, including whether Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani died because they had nowhere to live.

The jury, which began to hear evidence on June 24, concluded that Mr. Upper, 56, died on Jan. 5 of intoxication, possibly complicated by hypothermia. But homelessness and possibly suicide were behind his death that night in a bus shelter in downtown Toronto, the jurors concluded.

Mr. Kompani, 41, died of hypothermia, freezing to death on Feb. 1 in a makeshift shelter near a downtown highway ramp. Again, the jury found that lack of shelter, combined with mental illness, led to his death.

Alcoholism, cirrhosis and an enlarged heart killed Mr. Anderson, 63, but lack of shelter led to his death on the steps of a downtown business on Feb. 2, the jury ruled.

During the inquest, the coroner commented that Mr. Anderson had been "the author of his own misfortune" because he was evicted from his apartment.

In a preamble to the recommendations, the jury said that the lack of adequate shelter is a growing problem and "we urge all levels of government and society at large to make a concerted and serious effort to alleviate the burden of this group of people to allow them to live in dignity."

Beric German, a spokesman for the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness, which had standing at the inquest and presented evidence, said the group was very pleased with the jury's recommendations.

"Five good citizens heard what many people had known before: We've a crisis of homelessness in Metro Toronto." He said the jurors "made good recommendations." "[The jury] recommended that we house our people. They've asked that all levels of government meet and do something about problem."

The coalition will deliver a copy of the jury recommendations to Housing Minister Al Leach today because it doesn't want them to sit on a shelf, spokeswoman Cathy Crowe said. "There's a pressing need for action, and money has to be poured into resources before this winter."

The majority of the jury's 54 recommendations focus on the two key issues that it determined contributed to the deaths: housing and alcohol, not enough of the first and too much of the second.

One recommendation calls for more hostels to be built, with all levels of government providing the necessary funding. The jury recommends that new hostels accommodate no more than 40 people, the rationale being that a smaller facility would reduce stress and behavioural problems.

The jury also called for funding for a new hostel for native people, who are overrepresented in the homeless population.

And an ombudsman-advocate's office that is independent of the hostel system should be established to deal with complaints and security problems. The ratio of staff to clients should be no more than 15 to one, the jury said.

Ralph, a 39-year-old panhandling outside Union Station, has slept outdoors for 31/2 years because he can't bear the thought of a hostel.

He said in a recent interview that he fears and avoids other people. His problems, he says, are alcoholism and uncontrollable rage over sexual and physical assaults by his father from the age of 7.

"Homeless people are people who can't function in society because they've been broken by abuse, or been born with a mental illness," he said.

Much of the jury's criticism is levelled at Seaton House, which it says is too large and requires major renovations and changes, including division into more manageable units "to provide a more human atmosphere" and allow staff to deal with mental problems, addiction and other special needs.

Seaton House (some people who have stayed there refer to it as "Satan House") can house 571 people in beds and up to 900 when the floor is used.

All three men had had some contact with the facility, but all chose not to go there the night they died.

The facility should also move to eliminate bunk beds and introduce an alcohol- storage program for clients, the jury recommended.

It also said that more detoxification centres should be built, rather than making existing facilities even larger. A special centre should be provided for aboriginal people, more centres should be built outside Metro Toronto, and an effort should be made to discourage detoxification centres from being used as hostels by people who have nowhere else to go.

Other recommendations:

- More money should be spent on outreach programs for the homeless.
- Hospitals should not discriminate against patients because of their appearance, hygiene, socio-economic status and culture.
- A crisis line should be set up to handle calls involving alcohol abuse and mental illness.
- All levels of government and community organizations should develop a plan to ensure that the homeless have access to housing and support services.
- On being served with an eviction notice, tenants should be given a list of community organizations and available legal aid in a bid to stop evictions and allow mediation of landlord-tenant disputes.

The jury accepted most of the 24 recommendations submitted jointly by the Crown and the coalition.

Approximately 1,250 people stay in Metro hostels each night during the winter months.

Ms. Crowe said yesterday that the umbrella group of community service organizations, which was formed in February in the wake of the three deaths, has not yet decided whether it will request a judicial review of the inquest proceedings.

During the hearing, Dr. Naiberg refused to allow the coalition to bring forth as witnesses formerly homeless people, housing advocates and a toxicologist, saying their testimony would be repetitious or irrelevant.

Document glob000020011014ds7v00yzv

NEWS

Need for crisis support urgent: MD System fails homeless, inquest told

By Rebecca Bragg TORONTO STAR

499 words

24 July 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A6

English

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A 24-hour crisis support system is urgently needed to serve the needs of homeless people with major mental illnesses in the Toronto area, a psychiatrist told a coroner's inquest yesterday.

Dr. Tyrone Turner, chief of psychiatry at Doctors Hospital, said that Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani would probably not have been able to cope with the kind of "congregate living situation" he would have encountered in most hostels.

Kompani, who had a long history of mental illness, was found frozen to death in a lean-to under a ramp to the Gardiner Expressway last Feb. 1.

The inquest, presided over by coroner Dr. Murray Naiberg, is examining the freezing deaths of Kompani, 41, and two other homeless men last winter.

Kompani, diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic in the United States, Iran and Canada, was treated as an in-patient at York County Hospital in Newmarket in 1992 and 1993.

But the third time he arrived at the hospital, a psychiatrist who believed he was just looking for a place to stay gave him directions via public transit to Seaton House, a 571-bed hostel in downtown Toronto, the inquest heard earlier.

Apart from an encounter with police two months later in June, 1993, when he was found living in a North York bus shelter, Kompani's whereabouts until the time of his death have been unaccounted for.

"There is a gaping hole in the system into which people like Mr. Kompani can fall," Turner told the inquest.

The crisis support system has been deemed a priority by various levels of government for several years, Turner said. But scarcity of money, "inertia" and the absence of a direct "prod" have been responsible for failure to implement the changes, he suggested.

Turner recommended that the prod necessary to get such a system in place could be made by the inquest jury in its recommendations. Testimony summations are expected to wrap up tomorrow.

If a crisis support system had been in place in 1993, Kompani could have been assigned someone to help him with appropriate housing and medical care, Turner said.

Emergency staff in general hospitals are too overloaded to be able to take on extra responsibility for arranging housing and other assistance, he said.

In recent years, with budget cutbacks and the resulting bed shortages, hospitals are under even greater pressure not to keep psychiatric patients until housing can be found. As a result, all too often they end up on the streets, Turner testified.

Outside the inquest, Detective Bob Gordon told The Star that Kompani's remains will be claimed by family members who identified themselves to the coroner's office yesterday.

Kompani's sister and her husband do not live in the Toronto area and learned only recently of Kompani's death from a Toronto Star article sent to them.

The couple were very upset and have asked for privacy, Gordon said.

Document TOR0000020080120ds7o00fmo

NEWS

Frozen man's body remains unclaimed Last 3 years of his life unknown, inquest told

By Rebecca Bragg Toronto Star

431 words

18 July 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A8

English

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The remains of a homeless man who froze to death last winter are still lying in the morgue and an investigation has drawn a blank on his whereabouts for close to the last three years of his life.

The mystery of Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani deepened yesterday when a coroner's inquest was told relatives he was believed to have in the Toronto area have not been found - and no one has come forward to claim his body.

Detective Steve Bilac made the disclosure in response to questioning by Peter Rosenthal, lawyer for the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness, about the whereabouts of a bag that had been found with Kompani's body.

The bag, which contained four binders filled with writings, were at the morgue - with Kompani himself, Bilac replied.

The 41-year-old Iranian immigrant, who had a long history of mental illness, was found frozen to death last Feb. 1 in a lean-to under a Gardiner Expressway ramp.

Several witnesses who have testified at the inquest into the freezing deaths of three homeless men last winter have referred to Kompani's brother, with whom he had lived for a period of time, in Richmond Hill.

But when police investigated, Kompani was unknown at the address they had found for this "brother."

Recently, someone phoned the coroner's office claiming to be a relative, but refused to give a name or any further information. The person promised to call back, but hasn't yet, Bilac testified.

Kompani was known to have family members, including parents, in Iran, and police contacted the Iranian embassy in Ottawa so that a message could be relayed to next of kin about his death.

But there has been no contact from anyone in Iran either, Bilac told The Star outside the hearings.

The Star has managed to obtain a photograph of Kompani taken in 1985 by police in Lexington, Ky., where he had lived for 10 years, graduating from a university there with a degree in engineering.

But his mental illness had also caused Kompani to run afoul of the law more than once before he returned to Iran in 1987.

He was granted refugee status in Canada in 1991.

Kompani's appearance changed dramatically from 1985 to the time of his death.

Rosenthal, who viewed Kompani's body at the morgue yesterday, described his appearance as "emaciated."

Kompani had been treated for mental illness at York County Hospital twice, in 1992 and 1993.

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NEWS

Mandate of inquest 'limited to deaths'

by Rebecca Bragg TORONTO STAR

304 words

2 July 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

A6

English

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Discovering how, when and where three homeless men died on Toronto's streets last winter can be the only mandate of an inquest, a coroner ruled last week.

Saying the investigation "cannot be a roving inquiry on all issues of homelessness," coroner Murray Naiberg dismissed the lack of affordable housing as being relevant to an examination of the deaths.

He also gave only six in a coalition of 27 social service agencies official standing at the inquest into the freezing deaths of Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani.

The coalition had wanted the scope of the inquest broadened to examine such issues as the causes of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing.

Upper and Anderson were alcoholics who had been drinking heavily on the nights of their deaths. Kompani had become homeless after being discharged from hospital where he was being treated for long-standing mental illness.

Coalition lawyer Peter Rosenthal has criticized the coroner's office and police for their failure to conduct an adequate investigation into the deaths.

So far, police have refused to produce photographs of the dead men. Consequently, their activities before their deaths cannot be properly traced, Rosenthal contends.

"If there's any murder or death being seriously investigated, police take photos around, show them to witnesses and ask them questions," Rosenthal said outside the hearings.

Dr. Paula Goering, who teaches psychiatry at the University of Toronto and is director of a research unit at the Clarke Institute, testified as an expert witness on homelessness and mental illness.

"Continuity of care" is an urgent requirement for many mentally ill people who have nowhere to go after being discharged from hospital, she said.

The inquest, expected to last another two to three weeks, resumes today.

Document TOR0000020080120ds7200cq8



LETTER

Inquest can't ignore rental crisis

250 words

25 June 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A16

English

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Basic common sense seems to be eluding the coroner conducting the inquest in Toronto into the freezing deaths of three homeless people (Helpers for homeless seek role at inquest into freezing deaths June 19).

In a preliminary ruling, he has limited the scope of the inquest to a narrow range of issues. It is most astonishing that the coroner won't allow any evidence about Toronto's housing crisis to be presented to an inquest into the death of homeless people.

Consider these facts: Toronto has the lowest rental vacancy rate in Canada. Virtually no new affordable housing units will be built this year. The huge cuts in shelter allowances last October have made it tough - nearly impossible - for some welfare recipients to pay their rents.

One recent study reported that an average of 13 families a day are being evicted from their homes in Toronto because they cannot pay their rent. All of these facts, and many others, point to a growing crisis in the supply of housing and growing problems among tenants in being able to afford their housing.

Inquests are supposed to probe all the circumstances of a particular death or deaths for the coroner's jury to make recommendations to prevent similar deaths in the future.

By artificially restricting the scope of this inquest and prohibiting the jury from hearing evidence about the causes of homelessness, the coroner is preventing the jury from doing its duty.

Michael Shapcott

Toronto

Document TOR0000020080120ds6p00bu6

NEWS

Life on streets beats shelters, hearing told

By Rebecca Bragg TORONTO STAR

217 words

25 June 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A6

English

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Many of Toronto's homeless find life on the street attractive compared to the "deplorable and dangerous" conditions of housing for them, a preliminary hearing has been told.

The lack of low-income housing should be "the number one issue" for an upcoming inquest, added Peter Rosenthal, a lawyer for Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness.

An inquest into the freezing deaths of three homeless men, Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani, on the streets of Toronto last winter is to start tomorrow morning.

Headed by coroner Murray Naiberg, it is restricted to the circumstances of these deaths.

The 27-member coalition of social service agencies is appealing for official standing as a unit. It also wants the inquest to investigate the causes of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing.

A witness previously testified Anderson was evicted from his subsidized apartment shortly before he died.

Both Rosenthal and crown attorney Mary Ellen Hurman made their final submissions to Naiberg yesterday.

Kompani was a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic who became homeless after hospital stays. His mental illness seemed pertinent to the circumstances of his death, Hurman agreed.

But she said agencies dealing with street health and housing lacked "direct and substantial" interest to warrant standing.

Document TOR0000020080120ds6p00bt7

NEWS

City faces even more deaths of homeless, hearing told

by Rebecca Bragg TORONTO STAR

426 words

21 June 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A6

English

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Toronto is in the midst of a "tremendous emergency" of homelessness and will face many more than the three freezing deaths registered last winter if steps are not taken to address the problem, a coroner's court has heard.

AIDS worker Beric German, on the steering committee of the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness, made the comments yesterday at preliminary hearings for an inquest into the deaths of three homeless men.

The inquest is scheduled to begin next Wednesday.

The coalition, consisting of 27 social service agencies, "came together because we had to come together," German said. "We anticipated these deaths and believe this is a tremendous emergency."

The agencies are making a two-pronged appeal before Dr. Murray Naiberg - first for official standing at the inquest and for a broadening of the scope of the investigation.

The coroner's office has specified it will restrict the inquest to just four issues.

These are the safety and availability of beds in hostels; the availability of spaces at detoxification centres; alcoholism and homelessness; and the added barriers to services faced by homeless immigrants.

But Peter Rosenthal, lawyer for the coalition, has argued that such matters as the root causes of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing for people on welfare must also be addressed.

On Jan. 5, Eugene Upper was found frozen to death in a Spadina Ave. bus shelter. On Feb. 1, Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani was found dead of exposure in a lean-to under a ramp to the Gardiner Expressway. The next day, Irwin Anderson was found dead in a doorway on Gerrard St. near Broadview Ave.

The investigation into Kompani's death is still continuing, but new information has revealed that the 41-year-old Iranian immigrant suffered from schizophrenia, the coroner's court has been told.

Before his death, Kompani had lived with a brother in Newmarket, but ended up in hostels in York Region after being in hospital.

Earlier, investigators had learned that Kompani had either completed or almost completed an engineering degree at a U.S. university.

The homeless man was found dead with his hands frozen to his face, and his shoes tucked under his arm.

Asked by Rosenthal why Kompani would have had his shoes under his arm, German replied that among homeless people who have been in the hostel system, "Everyone fears losing his shoes."

Kompani had probably held them close to his body "to ensure no one would steal them," German said.

Document TOR0000020080120ds6i00baj

Focus

DEATHS OF THE HOMELESS One is too many Three homeless men died of exposure this past winter in downtown Toronto, and the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness asked six of us to sit as a panel of inquiry. We found out that private charity and thousands of sleeping bags are no answer to the sheer growth in the number of street people

BY MICHAEL VALPY

The Globe and Mail

3,055 words

1 June 1996

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

D1

English

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Toronto -- HERE we are in the transept of All Saints Anglican Church in Toronto's bowery on a Saturday afternoon, listening to Marilyn White-Campbell recount the conversation she had with Eugene Upper one evening over a game of euchre.

"He said, 'The hostels are too damned hostile.'" A couple of us write this down as a mot. Ms. White-Campbell, an outreach worker with the Community Older Persons Alcohol Program, says: "Eugene knew how to get out of the cold."

I know some things about Eugene Upper, though not enough to give him the full dimensions of a human being.

He was 56, blond, an alcoholic sherry drinker, terrified of closed-in spaces. He had lived on the streets for years. He was, when he visited the drop-in centres for the homeless, chatty, interested in the people around him, gentle, circumspect in his language, clean, quietly appreciative of things given to him -- food, clothing, conversation.

He confided that on one or two occasions he had found it necessary to eat cat food.

He was resourceful. He was so streetwise. He knew not to be drunk on the streets in winter because of the danger of falling asleep in the cold. He knew he could ride the streetcars and buses through the night until the hostels opened. Odd, then, that on the night of Jan. 5 at minus 17 degrees, he should freeze to death in a bus shelter at the corner of Spadina Avenue and Nassau Street, smack in the middle of Toronto's westside Chinatown.

The media are fascinated by the homeless freezing on the streets. The homeless die the rest of the year, too, but without the same stagecraft. Eugene Upper was the first one to go in the winter in Toronto. Those who attend to such things have since -- out of respect, one supposes, but maybe because of street construction on Spadina -- removed the shelter where he died.

On Feb. 1, at minus 14 degrees, the Anishnawbe Health Centre's street patrol discovered Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani, age unknown, curled in a fetal position in a windbreak constructed of lumber scraps and a discarded truck hood under the Bay Street on-ramp to the downtown Gardiner Expressway. The following morning, at minus 16, Irwin Anderson, 63, was found in the doorway of the Toronto Cosmetician & Hair Design College in the east end.

There will be a coroner's inquest June 24 into the three men's deaths. In advance of the inquest, the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness, an umbrella organization of 22 agencies, asked six of us to sit as a panel of inquiry into homelessness and street deaths in the city.

We did, last Saturday. We were Sarah Polley, the actor; Patricia Erickson, a senior scientist with Ontario's Addiction Research Foundation; Libby Zeleke, a worker at The Meeting Place, a west-end homeless drop-in centre; Steve Laine, homeless himself for 10 years and now an advocate for the homeless; Peter Tabuns, a city

councillor and chairman of the Toronto Board of Health (and chairman of the panel); and me, a newspaper columnist.

We sat at a row of tables across the chancel of a beautiful, 122-year-old High Victorian Gothic church that has pink granite columns and Minton tiles and six-metre walls topped by a double-hammerbeam roof 16 metres high at the ridge. All Saints was built for 800 worshippers in a neighbourhood that began life as home to the city's first families. In a back room hangs a lithograph dated 1900 showing the parishioners at prayer attired in splendid bonnets and frock coats, with three glorious muscular angels hovering over the pulpit. That was then.

In 1971, the few remaining members of the church, at the corner of Dundas and Sherbourne streets, acknowledged the demographic reality of a century's change -- the area had become Skid Road -- and voted to transform All Saints into a haven named The Open Door. Pews that had supported the bottoms of the Victorian bourgeoisie became beds for the homeless. The angels, I like to think, still hover.

Perhaps our inquiry was more worthy-public-cause than investigative tribunal. The 41 people who spoke to us have, let's say, a certain perspective. They are the homeless themselves and those who work among the homeless: the public-health nurses, doctors, social workers, hostel managers, dispensers of charity and people who bear that vogue, militaristic but not inappropriate job-title -- front-line workers -- in the social agencies.

"What we heard," said ARF's Patricia Erickson, when the panel presented its report with its 44 recommendations to the news media Thursday, "was all about people. About our fellow citizens." We called our report One Is Too Many.

What was presented to us was a profile of several thousand men, women and children afflicted with a horrific list of physical and mental illnesses, living in depression and fear, and pushed to the outermost margins of society by government cost-cutting, bureaucratic rules and institutional indifference and hostility. They are people with a lousy life. Certainly they are not people who are out on the streets because they want to be. As Fred Martin, manager of the Good Shepherd Centre, a shelter run by a Roman Catholic lay order, told us: "People just don't wake up one day and say, 'I want to be homeless'."

Homelessness has become, since the early 1980s, an epidemic of the industrialized world, the product of economic harshness, public stringency and a range of social upheavals, from family breakdown to unprecedented global migration. The United Nations defines homeless people as both those without security of tenure and/or living in substandard housing and those who have no housing at all.

Germany in 1992 reported 150,000 registered homeless people. The French government says it has 400,000. British statistics say there are 100,000 homeless in London, 8,000 of whom sleep on the streets. Eleven years ago, the Europeans held their first emergency meeting on urban homelessness. The United States sent observers; Canada did not.

For homeless people in the United States, one can pick a number: "Upwards to three million" (the National Coalition of Homeless), 500,000 (the Urban Institute) or 230,000 (the U.S. Census Bureau, a figure widely criticized as ridiculously low). A 1990 Census Bureau enumeration in New York City found 10,732 people sleeping on the streets.

Statistics Canada made its first patchy effort to count the homeless in the 1991 census, tallying the clientele in 90 of the nation's soup kitchens. The result has not been considered reliable. A StatsCan official said at the time it was too risky for enumerators to try to count people at night on the streets.

According to a recent Maclean's magazine survey, Montreal officials put the number of homeless in their city at 20,000, rising by 3,000 a year; a Calgary housing agency says that city has 1,200 homeless, up from 400 three years ago; Vancouver's Downtown Eastside Residents Association estimates as many as 3,000.

The estimate for Toronto is 25,000, double the number calculated in 1984. But accurate data are elusive in a metropolitan area -- the country's largest -- with so much in-and-out migration (for example, a 1992 survey of Toronto's homeless by the Street Health Community Nursing Foundation found that 42 per cent had lived outside the city the previous year).

There are, however, some useful ways to sketch the dimensions.

The Metropolitan Toronto municipal hostel system housed about 3,000 people in shelters in 1994, about 3,800 in 1995 and calculates it is housing 4,300 so far in 1996. The city has more than 30 government and non-government hostels and shelters.

The Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto estimates there are 5,000 to 10,000 street youth.

The Greater Toronto Community Clearing House, a charitable umbrella organization supported by the city's business community, has distributed through its member agencies 22,000 sleeping bags and blankets to the homeless in three years (more than half that number last year) and more than one million pounds of used clothing.

I found especially intriguing statistics presented by two agencies created to serve homeless aboriginal people.

Carol Polych, a nurse with Anishnawbe (Ojibwa) Health Centre, said not only has the number of people seen at the centre doubled in the past two years but they are now 80 per cent non-aboriginal. Reva Jewell, executive director of Council Fire shelter and drop-in, said the numbers using her shelter have increased each year for four years and half the people are non-aboriginal. Council Fire also is visited inexplicably by about two dozen, non-aboriginal deaf youngsters. Ms. Jewell said no one knows where they come from because no one at Council Fire knows how to communicate with them.

The number of adults living full time on the city streets is estimated at 250 to 400. Mike Crawford, a one-time homeless man who organizes the now-annual November memorial service in the civic square for homeless who die on the streets, says he personally knows of 30 who have perished the past year, double the number the previous year.

THE audience in the church for the inquiry are largely the homeless. They applaud each speaker, make interjections, cheer members of their own community who come to the microphone, shout "Right on! Right on!" at statements they like. They have been told that a corner has been declared a no-go zone for photographers and TV crews should anyone feel uncomfortable with media attention.

The word has been put out that a free and nutritious lunch will be served. By noon, 250 have turned up.

Cathy Crowe, a nurse-practitioner at West Central Community Health Centre and one of the organizers of the inquiry, has directed one malnourished pregnant woman she has been looking after to come to the lunch. Ms. Crowe says the food banks have almost no fresh fruit and vegetables. Lunch at the church is a thick broth of meat and vegetables, a pasta-and-bean salad, fresh fruit and fruit juices.

Ms. Crowe and fellow nurse (and inquiry organizer) Alicia Odette of Street Health carry on nursing throughout the day. They arrange a referral to a dental clinic, examine a rash and a sore shoulder, hand out throat lozenges and Tylenol tablets, give someone bus tickets, hear about someone who is unable to get a health card because of lost identification, advise a woman on how to apply to her welfare office for money to bury her husband, hear from another woman about a man who has died.

So a day of testimony about homeless life. And then our conclusions about what is wrong and must -- in a just society -- be fixed. A reporter at Thursday's press conference asked us how realistic our recommendations were. Sarah Polley responded: "The question is not 'What is realistic?' The question is: 'What is common sense?'"

None of us remain in doubt that the Ontario government's 21.6-per-cent cut in social assistance rates last October has hit Toronto's poor -- and particularly its homeless -- like a bomb. We recommend the cut be cancelled.

Gatean Heroux, who runs one of the few homeless drop-in shelters open on weekends (at Central Neighbourhood House), speaks of an 80-per-cent increase in people using the shelter since the cut. He describes the tension in the building one cold afternoon when 140 sleep-deprived men crowded into a space that comfortably accommodates only 80 to 100 -- with another 50 waiting outside to get in.

"It [is] an environment that is not safe. You have to say: 'Stop this growth.' I have been at meetings where people talked about taking over football fields for the homeless." Dr. Tyrone Turner, chief of psychiatry at downtown Doctors Hospital, echoes him: "We've got to halt the supply of homeless people."

Private charity, and thousands of sleeping bags, won't do that.

Julia McNally, a lawyer at Neighbourhood Legal Services clinic with expertise in housing issues, says that in past months the number of eviction cases before the courts in Toronto on any one day has doubled from 25 to 50.

Ann Fitzpatrick of Metro Children's Aid Society reports that between August, 1995, and February, 1996, the number of social-assistance households in private accommodation paying rents in excess of their shelter allowance increased from 33 per cent to 68 per cent. She reports that the number of families on CAS files living in shared accommodation has doubled in one year.

More than 80 per cent of welfare households who rent accommodation in Ontario live in private housing. The Ontario government is proposing to remove rent controls. Ms. McNally says approximately 50,000 households -- more than half of them in Toronto -- are on the waiting list for public housing. The wait for most public housing in the city is five to seven years. The Ontario government has cancelled new social housing projects. We recommend it reverse this policy. We say the city is too wealthy to permit such economic discrimination against its poor.

We hear one horror story after another of life in large dormitory hostels -- of assaults, of men being robbed of their few possessions, of the impossibility of sleep in an environment populated by many seriously disturbed people, of the risk of being infected by disease; of why, in short, so many homeless men prefer to sleep on the streets. We say male hostels have to be re-invented.

We hear of men being barred arbitrarily from Seaton House for petty rule infractions, of being barred from numerous hostels in winter because they are drunk (in a population where alcoholism is endemic). We are told the city's so-called wet hostel -- known as the Schoolhouse -- is no more difficult to manage than dry hostels. We recommend the creation of more wet hostels.

We are told the homeless are seven times more likely than the non-homeless to use hospital emergency departments. We also hear stories of abusive treatment of the homeless in hospitals, of hospital staff who make clear they don't want to touch the homeless, of difficult men being injured when hospital staff restrain them, of men being thrown out in the snow.

We are told by public-health nurses that dental care for the homeless is virtually non-existent. We are told of many young women who look twice their age because of missing teeth.

We hear public-health nurses describe the homeless as unidentifiable. They say at least half the homeless people they see have no health cards, and cannot get them because they can't afford the required pieces of identification -- birth certificates, social-insurance cards, citizenship certificates. We are annoyed by this barrier. We recommend an end to fees for poor people for government documentation.

We hear from doctors, nurses and social workers that proposed schemes such as Code Blue -- which would enable police to forcibly remove the homeless from the streets and take them to shelters -- would be counter-productive, provoking and intensifying fear in a fearful population and driving them further beyond the reach of assistance. We reject these proposals.

We read reports on Toronto's homeless dating back more than a decade (including a coroner's jury report on the death of Drina Joubert who froze on the street in 1985). We are struck by the repetitiousness of the recommendations -- we ourselves are making the same recommendations. Where has the action been?

We listen to Fred Martin of the Good Shepherd Mission:

"Our agency is very aware of the difficulties governments have in dealing with the current fiscal problems, but government must realize that the dismantling of the social-safety net has a human toll. People dying on the streets, going hungry and without shelter are not signs of a progressive society. They are signs of a seriously troubled society."

We agree.

Sick in body and mind

Testimony at the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness inquiry provided this list of common physical and mental illnesses of homeless people:

Kidney and heart disease

Pneumonia

Liver disease -- so much Hepatitis B (from contaminated needles) that Anishnawbe Health Centre doesn't test for it any more, just vaccinates

Septicemia and cellulitis (general and localized blood poisoning, the latter usually in the lower legs)

Presence of tuberculosis (about 40 per cent of the homeless are infected)

Widespread malnutrition

Lice

Horrendous dental problems (many homeless ask for their teeth to be pulled to get rid of the pain)

Head injuries from falls and assaults

Incidence of chronic illnesses -- diabetes and cancer, for example -- significantly higher than in the general population

Pandemic foot ailments -- infections, skin ulcers, circulation problems -- in a group that spends a considerable proportion of the day walking

Headaches

Second-degree sunburn from May to September; hypothermia and frostbite from November to March

Pre-natal complications

Sexual assault Anomie (lacking accepted standards of social behaviour)

Depression -- an estimated 50 per cent meet the criteria for clinical depression; severe psychological effects arise from the stress of coping with daily adversity (especially among those who have lost jobs, housing, financial security and family)

Schizophrenia -- The voices often become more intense and tortuous, exacerbated by living in a state of fear and isolation

Extreme sleep deprivation -- in which a person finds it very difficult to think logically, develop a mental plan or function at anything beyond a very basic level ("How can I stay safe? How can I stay away from people?")

Suicide -- One-quarter of the homeless people seen by Street Health have considered it; 10 per cent have attempted it

Drug and alcohol abuse -- addictions counsellor Don Hart said about one-third of Toronto's homeless suffer from substance abuse

Illustration

Document glob000020011014ds6100ouu

Winnipeg Free Press

Canadian Wire Stories

Toronto warms up to its dying homeless By Marjo Cusipag Canadian Press

Canadian Press

480 words

19 February 1996

Winnipeg Free Press

WFP

b2

English

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IN A few minutes, Ed will spread his sleeping bag in the doorway of a busy Toronto street, recessed between a bank and a shoe boutique.

It's about the size of a walk-in freezer at McDonald's, says Ed, 42. He extends his arms to illustrate his point, revealing a hole in the armpit of his soiled beige parka. "And it's just as cold," he adds. "No, colder."

For the next few nights, however, Ed and about 200 other homeless people will sleep in a heated Canadian Forces armory. Prompted by unusually frigid temperatures, Toronto has declared an emergency and ordered the armory opened as a shelter.

Many parts of Canada have been punished by a cruel winter. But in the country's largest city, the weather hit an estimated 19,500 street people especially hard.

Three have died.

On Jan. 5, Eugene Upper, 56, was found frozen to death in a bus shelter. This month, two more men died, one with his hands frozen to his face. "We were kind of caught off guard," says Jack Layton, a Toronto councillor now in charge of a task force on street people. "People hadn't been freezing to death in Toronto for a few years."

The deaths sparked action. More churches opened their doors, turning pews into beds. An aboriginal outreach group that tends to street people increased their patrols from one to three a night.

Security guards pitched in, offering to drive people to shelters. Several organizations donated sleeping bags.

Toronto politicians approved \$600,000 in emergency funding and a help hotline, shut down in January because of provincial funding cutbacks, was reactivated.

Nothing like a cold snap, says Kathy Petrie, to make people suddenly remember the woman sleeping under a truck or the university student, forced to drop out of school, finding warmth in bank lobbies.

In the southern Ontario city of St. Catharines, where Petrie is an assistant pastor, a church is opening its doors to homeless people for the first time in recent memory.

In London, Ont., where a 16-year-old girl lost her toes after wandering shoeless for two days, half a dozen churches have also become temporary shelters.

In Vancouver, some office buildings became warm havens for the homeless.

But amid the goodwill, the question of the rights of the homeless arose.

Two Vancouver women refused to come in from the cold, sparking a debate about whether people who may be mentally ill should be taken to shelters against their will.

At the same time, Code Blue, a cold-weather protocol that allows police in Philadelphia to round up street people, was examined as a possible model for Toronto.

CP PHOTO It's been a cruel winter . In Toronto, 3 street people have died.

Document wfp0000020011015ds2j002ug



LETTER

Homelessness: Cause is obvious

252 words

9 February 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A20

English

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Your two lead articles on death by freezing (Feb. 3) are sorely deficient in their analysis (Another homeless man dies from cold and Deep-rooted problems keep homeless outside).

By labeling the deceased as mentally disabled, your articles allegedly explain the phenomenon, marginalize the victims and exonerate our elected politicians from any specific responsibility.

If the three unfortunate persons were in fact mentally ill or brain damaged - assumptions which are clearly debatable - why did they wind up homeless?

For more than 25 years we have been closing psychiatric hospitals and putting people on the street without adequate supports or assistance. The blame for this appalling failure of deinstitutionalization lies directly with Mike Harris - and with Bob Rae, David Peterson, Bill Davis and John Robarts.

Maybe the three who froze to death were on the street because they had nowhere to live. And maybe they had nowhere to live because they didn't have enough money.

And maybe they didn't have enough money because Harris, after promising to protect people with disabilities, cut their welfare cheques by 22 per cent. It's hard to find even cheap housing in Toronto. The cause-effect linkage is not hard to follow.

We have two choices with people who are clearly unable to work: We can support them one way or another, or we can let them freeze on the streets in winter. The Tories have made their choice clear.

Ernie Lightman

Professor of Social Policy

University of Toronto

Toronto

Document TOR0000020080119ds29008v9

News

Metro hostels struggle to meet demand Lack of affordable housing leading to more families becoming homeless, report says

MARGARET PHILP

685 words

6 February 1996

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

A3

English

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TORONTO

The number of beds available in hostels and motels may not be enough to accommodate the burgeoning population of homeless people expected this year in Toronto, a report by Metro Toronto's hostel division warns.

Presented yesterday to Metro's human services committee, the report says that even with plans in place to bolster the supply of beds by 21 per cent this year, Metro's hostel system is expected to just barely meet the demand posed by an expected 500 additional people seeking shelter in 1996.

At the peak in homelessness last year, there were 3,727 people housed in shelters - 700 more than the year before - and enough room throughout the system to sleep 3,798 people. With a few more beds sandwiched into existing hostels and an expanding list of motels under contract, capacity will grow to 4,582 beds this year. But the number of people who will be forced out of their homes over the course of the year remains less clear.

"Much of this is uncharted territory," the report acknowledges. "While the shelter system is still manageable, we really do not know what is ahead."

The report says a shrinking stock of cheap apartments for rent is largely to blame for Toronto's homelessness problem, which started to soar last May. The average vacancy rate for one-bedroom apartments in Toronto, according to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., sits at 0.6 per cent.

But the report says that the recent 21.6-per-cent cut in provincial welfare rates has made the problem worse. Workers in homeless shelters have begun noticing families seeking refuge who were evicted from their homes after failing to pay the rent once their welfare cheque was slashed, and the fallout from the welfare cuts is expected to grow in the coming months.

Metro's hostel-services division is projecting that it will shelter 47 per cent more people in its hostels and motels in 1996 than the number expected when the 1995 budget was approved.

Many of those homeless people will be women and children. Women flocked to shelters last year, with 270 women showing up on hostel doorsteps last October when there were only 257 beds. The number of single-parent families led by a mother seeking refuge soared 52 per cent last year.

By last November, the system was opening its doors to an average of 1,894 people arriving as families. About 63 per cent of those family members - 1,200 - were children.

"In our experience, adult women do everything possible to avoid becoming homeless," the report says. "Life on the streets is dangerous for women and not an option that many would choose. It naturally follows that those women who do become homeless are exceptionally vulnerable and needy."

As a result, the hostel division is increasing the number of beds in women's shelters by 51 per cent this year, to 388. The supply of beds for hostels serving families, including motels, will grow by 25 per cent, to 2,352.

"People think that homeless people are really these men who are freezing to death," said Metro Councillor Olivia Chow, a member of the human services committee. "But the dramatic increase are children and women. Families. That in itself is quite shocking."

While Metro houses many of its homeless families in a strip of inexpensive motels in Scarborough, five of the seven new contracts it signed with motel owners last year were in other parts of Metro. But there may be problems expanding the existing network of motels. Hostel officials have encountered reluctance from motel owners in a similar strip in Etobicoke, and have felt compelled to turn down offers from motel owners outside Metro.

To meet the surge in homelessness, the \$53.3-million budget for Metro's hostel services was increased by \$8.3-million for this year. The province pays 80 per cent of the cost, while Metro covers the remaining 20 per cent.

Document glob000020011014ds26005s0

NEWS

On patrol with street 'angels' 'Homeless people are human beings who need to be treated with dignity'

By Peter Small TORONTO STAR

1,655 words

4 February 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

SU2

A14

English

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"I've given up, Carol," rasped a homeless man called Frank, sitting up weakly in his sleeping bag in a dirty Chinatown East storefront Friday night.

Irwin Anderson, Frank's friend, died several buildings away that day and Carol Polych, an Anishnawbe street patrol nurse, urged him to come out of the brutal cold.

"My legs have been just giving up on me," Frank complained in the courtyard off Gerrard St. E. and Broadview Ave. "Nothing solid is staying inside me."

Polych gently suggested he go to hospital, or at least to Council Fire drop-in shelter on Parliament St. He refused, but said he might go to a health clinic on Monday.

He pressed two \$5 bills into her hands. "Put that toward street patrol," he said, his leathery fingers tattooed with the words HATE and LOVE. She gave him a hug.

In another part of the city later on, a man sat blanketless on a steam grate arguing that Premier Mike Harris is on the right track in cutting welfare.

Another man slept nearby with his wheelchair parked beside him. A third looked like a college freshman and hinted he may be Jesus Christ.

They were among scores of men and women checked by Metro's only full-time street patrol as temperatures dipped to -16C Friday night.

The patrol's primary aim: To prevent any more freezing deaths.

Three victims have been claimed over the past month: Anderson, an unidentified man found Thursday under the Gardiner Expressway, and Eugene Upper, found Jan. 5 in a Spadina Ave. bus shelter.

Deaths such as these helped convince Metro Toronto Council on Thursday to approve \$600,000 in emergency funding, some for Anishnawbe's street patrol, a centre run by Indian peoples.

Barbra Nahwegahbow, Anishnawbe Health Toronto's executive director, summed up their philosophy: "Street people are human beings that need to be treated with dignity."

6:05 p.m.: Volunteers were making more than 150 sandwiches and a giant pot of soup in the small basement kitchen of Anishnawbe Health Toronto on Queen St. E. near Sherbourne St.

Volunteer Kim McQuabbie, a 25-year-old Ojibway studying at George Brown College, joked that they were making hunter soup: "We hunt around the kitchen."

Volunteer Joanne Wilson, 28, ladled the steaming vegetable, bean and steak concoction into a pair of two-foot-high rectangular containers.

Wilson, a medical worker from Pickering, was there for the "personal satisfaction" of helping others.

Alain Raymond, 28, a professional driver, said he volunteered to beat the winter blahs. "Instead of being depressed at home, I just help out."

6:33 p.m.: In the rear parking lot, Paul Martineau, a street outreach worker, loaded the van with blankets, sleeping bags, sweaters, socks and toques.

"We don't have any mitts or gloves. It would be nice to get some. Toques, you can never get enough of," said Martineau, a Cree who has been patrolling since September.

Long plumes of vapor rose from brilliant Bay St. towers in the distance. The moon looked full through the freezing night air.

The volunteers loaded soup and coffee containers, pop, juice, cups, and sandwiches in the back of the van.

7:09 p.m.: The van headed east on Queen St. with staff scanning doorways and alleys for people sleeping out or apparently needing help.

"We're trained to look for people. Sometimes they're hard to see," explained nurse Joan Knapp, who will soon take over from Polych as the nurse that rides the van two nights a week.

At Broadview Ave. and Queen St. they stopped to check on two pedestrians with sleeping bags.

"We're hungry," said one of the men, John Gardnar, 30, as he approached the van. "If it weren't for you, we'd be screwed."

Gardnar planned to sleep in a stairwell that night because he hates shelters. "It stinks and there are too many crack people," he said.

He said he'd been sleeping rough since January and his welfare cheque was held up while Metro caseworkers tried to confirm he's no longer living in Mississauga.

"I should be working," he added. "I should have a job."

8:23 p.m.: Wilson and Raymond spotted a shape under an orange blanket on a bench sitting on a traffic island on University Ave.

A woman's voice within the blanket refused all help. "I'm okay thanks."

They vowed to return later.

"You can't disturb them when they refuse," Raymond explained.

8:33 p.m.: Location. Location. Location.

Set next to historic Campbell House along trendy Queen St. W. is one of the most sought-after hot air grates in the city.

"It's first come, first served," declared Martin, 42, the genial host, an Indian originally from Manitoba but now a Toronto street veteran.

Fights over the grate are rare, he said.

"We're mainly natives here. We're pretty fair," he smiled under a toque that covered his long, stringy hair as a tropical blast of steam surrounded him.

Cat, his girlfriend, tottered toward Polych to chat, one eye half-closed from some apparent injury.

Martin explained that he and Cat sleep rough because shelters don't allow couples. "I'd have to go to Seaton House and she'd have to go to some place for women," he said.

Nobody cares about the homeless, except when somebody dies, he added.

Elvis, their drunken friend, climbed in the van to be driven to Council Fire.

9:25 p.m.: Simon looked too fresh-faced and healthy to be sleeping on a Simcoe St. grate north of Dundas Ave. The 26-year-old still looked like the community college student he was before dropping out for lack of money.

Simon said his ambition was to help the poor and save souls. He hinted that he's the Messiah, but refused to say if he really believed it.

A few minutes later, on University Ave. again, Polych rechecked the woman under the orange blanket.

"Someone froze to death last night," Polych said to the blanket.

"Oh, it's not that cold," the woman replied, never showing her face.

But she let them put sandwiches under her pillow.

9:51 p.m.: A man called Lucky Joseph, at John and King St., drank soup from a cup and explained he's not afraid of freezing to death because he doesn't drink alcohol. Drunks don't get up and walk around when they start to freeze, he said.

The 48-year-old former crane operator recently returned from a hitchhiking trip to the Yukon in a failing bid for a mining job.

Joseph added that he's a good worker. "I can't read or write, but I'm pretty handy with my mind."

11 p.m.: Tucked away on a dark concrete alcove under the Gardiner Expressway, Mike slept with 10 layers of bedding shielding him from the bitter cold.

"It's pretty hard to believe that some people froze to death," he said. Two blankets are all you need, he claimed.

Polych asked him if he was wearing the thermal pants she gave him. "I only use them when it's really cold," he said.

Midnight: Todd's spot on Bathurst St. is a sort of pen made of siding and plywood that's filled with bits of junk, including a street sign and a shopping cart.

"I sure wish somebody would turn the thermostat up," joked the bearded, sensitive looking man lying under many sleeping bags.

There are people in the city who chase others from place to place until they die, he confided. "I'm here on a military investigation," he added, his voice barely audible.

12:54 a.m.: In the financial district, early yesterday, the bodies are easy to find.

A man calling himself Newfie lay in a Royal Bank Plaza access lane. Relaxing with a cigarette, he said he avoids shelters because last time he went, in 1971, he "got all bugged up with fleas and lice."

Nearby, Pat Hayes, a 56-year-old artist, sat over a grate with only a coat and no blankets.

He talked about the Harris cuts.

While denying he was a Harris supporter, Hayes added that something had to be done about rising welfare caseloads.

"A lot of people got stuck in a rut and started to lose initiative," he said.

1:20 a.m.: Edward Seymour, 36, lay on the sidewalk in a sleeping bag, his legs paralyzed from blood clots, his wheelchair parked beside him.

"I just can't find a place to live. They're all at cutthroat prices," Seymour said, adding that he gets \$639 a month in welfare.

He asked Polych to remove stitches from a cut over his eye.

While Knapp held a flashlight for illumination, Polych searched in vain for stitches on the nasty one-inch gash. But she managed to disinfect and close the wound by 1:39 a.m.

A few more stops and, at 2:05, it was back to base.

Another crew got ready to take the van out until 9 a.m.

STAR COLOR PHOTO (Loek): Page A1 - Nurses Joan Knapp, left, Carol Polych of Anishnawbe street patrol tend to Edward Seymour during frigid late-night patrol. The 36-year-old man is paralyzed from blood clots in his leg says he "can't find a place to live." Story, A14. 3 STAR COLOR PHOTOS (Loek): ON PATROL: John Gardnar, above, holds cup of soup, while nurse Joan Knapp, below, checks on Edward Seymour who had cut on face. SEEKING WARMTH: One man battles Friday night's bitterly cold temperatures by sitting on top of a steam grate on Simcoe St. in downtown .

Document TOR0000020080119ds240089w

NEWS

Death on our streets ...and Metro okays rescue mission

By Peter Small TORONTO STAR

600 words

2 February 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

A1

English

Copyright (c) 1996 The Toronto Star

The death of a man whose frozen body was found early yesterday weighed heavily on the minds of Metro councillors as they debated whether to approve \$600,000 in emergency funding for the homeless.

Some 40 activists and homeless people sat in Metro Hall urging councillors to approve the proposed \$600,000 in emergency funding to prevent freezing deaths.

Politicians were poised to immediately approve some of the money, despite revenue woes, as budget deliberations continued last night.

The unidentified man found at Bay St. and Lake Shore Blvd. W. was the second found dead on Toronto streets in a month.

Eugene Upper was discovered in a Spadina Ave. bus shelter Jan. 5, prompting calls for the emergency fund.

"No more funerals," one demonstrator shouted, as security guards looked on anxiously. "We want a decision."

One held up a sign that read: "Something's wrong when Westinghouse and Frigidaire do a better job of housing the homeless than the province of Ontario and Metro." This referred to discarded cardboard boxes that used to contain fridges and are later used as make-do shelters.

"It's a dangerous situation," Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall said during the debate as she urged fellow councillors to approve the funds.

"I do not believe any one of you will be faulted by a single member of your constituencies if you support that, but you will be if you don't."

North York Mayor Mel Lastman said he was "totally sickened" by the sight of people sleeping in Toronto's streets, adding his support for the funding.

The \$600,000 proposal contained in a report to council would help drop-in centres meet increased demands; bolster street youth services; help homeless people with psychiatric problems; cover additional street patrols by Anishnawbe Health Toronto; and help pay for two homeless phone hotlines.

It's also proposed that Metro Chairman Alan Tonks call a meeting with Metro police Chief David Boothby, area mayors, fire chiefs and Metro's ambulance commissioner to develop a protocol to ensure "the safe referral and transport of 'at risk' patients" to shelters, detoxication centres or medical facilities.

Metro's advisory committee on homeless and socially isolated persons, which penned the report, also urges the province to open additional detoxication beds, especially for women.

The committee wants the Toronto Transit Commission to allow agencies serving the homeless to buy cut-rate bulk transit tickets for their clients.

Meanwhile, businessman Allan Sparrow, who was a downtown city alderman from 1974 to 1980, said he is appalled by Metro's inability to stop freezing deaths on the streets this winter, The Star's Laurie Monsebraaten reports.

"It doesn't take a task force, more vans, special telephone hot lines or even any more money," he said yesterday.

"It takes common sense. If someone is outside on a night when it's 20 below you bring them in. Period."

There are at least 200 police officers on the beat downtown every night, he said. These officers are commanded to serve and protect and when it's below freezing, they have an obligation to protect citizens from freezing to death, Sparrow said.

And if you see someone you believe may be at risk of freezing on a cold night, call the police at 911, he said. "This is their job."

Metro police Sergeant Joseph McVeigh at police headquarters agreed officers have the authority - and indeed the duty - to pick up people who are a risk to themselves or others on a freezing night.

Document TOR0000020080119ds22007zj

EDITORIAL

Help the homeless

309 words

1 February 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A20

English

Copyright (c) 1996 The Toronto Star

There are about 4,000 homeless on the streets of Canada's largest and richest city. For the most part, Metro Toronto's shame is hidden and forgotten. But when Eugene Upper froze to death in a bus shelter during a recent cold snap, the horrible reality was exposed to those who would rather turn the other way.

It's time we all paid attention.

A motion before Metro Council today asks for \$600,000 in emergency funds to help prevent further freezing deaths. Councillors should show moral leadership and approve the spending.

In these tough times, council is indeed faced with difficult budget decisions. Many services are being chopped to keep property taxes in line. But is there a demand more competing of our compassion than to help these victims of the economic recession and government cutbacks?

The Ontario government's cuts in welfare rates and in non-profit housing have started to take hold. Men, women, and families with young children can no longer afford their homes and are on the doorsteps of hostels and day shelters. In addition, others who should be in mental health centres have been turned loose on our streets to fend for themselves.

"We are overwhelmed," says Gaetan Heroux of Central Neighborhood House, where the number of people seeking refuge has jumped more than 25 per cent.

The \$600,000 would help fund two emergency hotlines for homeless people, provide a second street patrol van, add staff at drop-in centres, coordinate placement of homeless at hostels, and pay a social worker to help the homeless find shelter.

A report to Council says Toronto is facing the largest demand for emergency housing since the Great Depression.

Such need demands an extra dose of compassion. Metro Council can help remove this rising source of shame for all of us.

Document TOR0000020080119ds21007u4

News

Committee calls for \$600,000 to help homeless With more than 4,000 people living on Toronto's streets, situation is worse than during Great Depression

MARGARET PHILP

695 words

31 January 1996

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

A8

English

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TORONTO

An advisory committee hastily assembled a few weeks ago to prevent further freezing deaths on Toronto streets will push Metro Council today to pump an additional \$600,000 immediately into emergency services for the homeless.

The Metro Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons, thrown together after the death of Eugene Upper in a Toronto bus shelter during a recent cold snap, will ask that a \$600,000 emergency fund be created to contend with a massive rise in homelessness in Toronto and the 23-per-cent jump in the number of people showing up on hostel doorsteps.

With about 4,000 people living on Toronto's streets - close to 1,000 more than this time last year - the ranks of the city's homeless have surpassed the levels reached during the Great Depression, in the days before government-funded social services such as welfare and unemployment insurance were available.

Toronto has witnessed this sharp rise in homelessness only in the past five months after the Ontario government cut welfare rates by 21.6 per cent and ended funding for new non-profit housing.

For the first time this year, families with young children account for the largest share of the homeless population bedding down in Toronto's shelters. The number of two-parent families seeking refuge at shelters has jumped 27 per cent since last year.

With hostels filled to capacity, many of these families are being housed along a seedy strip of motels in Scarborough known to be frequented by prostitutes and drug dealers.

Metro Councillor Jack Layton, the committee's acting chairman, said he believes that Toronto residents have become so accustomed to stepping around homeless people sprawled in the street that they have become hardened to the growing poverty around them.

"A decade ago, people weren't freezing to death in this city," Mr. Layton said in an interview yesterday. "What's beginning to happen is people have come to accept the proposition that people are going to freeze in big cities. What we're saying is we have to roll up our sleeves and do something about it."

The committee's report insists that the \$600,000 fund should represent a fresh investment and not be diverted from other social services financed by Metro. "To do so will exacerbate the conditions causing homelessness," it concludes.

Mr. Layton said he didn't know where this money would come from, but has included it for consideration by the committee establishing Metro's financial priorities.

The cost of Metro's hostel services is shared with the Ontario government, which funds 80 per cent.

Down the road, the committee will grapple with the more enduring problem of homelessness. Councillor Dennis Fotinos, head of the Metro's human services committee, has suggested that as a longer-term solution the former site of Princess Margaret Hospital be converted into an apartment building for low-income tenants.

The fund being proposed today represents the committee's best estimate of the cost of addressing the surge in demand placed on services such as drop-in centres for street people, outreach services for street youth and support for homeless people suffering from psychiatric problems.

Should it be approved by Metro Council today, about \$100,000 of the fund would be earmarked for expanding the Anishnawbe Street Patrol and the emergency telephone lines operated by the Metro Community Information Centre.

The street patrol has already added another shift of volunteers and a new van to tour Toronto streets, providing a meal and a cup of coffee to the estimated 200 hard-core homeless people in Toronto who shun the shelters.

The committee's report also recommends: Adding staff to the handful of shelters operated by Metro, which are stretched to the limits by the surge in demand for meals and shelter; Demanding funds from the province to increase the number of beds available to women in detoxification programs; Persuading the Toronto Transit Commission to offer tickets at steep discounts.

Document glob000020011014ds1v0017t

NEWS

Metro to study homeless problem 'People are not supposed to die on our streets'

By Peter Small TORONTO STAR

376 words

18 January 1996

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A3

English

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Metro Council has launched a committee to study the homeless and is calling for an inquest into the death of a man who died in a bus shelter during this month's brutal cold snap.

An inquest into the death of Eugene Upper, 56, would uncover whether anything could have been done to prevent his death two weeks ago, Councillor Jack Layton (Toronto-Don River) said yesterday.

"People are not supposed to die on our streets," said Councillor Blake Kinahan (Etobicoke-Lakeshore-Queensway) in supporting the move.

A coroner's inquest will be held into Upper's death if tests confirm he died of exposure, Ontario's deputy chief coroner, Jim Cairns, has said.

Council asked that the inquest, if held, investigate methods of preventing other deaths of the homeless.

Homelessness is already on the rise, and will only grow worse this year as more people are evicted from their apartments and houses, said Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall.

"They've run out of people to borrow from. They've pawned everything pawnable," Hall told fellow councillors.

Councillors also launched the advisory committee on services to the homeless and socially isolated to examine emergency measures for preventing further freezing deaths.

The committee will provide a monthly report on deaths and near-deaths due to homeless-ness and will investigate whether empty hospital wards could be used for hostels.

Councillor Olivia Chow (Toronto-Downtown), near whose home Upper's body was found, said agencies helping the homeless are seeing a dramatic hike in demand.

"My phone's ringing off the hook with moms and kids being evicted," she said.

One mother was evicted after being hit simultaneously with a rent hike and a 21.6 per cent cut in welfare last fall, Chow said.

Councillor Joan King (North York-Seneca Heights) said she is noticing, already, a change in the streets. "What we are seeing is a tremendous divide between those who have and those who haven't."

King suggested that members of the corporate world should be included on the homelessness committee. "They have to take responsibility for the social ills in our city."

Document TOR0000020080119ds1i005gg

NEWS

More deaths among homeless expected

348 words

24 October 1995

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A7

English

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More vulnerable people will be living - and even dying - on Metro streets this winter due to provincial cuts to welfare and other social services, politicians said yesterday.

"We're definitely looking at more people freezing to death on the streets this winter," said Metro Councillor Olivia Chow.

"As the vacancy rate drops and relatively stable people get pushed into the hostels, the truly vulnerable - the expsychiatric patients and the street youth who have been abused - will have no options," she said. "There will be deaths as it gets colder."

Last weekend, Metro's 4,000 hostel beds for the homeless were full - an unprecedented situation for October. Metro officials blame it on the low rental vacancy rate and slow economy.

"It doesn't take great powers of imagination to say that if the temperatures go below freezing there will be a lot of street people who are going to be at serious, serious risk," Metro Chairman Alan Tonks said.

But Tonks and others said they are bracing for the worst when the full impact of the province's 21.6 per cent welfare cuts kick in and the temperatures drop later this fall.

Man charged as beaten man dies in bed

A Toronto man has been charged with manslaughter after a man was fatally beaten outside a Scarborough restaurant.

Gary Mortimer, 35, was found dead in his bed Sunday morning in his family's home in the Ellesmere Rd.-Pharmacy Ave. area of Scarborough. Mortimer was punched in the face at 12:30 a.m. Sunday.

Charged is Robert John Falconer of Holydene Rd.

Accused faces psychiatric testing

A youth charged in the slaying of Scarborough boot store manager Louis Amba has been ordered to undergo a psychological and psychiatric assessment.

Judge Petra Newton approved the petition for assessment by crown attorney Mary Hall in Scarborough youth court yesterday.

A 17-year-old from North York is being held without bail in the May 10 stabbing death of Amba, 37, at the Tom Houston boot store on Kingston Rd. near Cliffside Dr.

Document TOR0000020080217drao0197w

NEWS

Sleeping bags help homeless survive a cruel winter

by Barbara Aarsteinsen TORONTO STAR

830 words

20 March 1994

The Toronto Star

TOR

SU2

A6

English

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A bit of flannel and some down - that's what has stood between life and death this winter for many of Metro's homeless.

Countless people living on the streets have survived the cruelest winter in decades thanks to sleeping bags donated by the public and distributed by Metro police and various charities.

"We've given out an awful lot of sleeping bags and I think it has made a big, big difference," says Harvey Manning, a street worker with the Anishnawbe Health Centre's Street Patrol, an outreach project for the homeless. "If you have a bag and a warm air grate you're all set for a night in the starlight motel."

The program, Project Warmth, was organized last year by Ron Smith, a Toronto man who wanted to do something to aid the growing number of people he saw living on the streets.

"We were very lucky in our timing since this winter has turned out to be so very terrible," says Smith. "Not only may we have saved lives, but hopefully we prevented some cases of frostbite and a lot of misery in general. I thought the issue of homelessness would be a difficult one to get the public involved with, but the community has really come through in a very tough time."

Inspired by a giveaway he saw on U.S. television, Smith, president of a non-profit group called the Learning Support Council of Canada, recruited friends and colleagues to start a similar effort here.

A public appeal went out for sleeping bags and Canadian Tire offered its 52 Metro stores as collection depots. Cadet Cleaners volunteered to clean the donated bags and Metro police co-ordinated their distribution to various agencies and organizations.

Smith had hoped to bring in about 2,000 bags over the winter; in fact, more than 6,000 were handed out.

The project has been so successful that he helped launch a spinoff in Ottawa six weeks ago and he is working with organizations in several other cities to set up other offshoots.

"Project Warmth has been a very, very positive experience for us," says Sgt. Bob Crawford, head of the aboriginal peacekeeping unit of the Metro police, which made sure the bags got out to groups working with the disadvantaged.

"Not only did we make a difference in a lot of people's lives, but we learned a lot of things ourselves. We talked to many street people because of this program and we got a better understanding of why they're out there and what else can be done to better help them."

Besides helping to distribute the bags to various agencies, Crawford's unit also handed out close to 700 to street people who made requests at police headquarters. Other divisions pitched in and one inspector even carried around a supply in his car to give out whenever he spotted a need.

Thanks to another program, the Out of the Cold project, hundreds of others have also found much-needed respite this winter in a handful of churches, which open their doors at night to the homeless.

Ten churches now participate, double last year's number. Every night, one or two churches take in about 100 people who have nowhere else to go, providing them with food and shelter.

The seven-year-old program also recently opened a home, donated by St. Joseph's Health Centre, to accommodate longer stays. Ten men are allowed to remain a month in an effort to get back on their feet.

Plans are in the works to open another three facilities for similar longer-term stays.

"We are able to offer shelter to more people as more churches decide to join us, but demand often exceeds supply," says George Chester, co-ordinator of Out of the Cold, who credits Project Warmth with saving lives. "I'm absolutely amazed that we haven't had all kinds of freezing deaths, but those who can't or won't come in from the cold tell me that they are able to stay warm enough with the bags."

Since 1990, Metro police report, one person a year has died of exposure while on the streets of Metro. One exposure death was reported this year - a man who apparently fell asleep in a bus shelter after drinking cooking wine.

Nobody knows exactly how many people don't have any kind of a roof over their heads, so estimates vary widely. The number of real down-and-out cases is often put at around 300.

Similarly, it is almost impossible to estimate how many injuries or deaths there have been in which living on the streets may have been a contributing factor if not the direct cause.

Star photo (HENRY STANCU) SHIVERING ON THE STREET: Three people huddle in sleeping bags behind the Royal Bank Plaza at Bay Wellington Sts.

Document TOR000020080216dq3k009q8

Metro

Post Mortem Good intentions alone couldn't save Mary Popovich from a miserable death on the streets

By DENISE DAVY

THE SPECTATOR

2,058 words

5 March 1994

The Hamilton Spectator

HMSP

Final

C3

English

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But they were standing at the wrong grave.

Mary Popovich was a bag lady. And a pauper's grave doesn't offer the luxury of a gravestone.

Throughout much of Mary's adult life, the people who tried to help her often missed the mark. Her death, perhaps more so than her life, raises serious questions about how society responds to people with debilitating mental illnesses.

Mary slept on the front steps of a downtown shelter, her possessions stuffed into an old grocery cart. There wasn't much -- a pair of tattered men's beach sandals, a glass jar containing leftover coffee and rancid tangerine peels.

She wore layers of clothing to ward off the cold and found nooks and crannies where the wind couldn't reach her. A real survivor. That's how friends described her.

But sometime in the early morning of Oct. 23, Mary lost her battle. She'd gone to visit Cowboy, a friend who lived in a rundown walk-up on Barton Street East. But Cowboy wasn't home. So Mary waited on the wooden balcony, surrounded by discarded furniture.

She pulled her tattered black coat tightly around her small frame to protect herself from temperatures that dropped below freezing that night.

The next morning, friends found her hunched forward in an old black vinyl office chair. Her head, with its shock of white hair, rested on a table in front of her.

A coroner pronounced her dead at 2.15 p.m. Probable cause of death: respiratory failure. That surprised no one. Mary had suffered from pneumonia, emphysema and bronchitis. She also was a smoker.

Her years on the street had taken their toll. The doctor guessed she was in her mid-80s. She had only recently celebrated her 65th birthday.

There was no family to pay for the burial, so funeral costs were picked up by Hamilton-Wentworth. Mary found her final resting spot in grave 77, row 38, section 10 of Woodland Cemetery.

Mary was born on Aug. 10, 1929, to Sophia Graboski and Frederick Popovich. It's not clear where she was born but at sometime during her childhood, her family moved from Winnipeg to St. Catharines.

Her mother remarried after her father died of heart disease. Mary made it through grade 8. A series of office jobs followed.

Mary was in her early 20s when she was first admitted to St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. Doctors described her as "pale, underweight, preoccupied and vague." Diagnosis: possibly schizophrenic.

Electro-convulsive treatment (shock therapy), a once common treatment for schizophrenia, was ordered.

In 1954, the hospital placed her in a boarding house but within a year, she was back in a psychiatric hospital, this time in North Bay. One of her doctors noted, 'Prognosis does not appear favorable.'

Over the next few years, Mary was in and out of boarding homes and hospitals.

In the late '50s, Mary gave birth to a boy, who was put up for adoption.

By now, Mary was becoming a frequent guest of the province's psychiatric institutions -- some stays stretching up to six years.

Mary's symptoms could be controlled with anti-psychotic drugs but without supervision, she simply stopped taking her medication.

The '70s marked the beginning of a government push to transfer psychiatric patients from hospitals into the community. Mary was part of that move.

In 1976, she began treatment at St. Joseph's Hospital's Community Psychiatry Services, an out-patient psychiatric service. For many years, the arrangement worked. Mary dropped in for her regular injections. Life was relatively normal.

In the late '80s, things began to unravel.

Mary stopped going to the centre. Then she was kicked out of her apartment and, for 18 months, lived behind a house on Ferguson Avenue North. Mary had become a permanent fixture at both the Wesley and Good Shepherd centres.

Gilbert De Almeida, whom she had met at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre during one of her early admissions, helped her with laundry and meals. Periodically, they shared accommodations but never for long. Mary was incontinent, says Mr. De Almeida. 'She was hard to live with. She smelled.'

The park across from First Place on King Street East became her new home. She'd sit there all day and sleep there at night. Later, she made her home in front of the courthouse at Main and John streets. But the stench from her cart sparked complaints and it wasn't long before the police were called and she was asked to move.

On Aug. 2, 1990, she was admitted to St. Joseph's Hospital with breathing problems. She also was suffering from kidney problems and there was some suspicion she might have suffered a coronary. Her skin was covered with sores and she was malnourished. She was treated and transferred to the hospital's psychiatric unit.

In May 1992, Mary was again admitted to Queen Street Mental Health Centre, then transferred to the HPH. It was her last visit there. And she was refusing all treatment.

After her release, she briefly returned to Mr. De Almeida's small apartment. Mary occasionally rented a room in a boarding house but, more often than not, the street was home.

She became a regular at the Wesley Centre on Rebecca Street. She'd stop by the shelter in the morning for a cup of coffee and come back at night when she needed a place to sleep.

But something happened last year and Mary began refusing to go inside the shelter. Already a crusty, sometimes cantankerous woman with a quick temper, it took less and less to set her off.

'Sometimes she wouldn't talk to anyone but then there'd be days when she'd share her cigarettes with anyone,' recalls Pat, a regular at the centre.

By last fall, the centre's cement steps had become her permanent home. Her already small frame, bundled in clothes reeking of urine, grew ever more emaciated. Her cough worsened.

In the morning, staff had to hose down the steps where she'd slept. They grew increasingly concerned about her health. They were watching her die.

'It was very difficult because you'd drive away from the Wesley Centre at night and see her sitting there. It's an incredibly awful feeling,' said Suzanne Swanton, a worker at the Housing Help Centre next door to Wesley.

Some of the homeless people at the centre offered her their sleeping bags and spare change.

Suzanne Foreman, community worker at Wesley, established a friendship with Mary, in part, by bringing her tangerines. She tried to convince Mary to get medical help.

'I said, 'Mary I'm really worried about you. If you let me go with you, I'll make sure they don't do anything you don't want.' Her response was always, 'I'm going down Friday.' But she never went,' said Ms Foreman.

Oman Huhad, a Hamilton-Wentworth public health nurse who works at Wesley two days a week, joined forces with Ms Foreman and Ms Swanton.

They decided Mary's condition was serious enough to have her hospitalized against her will. Under the Mental Health Act, they needed a physician who agreed.

That physician was Dr. Walter Owsianik. On Oct. 10, police came to his office and asked him to sign the forms that would permit Mary to be taken to hospital. But there was a hitch. She wasn't with them.

'I told the police officer, 'I have to see her first before I can sign anything', said Dr. Owsianik.

In fact, it's not entirely clear what obligations a physician has under the Act.

An Ontario Ministry of Health guide states: 'The act gives a physician latitude in forming an opinion based on his or her belief, either through his or her observations, or on the basis of facts revealed by others.'

However, the same guide also says the application for psychiatric assessment 'must state that the physician who signs it personally examined the person.'

When Dr. Owsianik realized the police did not have Mary in custody, he arranged with the officer to bring Mary to a parking lot by his office.

But by then, Mary had disappeared.

Mr. Huhad, Ms Foreman and Ms Swanton searched alleys and parks and eventually found her at the bus terminal on Rebecca Street. But Mary refused to get in the car and the officer refused to do anything without the signed forms, Ms Swanton said.

Under the act, an officer can take a person to a psychiatric facility, against her will, if the officer believes the person is mentally ill and poses a threat to herself or others, or is unable to care for herself.

In Mary's case, the officer contacted his superior and the decision was made not to take Mary into custody, says Ms Swanton.

Hamilton-Wentworth police Sergeant Dennis Waddle says there are "grey areas" in the act and police have to make 'judgment calls' about a person's mental competence.

'It's especially hard if the person is known as a street person. If I knew a person was a street person, I'd question whether it was a chosen lifestyle,' said Sgt. Waddle.

On that day, Mary wanted nothing to do with police.

'Why did you call them for?' Mary screamed at Ms Foreman. 'What did I ever do to you? You want me locked up in jail. You're not worth two cans of creamed corn.'

Says Ms Foreman: 'We confirmed her worst fears. She was terrified she was going to be institutionalized again.'

Mary stood before them, her hands and legs swollen to three times their normal size, her cough worsening, the sores on her skin now infected. And no one was able to help her.

Mary came back to the Wesley Centre a few times after that, but she wouldn't talk to anyone. A short while later, she was found dead.

'We all felt it,' said Ms Swanton. 'We asked ourselves, 'Was there anything else we could have done?' We still ask ourselves if there's anything else we could do. But we did everything.'

Dr. Owsianik said those who tried to help her were obligated to follow the rules of the Mental Health Act.

'I guess the human rights issue has gotten out of hand in the sense that it's gotten too liberal. Sometimes by protecting people (civil liberties) you can sort of hurt them,' said Dr. Owsianik.

Meanwhile, Mr. Huhad has been left wondering how he is going to

'deal with the other Marys?

'For me, as a frontline worker, the system is still the same. This is going to happen again unless something changes. I can feel it.'

Mary's death touched a chord in the city's social service community. In an unprecedented move, several agencies have banded together in a bid to co-ordinate and improve services for the homeless.

For them, the issue now has a face. It's the face of Mary sitting on the front steps at the Wesley Centre, her black coat wrapped tightly around her, her grocery cart by her side.

That's how Ms Foreman will remember her.

'Once or twice, she'd even smile when I took the (tangerine) peelings to the trash bin and headed back to the office. She'd ask if I'd bring more tomorrow and I'd promise to remember. I'd ask if she wouldn't think about heading inside for some hot soup.

'She said she'd think about it.'

FINDING ANSWERS

AN AD hoc group representing various health and social service agencies has put Mary Popovich's death under a magnifying glass. The group's mandate includes:

Identifying specific gaps in the social service system;

Establishing a rapid response team to help homeless people in crisis;

Arranging emergency coverage by a medical specialist who can assess and treat street people;

Examining the special needs of all homeless, including women in shelters and those in boarding houses;

Setting up emergency short-term housing for the homeless.

The group has been meeting since December.

in Hamilton (SEE PRINT COPY OR MICROFILM FOR DETAIL)

Document HMSP000020051211dq3500mxg

NEWS

Some prefer streets as home Many homeless shun Seaton House despite bitter cold

by Phinjo Gombu TORONTO STAR

601 words

27 December 1993

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A6

English

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Street people huddled outside in last night's bitter cold, yet some of the beds remained empty at Seaton House, Metro's largest hostel.

And without doubt, hostel workers say, many people will keep on spending their nights on the streets, in alleyways, over heating vents or any place they can find for some sleep.

"There are many people who just don't want to stay in shelters," Eugene Lovi, Seaton's night shift supervisor, says.

One such person may have been 29-year-old Efthimio Dimzas, 29, who was discovered late Saturday afternoon under the Bloor St. viaduct - after apparently freezing to death.

'SEMI-HOMELESS PERSON'

Metro police described him as a "semi-homeless person" because he had an apartment.

A jogger found him wearing just a light cotton shirt, blue jeans and running shoes. Police believe he may have died Christmas Eve or early Christmas Day. No foul play is suspected.

Dimzas, a schizophrenic under medication, had an apartment of his own on Dundas St. W. where he stayed after being released from the Queen St. Mental Health Centre a few years ago.

Dimzas was a sometime visitor to Seaton House, and Daniel Sanchez, the assistant house supervisor, knew him.

"Quite a few people who have apartments still come here for the food rather than stay alone in an apartment," Sanchez said. "They also come here for the TV or to be with people they know."

Sanchez said he is often at a loss to explain why many street people refuse to go to shelters during bitterly cold nights.

"There are facilities available and no one is turned away," he said.

Explanations could range from a fear of structure and authority in the hostels to some people just not wanting to socialize in a hostel setting, he said.

As an example, he said, some street people refuse to take showers suggested by hostel workers because they don't want to part with their belongings for even a moment.

Dimzas returned to his parents' home slightly more than a week ago saying he wanted to move back in with them.

But he suddenly disappeared a week ago, without any explanation.

"It's very much a shock that he died," said his brother Asterios Dimzas, 34. "Sometimes you feel so powerless to solve a problem."

Dimzas said his brother sometimes tended to be aggressive but his condition got progressively worse after he left the Queen St. Mental Health Centre and lived by himself without any centre supervision.

HAVE TO CHECK

The illness began about six years ago, he said.

"When someone does have a problem, you have to check on him or her so they don't get worse," Dimzas said, adding he wasn't talking about family supervision.

But his brother also refused to talk often about his illness or acknowledge that he needed to stay in hospital, he said.

"It's sad, the circumstances that existed, the way he died," Dimzas said.

His family, in their modest home on Pauline Ave. in the Bloor and Dufferin Sts. area, had little to say about the 29-year-old Dimzas except that he liked to listen to rock and roll, had gone to a junior school down the street, never completed high school and dreamed of getting a factory job when he was cured of his illness.

Star photo: COLD NIGHT'S SLEEP: A pedestrian passes a man on the sidewalk at King Victoria Sts. in frigid temperatures last night.

Document TOR0000020080314dpcr0063u

Column

TORONTO Visits among homeless moves mayor to charity

COLIN VAUGHAN

671 words

26 October 1992

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

A19

English

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COLIN VAUGHAN At last, some welcome signs of life in the front office at city hall. On the agenda of today's meeting of Toronto city council is a request from the Mayor's Committee on Homeless Street People for \$1.75-million to be spent over the next several years to ease the plight of the swelling ranks of the homeless in the city.

After consulting with some 50 city officials and other agencies that work with those who care for the homeless, Mayor June Rowlands has come up with a two-pronged approach. In the short term she wants \$250,000 to plug the gaps in existing emergency services this winter. In the long term, she would spend another \$1.5-million to reinforce those services and to provide seed money to get some permanent housing started.

Not bad for someone who, during the civic election campaign, delivered lectures when the time came to listen to the down-and-out. At one meeting Ms. Rowlands chided those living in substandard housing for having so little get-up-and-go and even equated freezing to death on the streets with suicide.

One reason for the sudden conversion is that the mayor has been out with some of the nightly street patrols that see to the needs of those who live on the street. On those trips she discovered that more than a wag of the finger was needed to save and recover lives.

As always, there are critics. One school would still carp even if Ms. Rowlands was able to turn Toronto into a bower of bliss. The complaint of these naysayers is that the whole plan is nothing more than a stop gap measure put forward by bleeding-heart liberal do-gooders out to "save the homeless."

Another, more reasoned, view is that most of what is proposed in the mayor's plan - warm beds, more washrooms, hostel outreach and networking - is fixated on the short term as a way of heading off the spectre of frozen bodies littering the streets.

This group argues that studies have shown that few deaths result from the cold as against the combined effects of neglect, violence, alcoholism, cooking wine, drug overdoses and simply because many on the street refuse medical treatment for fear of humiliation at the hands of the traditional health care institutions.

They see the mayor's initiative short-circuiting long-range efforts to build self respect so that the homeless will gain the confidence to identify and deal with their own problems in their own way.

A worthy aim, but no reason why the two goals cannot be meshed to achieve both ends. City council need not search far for a way out.

The Community Housing Initiatives section of the city's Housing Department has already established an impressive track record for an innovative, even radical, approach to finding ways to house the hard-to- house and has slowly won the trust of many of those on the street. The mayor's report to council today lists the section manager, Bob Yamashita, as one of those who was consulted. He has devoted a lifetime to coming up with alternative housing arrangements and city council would be wise to entrust Mr. Yamashita's section with the responsibility of blending both plans.

One warning to council: don't look for a quick fix. Years will be needed to even dent the problem - and for some of the homeless there never will be an answer to satisfy their deep seated needs and fears. But that's no excuse for delay.

As for those who question the motives of the mayor, I would recommend they follow her example and volunteer on one of the street patrols. Open eyes can be a wonderful antidote to closed minds. In the meantime, be thankful for small mercies. Colin Vaughan, architect and former member of Metro and City Councils, reports on politics for CITY-TV.

Document glob000020011107doaq017ac

NEWS

Homeless come in from cold as churches open their doors

By Susan Reid TORONTO STAR

1,850 words

27 January 1992

The Toronto Star

TOR

AM

A1

English

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ABOUT 20 MEN AND TWO WOMEN form a circle around a big pot of tomato macaroni and bow their heads in prayer as the nun says grace.

Eyes wander to the steaming food while the group listens to a quick rundown of the rules: no alcohol; no fights; no smoking in bed.

A few heads nod and a team of nuns, priests and volunteers sets to work heaping the bowls full and passing them around. Over the course of three hours, another 20 or so men and a woman drift in.

In the basement of St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church on McCaul St., homeless and hungry people come for supper once or twice a week and many stay overnight on mats and cots that line the walls. One frigid night this month, more than 100 people took shelter.

Sister Susan Moran, one of the organizers and the nun who gave the evening prayer, has issued a plea to all downtown churches to open their doors to homeless people in emergencies. Mayor June Rowlands last week took up the cause and agreed to write letters to the churches.

This night, Nancy Baker, seven months pregnant and a veteran of sleeping in stairwells and parks, says she decided to come in from the January cold for the sake of her unborn child.

Dennis Flarity got frostbite from sleeping on the street and didn't want to risk it again. His buddy, Alfred McLean, an ex-convict who has been on and off the street since age 12, travels with him.

"You need someone you can trust, someone to watch your back," Flarity says.

Miroslav Janes, a Yugoslavian refugee claimant, has a place to sleep but comes in for a warm meal and companionship to ease the daily frustration of his three-year wait to get a work permit.

He still has hopes of getting a job, and dreams of sending for his Russian girlfriend. But as it stands, "I don't want to bring her and together we go to the Scott Mission."

An estimated 200 to 300 people live outside, mostly single men, according to Metro's community services department. Social agencies believe the number is much higher but proving it is difficult.

Five years ago, St. Michael's College School and St. Michael's and All Angels Anglican Church started an Out Of The Cold program. It has grown with the need and now includes four other churches with soup kitchens, food banks and clothing depots.

St. Patrick's and St. Simon-the-Apostle Anglican Church, at Bloor and Sherbourne Sts., are the only downtown churches that stay open overnight at least one night a week in winter, and sometimes two when it's very cold.

Some nights they are overwhelmed by the numbers. When they're not open, homeless people are left to tough it out on the streets or turn to a hostel, which some simply refuse to use.

"We are in the middle of it all. Someone's got to respond; there's such incredible suffering," says Michael Dodds, one of the priests at St. Patrick's.

"One morning lately, it was so cold the first thing our volunteers thought was: 'People are going to die tonight. We have to open up again.' "

'You just do your best for them'

St. Patrick's doesn't advocate violating the laws by crowding people in church basements, says Moran. "But when you see people sleeping over grates, you bring them in for a warm bed and some comfort. You just do your best for them."

As they eat their meal at St. Patrick's, six people sit around a long table in the warm, bright basement and talk about their lives on the street. They hope that by telling their stories, they might convince other churches to offer shelter.

Flarity, a 35-year-old recovering drug addict, says he has been homeless for 15 months, and is ashamed of what it has done to him.

Somewhere out there, he has two children staying with their mother in a hostel.

"I'm ashamed to let them look at me," says Flarity, who is tall, thin and has deep, sunken eyes. "I've lost so much weight. They see me and say, 'Dad, is that you?' It takes away your pride."

Shunning hostels to avoid the people and places that might tempt him back to drugs, he spends his nights outside - or this night at St. Patrick's.

"This church practises what it preaches," Flarity says. "When they say open your arms to the homeless, they do it."

He looks around the room at people like George Chester, a retired school principal, and Margie McGowan, an enthusiastic 26-year-old woman in marketing sales, who put aside several hours at least three days a week to work with the homeless and poor.

Chester is one of three men who takes the overnight watch at St. Patrick's. He gets help from some teenage students at St. Michael's school.

Hostels, the street people say, have more violence, lice and theft. They also have too many people and too many rules.

However, recent reports that 15 of Metro's 37 hostels are in financial trouble because of government funding has them scared. Last year, 32,000 people used those hostels. And while Metro politicians have said they want to make hostels a top budget priority, McLean says there is fear on the streets.

"It's going to be war if they close down," McLean says.

Baker, 32 and the mother of two teenage daughters who live with her parents in Hamilton, sighs as she talks quietly about her trouble finding a safe, comfortable place to sleep. The night before, she had scrunched herself up in the corner of a stairwell. Hostels are often full, she says.

But Moran, hearing for the first time that Baker was pregnant, was able to find her a place in a hostel for the next night.

Baker says her problems stem from a drug addiction. "Crack was destroying me," she says. It's been 12 weeks since she gave it up but she still can't kick the drinking.

Even though she has had her head split open while living on the streets, Baker talks fondly of the friends she has made. Last summer in Moss Park, she says, "about 40 of us" slept outside.

Peggy Ann Walpole, who has spent the past 26 years running Street Haven, a 20-bed hostel for homeless women, says she can understand why street people prefer the street to hostels.

"As awful as it sounds, and as hard to understand as it is, some people would rather sleep in a stairwell," Walpole says. "At least they're doing what they want to do. No one is telling them when to go to bed, or when to have a bath."

But on cold nights, she says, "you just can't leave people on the street to freeze to death." Last month, Eugenie Balcombe, a 66-year-old street person, died of hypothermia. There have been many others before her.

There are some people living on the street who aren't rational, are "quite psychotic," or have other health problems, Walpole says. They should be taking medication but they have lost touch with the institutions that could provide them with what they need.

"There are so many problems, people have no idea," Walpole says.

When Joe McNamara, a street worker who was once homeless himself, makes his rounds, he may offer to find a hostel bed or help with checking in at a detoxification centre. But sometimes all that's required is a "Good morning. Can I buy you a cup of coffee?"

One man who had spent the night on a hot air vent outside the brightly lit windows of City Hall is groggy when first approached on a recent early morning, but warmly accepts McNamara's offer to lift him up from the grate.

Slowly and stiffly, the man, who identifies himself as Paul, age 53, gets to his feet and politely clasps his hands in front of him as he talks to McNamara, the hood of his parka shrouding his face.

He is bundled up with big mitts, a scarf and tuque, but the front of his coat hangs open as if he couldn't quite finish the job of protecting himself from the cold and damp. He carries a small white plastic bag.

He says he would head off to the Scott Mission. On any morning in downtown Toronto, before day breaks and the business of the city takes over from the night, homeless people rise from their makeshift resting places and move off.

Paul has no problem with going inside somewhere in the daylight but at night he prefers to sleep outside. He couldn't, or wouldn't, say why.

Helen Hemsol, social services director for Dixon Hall, thinks she knows why.

Residence helps ease the transition

"For some, they need a slow transition," she says. "It's unlikely someone living under a bridge for 10 years will move right into an apartment."

To help ease that transition, Dixon Hall has 60 mats and a residence for five men, which serves as a springboard for permanent housing.

For the ones still out there on the streets, there are men and women across Metro - volunteers, community workers, religious orders - doing something. Some of the most tireless workers are with the Anishnawbe Health Toronto street patrol.

And there are individuals.

"You know the High Spirit put us here to help each other," says one man who watches over homeless people around Cabbagetown.

The man, who is approaching 70, says he prefers to be anonymous but is called an "unsung hero" by the friends who contacted The Star about him.

He has been known to fit as many as 16 people into his tiny apartment on cold nights, and hands out money from his old age pension.

"What I do is, I go out and see that nobody's freezing," he says. "Usually put them in a doughnut shop with money. If they can buy coffee at night, they can sit in there.

"I slept on the street for over a year, about 18 years ago," he says. "It was cold; I was mixed up; I was a mental patient.

"I can understand people on the street who don't want to go inside. I didn't want to bother other people, didn't want them to bother me.

"It's all right to say open up the churches," he says. "It's not a bad idea."

Star photos (BERNARD WEIL) FOOD FOR THE SOUL: A print of a religious painting adorns a table in St. Patrick's Church, where a hot meal is served up to men women. SAFELY INDOORS: A man sleeps on a mattress beside a radiator in the basement of St. Patrick's Church on McCaul St.

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Opinion

Toronto turns its back on the homeless

Star Editorial Board

815 words

10 February 2023

The Toronto Star

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English

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Toronto Council's decision this week not to open warming centres around-the-clock to provide shelter for the city's most vulnerable residents was beyond disappointing. It was a disgrace.

Those who objected to making the centres accessible threw up a fog of excuses — cost, staffing — and in the face of real human suffering, offered the most weakest of actions, the promise of further study and a punt to other governments.

On Wednesday, council voted 15-11 against a board of health recommendation to open the centres 24 hours until April 15. Ostensibly concerned about the lack of funds — remember that councillors ponied up almost \$50 million more for the police — council instead supported a motion to ask the federal and provincial governments for more support. And it will investigate the “feasibility of providing 24/7 drop in spaces.”

Certainly, all levels of government need to step up. But a feasibility study? What doesn't council know? Doesn't it know that about 100 people are turned away from temporary shelters every day?

Doesn't it know that freezing temperatures present serious health risks to unhoused people? Doesn't it know that unsheltered people are currently seeking refuge in public libraries, at all-night restaurants and on the TTC, and that this is one of the reasons police officers are now patrolling public transit?

Mayor John Tory, who voted against the motion to keep the centres open, has long stressed that permanent supportive housing is a better solution than temporary shelters and warming centres. That's true, but when it comes to permanent or temporary shelter, this isn't an either/or proposition.

Although undeniably important, permanent housing won't be built overnight, which means temporary lodging will still be necessary. And even if there were enough homes to go around, that wouldn't solve the problem.

Many unhoused people have experienced serious trauma — trauma that led them to the street and trauma that keeps them on the street. And transitioning to permanent housing is, for many, a further stressful experience.

According to the U.S. National Health Care for the Homeless Council, housed unhoused life involve completely different cultures require completely different survival skills. Street living is largely a day-to-day affair, for example, while stable housing requires planning for the future.

Furthermore, some people who make the transition feel lonely and isolated as a result of losing the supportive social network they enjoyed on the street, while others feel guilty and unworthy of having their own place. And some develop phobias that make staying indoors difficult.

This highlights the need for transitional housing, where people are supported by workers who understand the challenges of transitioning, and it means we'll need temporary shelters and warming centres for the foreseeable future.

Centres are only useful if they're accessible, of course, so the city needs to follow evidence-based criteria for determining when the centres should open. Currently, the city activates warming centres when temperatures are forecast to fall to -15°C or below, or wind chills to -20°C or below.

Although these are only guidelines, and centres might be activated in the presence of other factors such as precipitation, the existing guideline plays a significant role in the city's decision making.

A brief review of the medical literature demonstrates that evidence for the guideline is lacking, however. For instance, a recent study by 's MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions assessed 97 cases of hypothermia and found:

“The risk of hypothermia among individuals experiencing homelessness increased with declining temperature; however, most cases occurred during periods of low and moderate cold stress. [Seventy-two per cent] occurred when the minimum daily temperatures were warmer than -15°C.”

Similarly, the risk of frostbite is much greater at very low temperatures, but it can occur at any temperature below 0°C if skin is exposed for long enough. And Toronto emergency rooms see many cases of frostbite — some of which result in amputations — among unhoused people every winter.

The existing weather guideline therefore seems then to be more an article of faith than an evidence-informed standard, and when lives are on the line, faith just isn't enough. Rather, evidence-based standards are essential to keeping people alive while the transition to permanent supportive housing continues.

Given the importance of that housing, we must all continue working toward the day when everyone has a place to call home. But we must first ensure that everyone lives to see it. That's what makes this council decision so shameful.

Advocates hold a banner with 166 silhouettes on it, each representing a related to homelessness in 2021 during a vigil outside City Hall this week ahead of the council debate on opening warming centres.

Document TOR0000020230210ej2a000e3

Unhoused face 'life or death,' advocates say as Toronto looks at expanding warming centre hours

Shawn Jeffords
CBC News
716 words
7 February 2023

CBC.ca
CBCDTCA

English

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A motion to expand the hours for warming centres is expected to come before Toronto city council this week in the wake of a loud demonstration by advocates for the homeless on Monday.

The protest came a day before the first city council session of the new year. Dozens of people gathered outside city hall to speak out against what they say is inaction that's killing and injuring people experiencing homelessness.

They want council to adopt a recommendation made by Toronto's Board of Health last month to keep warming centres open around the clock until April 15. The demonstrators took part in a "die-in," lying down on the cold concrete in Nathan Philips Square as a tribute to the unhoused people who died in the city this year.

"This is life or death for people," said Lorraine Lam of the Shelter and Housing Justice Network.

In addition to keeping warming centres open longer, the motion calls on the city to declare homelessness a public health crisis "based on systemic failure" of all three levels of government to provide safe, 24 hour respite spaces.

Advocates question warming centre opening threshold

Toronto has four warming centres that open at 7 p.m. the day a cold weather alert is issued. Temperatures typically need to dip below -15 C, or feel like -20 C with the wind chill, for them to open. But advocates say that threshold is arbitrary and exposes people experiencing homelessness to potential injury or death.

"We're asking that they just keep the warming centres open all winter, in recognition that ... even if it's one degree, and you've got cold rain or freezing rain, that's really dangerous for hypothermia," outreach worker Greg Cook said.

"Sometimes, it's more dangerous because you get wet and you can't get dry and can't get warm."

Coun. Alejandra Bravo, who is a member of the Board of Health and voted for the resolution to keep the centres open until April 15, said the city must take to action to save lives.

She said health professionals told the board compelling stories of treating people who have lost fingers and toes because they have been exposed to the elements.

And last week, Toronto experienced some of the most frigid temperatures of this winter season, adding new urgency to the debate, she said.

"The level of interest in this motion started even before the cold snap," she said.

"With the voices being raised by health practitioners, in particular, I think medical doctors and emergency department chiefs have made a big impact. That's a credible and powerful voice."

Coun. Josh Matlow, who represents Ward 12, Toronto-St. Paul's, said he is concerned council may not adopt the Board of Health's recommendation. But he stressed that this isn't a debate about whether or not the city can solve the housing and homelessness crisis.

"This is a debate over, 'Are we going to do the bare minimum?'" he said.

"Are we going to do the bare minimum and ensure that there are 24/7 locations where people who don't have shelter can be warm and safe when it's cold outside."

Tory undecided how he will vote

Mayor John Tory's office said he has not yet decided how he'll vote on the Board of Health motion, saying he will listen to the views of fellow councillors, Toronto Public Health and city staff before deciding.

Tory's office points to a recent deputation from Toronto's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Eileen de Villa, in which she said while warming centres and shelters are "lifesaving interventions" the better overall solution is affordable and supportive housing.

"This is why Mayor Tory supports all of the city's efforts on all of these fronts and why he has worked to move supportive housing forward," spokesperson Taylor Deasley said in a statement.

In addition to the Board of Health's motion, council will also consider a plan from the Economic Development Committee to extend the leases on some of its temporary shelter hotels, while closing up to five of the centres this year.

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News

Keep warming centres open 24-7, board of health urges; Homeless face 'deadly crisis' with lack of shelter, council told

David Rider and Alyshah Hasham Toronto Star

996 words

17 January 2023

The Toronto Star

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English

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Cold-weather services for homeless Torontonians are a "systemic failure," the public health board said Monday, urging the city to ensure people have access to warm spaces around the clock until mid-April.

The board of health voted after hearing of a surge of people desperately seeking warmth, losing limbs to frostbite or freezing to death outside. A mother pleaded with board members to help provide a safe, warm place for her homeless son with bipolar disorder.

The city opens its three warming centres, with a total of 112 cots, during cold snaps. Guidelines that can trigger their opening include temperatures plunging to -15 C.

The reduction of these sites to three, from as many as 40 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, has sent more warmth seekers, including those with mental illness, into libraries and onto the TTC, the board heard.

Dr. Raghu Venugopal, an emergency room physician at three Toronto hospitals, has witnessed a surge of people seeking refuge in ER waiting rooms. When he calls a city line seeking shelter beds, he sometimes gets no answer.

One man vandalized a Walmart to get arrested, Venugopal said, adding: "He was brought to the emergency room in handcuffs by police and his only request was for food and shelter."

Board members heard mentally ill people are especially vulnerable and in need of increased help. "We are all parents," said the mother of a bipolar man, describing his stays in shelters and her dismay that he was told it could be years before he gets a shot at moving into supportive housing.

"He's in a standstill because of his condition, I don't want him to fall through the cracks of Toronto homelessness ... he needs a chance to get his life back," she said.

Coun. Gord Perks, a health board member, said the city needs more warming centres and must relax the criteria for opening them.

"We are facing one of the worst public health emergencies, other than the pandemic ... it's certainly the worst it's ever been in my life," Perks said. "If the mayor wanted to, he could find the money to meet this urgent and deadly crisis."

Gord Tanner, the city's director of homelessness initiatives and prevention services, warned that two of the warming centres are not suitable for 24-hour occupation. Metro Hall, for example, has no shower facilities.

Tanner said his department was already tasked with reviewing cold-weather services and plans to report back with recommendations in April.

Perks, along with fellow health board members Coun. Ausma Malik and Coun. Alejandra Bravo, said that's not enough, tabling four successful motions.

They include urging city council to ensure, until April 15, round-the-clock indoor spots, either in warming centres or in community spaces. Council should also declare a crisis "based on systemic failure of all three levels of government to provide adequate 24-hour respite spaces," they said.

In addition, the board asked public health chief Dr. Eileen de Villa to work with doctors and other experts to review "the intersection of health and homelessness."

The motions go to council for budget deliberations Feb. 14.

Advocates say some people experiencing homelessness died of cold-weather-related injuries last winter, and, as the city debates its 2023 budget for services including those for the homeless, there will be more such deaths.

Dr. Samantha Green recalled a woman with no winter coat or boots who came to an urgent care clinic. When staff were unable to find her a shelter bed or a space at a drop-in centre, she spent the night in the St. Michael's Hospital emergency room.

"That is not a solution," said Green, who is one of 1,500 health care workers who have signed an open letter calling for city council to make warming centres available when the weather reaches 0 C and before freezing rain or snow, rather than only when the forecast is for -15 C.

"Moderate cold still kills people," added Dr. Talveer Mandur, co-chair of Health Providers Against Poverty.

Rev. Angie Hocking, a minister at the Regent Park Community Ministry and community outreach worker for 16 years, is one of the more than 150 faith leaders who signed the letter.

"The situation is the worst I have ever seen it. People are experiencing abuse, major health issues and trauma on the nightly and sometimes death without safe spaces to go," she said.

On Thursday, Hocking tried to help a man find space in a warming centre after being told shelters were full.

"It is nearly impossible for me and my colleagues to navigate the opening and closing times of warming centres, and they often open a day after inclement weather has started," Hocking said, adding that she got conflicting information from the 211 phone service and the central intake line about whether the centres were open at all, what times they operate, and whether calling in advance to register is required.

The man ended up splitting his night between transit and Tim Hortons, she said.

"We are calling on everyone here - the city councillors, the mayor, the business owners, churches, the neighbours - to open our eyes and see through the lens of humanity. See who lies on the pavement right in front of us," Hocking said.

Mayor John Tory "supports a pragmatic approach based on the best advice from our city staff and Dr. de Villa," a Tory spokesperson said, noting de Villa's statement that -15 C is only a guideline and centres are often opened at higher temperatures.

Tory "will continue to have discussions ... about this issue to make sure the best system possible is in place to keep people safe," while increasing the supply of permanent housing for people escaping homelessness, Taylor Deasley said.

Document TOR000020230117ej1h0005t

National

Toronto Police identify homeless victim of teen swarming attack; Ken Lee, 59, was killed at Union Station in a midnight attack; eight teenaged girls stand accused of second degree murder

Colin Freeze

714 words

11 January 2023

The Globe and Mail (Breaking News)

GMBN

English

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Police have identified the 59-year-old homeless man who was killed in downtown Toronto during an alleged swarming attack for which eight teenaged girls stand accused of murder.

On Tuesday, authorities released Ken Lee's name to the public three weeks after they had announced his Dec. 18 death. A photograph of him as a younger man was also revealed.

Investigators at Toronto Police Service said they had been keeping Mr. Lee's name under wraps until next of kin were notified. Now, these relatives are reeling. "They are still very hurt with the event," homicide Detective-Sergeant Terry Browne said in an e-mail.

Also Tuesday, Mr. Lee was remembered at Toronto's Homeless Memorial during a noontime gathering. He was named at the makeshift monument as being among at least 15 people who have died on Toronto's streets this winter.

People who spoke at the memorial, which is located outside the Church of the Holy Trinity near the Eaton Centre, said the other cases involved deaths from overdoses, fires, suicide, or freezing in the cold.

But they characterized Mr. Lee's death as a powerful reminder of the violence suffered by people living on the margins.

"I'm not going to talk about Ken for the sake of his family," said Diana Chan McNally, a crisis worker.

"There is such an increase in violence against people who are on the streets," she said after the memorial. "This is the most extreme example of that."

One week before Christmas, Mr. Lee was outside a shelter near Union Station when he got into a confrontation around midnight.

Eight girls between the ages of 13 and 16 were charged in his death. Detectives have said the girls came from all over the Toronto area, and that they may have met through social media before heading downtown that night.

"It's our belief, right now, that the now-deceased was in possession of a liquor bottle," Det.-Sgt. Browne said when he announced the charges last month. "And we think that's what they were trying to take – but we can't say with certainty."

The eight teens, facing second-degree murder charges, are in the early stages of their appearances before the courts. Their identities are being withheld under Canada's Youth Criminal Justice Act.

In late December, one accused girl was released on bail. Hearings for the other seven are to occur later this winter. A publication ban has also been placed on any discussion of any evidence presented in court.

Other strictures imposed by the courts are blocking the release of information about the case to journalists. On Friday, lawyers representing The Globe and Mail and other news outlets will appear in court to press for a greater degree of access.

Last month, a resident of a downtown shelter told The Globe she knew Mr. Lee as “Kenny.” Katy Chiappetta said she watched him start to lose his life as he was taken away by paramedics in the aftermath of the attack. She described him as a father , and said he may have family overseas.

The attack occurred outside the Strathcona Hotel on York Street. It is one of several downtown hotels the City of Toronto has been leasing to operate as a homeless shelter in recent years.

Mr. Lee had once lived in that shelter, according to police, who have also said he was not a resident at the time of his death.

Court records filed in Old City Hall show that a man named Kenneth Lee gave an undertaking in court this fall concerning the Strathcona. In September, he told a justice of the peace he would stay 100 metres away from the hotel at all times after an unproven allegation that he had an altercation with someone else who lived there.

The Kenneth Lee in question had no fixed address. He was 59 and his 60th birthday would have occurred last week.

Follow this link to view this story on globeandmail.com: [Police identify victim of teen swarming attack](#)

The Globe and Mail

Document GMBN000020230111ej1a0008d

Opinion

There's a clash of values between the City of Toronto and its spiritual groups over care of the unhoused

573 words

15 December 2022

Toronto.com

TORCOM

Final

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English

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Recent conflicts have occurred between spiritual groups and the City of Toronto. We have a clash of values over the care of those at the bleeding edge of our society - the homeless.

The City removed benches in Allan Gardens where an Indigenous spiritual group, the Neechie Healing Circle, had their elderly and disabled sit for their rituals. Guests at Holy Trinity - the home of Toronto's Homeless Memorial - are often subject to intimidation and threats of eviction from Trinity Square by private security guards hired by the city. The same treatment has been experienced by those who seek care and shelter at the Sanctuary religious community on Charles St.

Iconic of this clash is the homeless encampment that existed peacefully in the yard of the Church of St. Stephen-in-the-Fields for the last six months. Recently, the City of Toronto served them a notice to vacate by Dec. 8.

That day, with the Anglican Bishop of Toronto, the Right Reverend Andrew Asbil present, the statue "Panhandler Jesus" on church grounds will have a cage put around that stays until the city stops criminalizing homelessness and provides safe and decent housing for encampment residents.

Why these clashes? Beginning with our Indigenous spiritual traditions, all lasting religious and humanitarian movements see the fullness of life blossoming in the individual and society through nurturing and expanding the empathic impulse in the individual. These visions of the good life emanate ethical principles that guide actions to support human growth and social cohesion.

We see those sleeping rough as displaced persons - internal socio-economic refugees - who need adequate food, clothing, medical care, and help to keep as comfortable as possible in the tent they are in because they have no other place to go.

My experience in talking and interacting with City officials concerning those living in encampments is that they see these citizens as a problem to be removed. The humanitarian outreach the city does in encampments is minimal and motivated not by humanitarian concerns but solely designed to get people out of the park.

We see the homeless situation in Toronto, with close to 200 people every night unable to find a bed in the city shelter system, a humanitarian crisis. The City minimizes the issue by reducing the space between shelter beds, which creates a serious health risk.

Following ethical principles emanating from any genuine spiritual tradition, they would cry out, "we have citizens who must choose between getting a serious infection and freezing to death. That's an emergency. Open the armouries. Bring in the Red Cross and the army."

In contrast, the current city regime's principles dictate the priority is to get the homeless out of sight because encampments are a blight, bad for business. Second, use only the resources necessary to deal with the homeless that political expediency dictates. Look good, no matter what shape the underbelly is in.

So here we are. We have a city with a mayor with superpowers, but its ethical feet are firmly planted in mid-air. That is very sad for all of us.

Jim Keenan is a minister at Saint Luke's United Church at the corner of Sherbourne and Carlton streets.

Jim Keenan is a minister at St. Luke's United Church at the corner of Sherbourne Carlton streets.

Document TORCOM0020221216eicf0000d

News

An explosion under the Bathurst Street bridge raises concerns about what's being done to help the homeless stay warm this winter

Victoria Gibson

989 words

2 December 2022

The Toronto Star

TOR

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English

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A fiery explosion beneath a Toronto bridge, which burned hot under the nighttime sky after propane tanks left in an encampment burst, is raising fears about how to keep the city's homeless population safely warm this winter — particularly amid a growing squeeze on the shelter system.

The explosion took place late Saturday on Nov. 26. Officials didn't know how the fire started, describing the setting as an empty encampment. No known injuries were sustained, and though transportation officers were dispatched to be sure, the bridge didn't appear to suffer damage.

But the fiery scene illustrates a looming tension in Toronto. When winter sets in, those facing homelessness outdoors find ways to stay warm and stave off frostbite, in many cases involving propane heat that city and fire officials have labelled as dangerous. Those officials have urged people to come inside instead — but this year, that's an especially tough task, with more than 180 people on average turned away each day in October after calling the shelter intake line.

And while a coroner's inquest years ago recommended the city offer people safer heating sources in the wintertime — as a way to prevent death — it's a suggestion that hasn't been heeded.

"The number one thing both to prevent the number of fires, and also to prevent frostbite, hypothermia and freezing deaths, is to make sure people have options to go inside," said outreach worker Greg Cook. Given the intake data, though, Cook said people will undoubtedly be outside this winter and urged decision-makers to do what they can to mitigate risks.

That could include providing safer alternatives to propane heat, he suggested, pointing to a pilot project run in Winnipeg earlier this year. Per the CBC, the project involved a kind of steel barrel being distributed to encampments, meant to contain the risks from open burning while providing people staying outside with heat. "There's clearly things the city can do that can prevent severe injury and death, and so it concerns me that I'm not seeing any move in that direction."

The city's fire service, meanwhile, did not respond to questions about its plans for the winter.

The Bathurst fire wasn't the first of its kind. The official counts of encampment fires in Toronto include a range of situations, from smaller bonfires labelled as "controlled" to more critical, uncontrolled blazes. The more serious incidents recently have included a 2020 fire near Lamport Stadium, which resulted in several explosions and left one person seriously injured, and an early morning fire the following spring that engulfed a wooden structure in a Corktown park.

When it was extinguished, one man was found dead inside.

Fire is a very real risk in the winter, Cook said, recalling an engulfed tent that critically injured a man named Darren McKim in Nov. 2018. McKim succumbed to his injuries days later.

Nearly eight years ago, the fire death of 49-year-old Grant Faulkner kicked off a broader conversation about safe heat sources in the winter. Faulkner was staying in a plywood structure in a Scarborough field, and died of smoke inhalation after it caught fire on a sub-zero January night. In 2018, a few years after the tragedy, Faulkner's death

was the subject of a coroner's inquest, and resulted in 35 recommendations aimed at preventing similar deaths in the future.

Those recommendations included the city revising its policies in order to allow the provision of survival gear to people staying outside: items such as sleeping bags, fire retardant blankets and safe heat sources. "While finding appropriate housing is always a high priority, there must be enough flexibility to respond to individual needs and circumstances," the coroner's report said.

While the city's winter shelter plan this year says outreach staff will hand out blankets, sleeping bags and warm winter clothing, it stops short of providing heat sources. The fire service has also said it doesn't hand out fire retardant blankets or extinguishers. In recent years, Toronto officials have stated their priority as moving people out of encampments and into indoor shelter.

When people try to survive the winter outdoors, they often turn up in the St. Michael's Hospital emergency room. Last winter, hospital staff reported a rising number of people arriving in search of shelter and help for cold-weather injuries. At least one person died of hypothermia.

"Every time someone dies of hypothermia, it's unnecessary," said Dr. Carolyn Snider, the hospital's chief of emergency medicine. She suggested more advanced planning for when warming centres open based on forecasts of extreme weather, to give those staying on Toronto's streets more notice. While the ER tries its best to hand out wool socks, hats, gloves and jackets to patients staying outdoors, she said places to properly warm up were critical.

"When it hits the hardest for us is when we feel like (a death) was preventable," she said.

While Snider believes city staff are working hard to prepare for extreme cold, the absolute number of indoor spaces just wasn't enough, she said. When ER patients had nowhere to go, she said their staff will try to help by calling the central intake office on that patient's behalf.

But their tracking suggests the success rate in those cases is less than five per cent. Other downtown hospitals were collecting similar figures, Snider said — with similar outcomes.

"It is very worrisome going into the winter season."

With files from Star staff

Victoria Gibson is a Toronto-based reporter for the Star covering affordable housing. Reach her via email: victoriagibson@thestar.ca

Several propane tanks exploded after a fire at a encampment just off the Lower Don Trail in February 2020.

Document TOR0000020221206eic2000jh

News

Toronto winter plan for the unhoused indicates a social 'emergency'

696 words

23 November 2022

Toronto.com

TORCOM

Final

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English

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With cold winter air racing through the city, advocates are calling now more than ever for supports for people experiencing homelessness, in the face of a city winter services plan that one city councillor said was "not sufficient."

Earlier this month, the City of Toronto released its winter services plan for 2022 and 2023, with an expected 1,000 spaces to be created through capacity in shelters, additional room in the refugee-specific system and via new affordable rental housing with supports. These services are expected, per the press release, to help 9,000 people in need this winter season, though only 230 additional spaces will be added into the shelter system. Sixty spaces will be activated at warming centres during periods of extreme cold weather, stated the release.

At the end of October 2022, there were 9,622 people considered actively experiencing homelessness in Toronto, per city data, with the number of those people rising heavily during 2021 as the pandemic stretched on. In that same month, on average more than 180 people per day were denied shelter space.

This has been a long-term problem. According to a data analysis from Information Mobilization for Public Accountability Collective Toronto (IMPACT), which Toronto.com reported on earlier this year, from November 2020 to June 2022, 43 per cent of callers seeking shelter for the night were never given any.

In Rev. Jim Keenan's opinion, the offered winter supports are not enough, leaving a sizable percentage of people out in the cold.

"I'm looking at the immediate situation for this winter, and both advocates for the homeless and the city agree there's approximately 10,000 people that are homeless in Toronto," the Saint Luke's United Church minister said. His church provides services to people experiencing homelessness, including hot meal programs.

"This is a huge city and there's an awful lot of homeless and to not have plentiful places for people to get warm, I don't think that's responding in a very humanitarian way."

He also said, the call in the press release to move shelter beds closer together to create more space could create public health concerns.

The Shelter & Housing Justice Network said in a release, this decision could worsen conditions and lead to outbreaks of viral infection.

"Congregate shelter settings led to poor health outcomes," nurse practitioner and network member Jessica Hales said in the release.

Keenan acknowledged the city is trying the best it can, and that it's obviously preferable to have beds closer together than to have someone freeze outside, but he pointed to the circumstances creating the need to make this decision as a clear indicator of an emergency.

"They should be crying out 'we have citizens that have to make this choice between getting a very serious infection and freezing to death,'" he said. "That's an emergency."

For Toronto Centre Coun. Chris Moise, the solution lies in a long-term strategy rather than just a "not sufficient" winter plan.

This, in Moise's view, could mean short-term solutions like more hotel space conversion spread throughout the city, a call echoed by Keenan who said more space was needed - offering the example of allowing city military armouries to be used as shelters.

However, the solution to the long game, Moise said, rests in dealing with the ongoing housing crisis.

"We need to make sure we have supportive housing because people who are underhoused for more than five years can not cope or have the ability to actually live independently," the councillor said, pointing toward transition housing as well.

More broadly, he called for an end of exclusionary zoning and more densified development so people can get housing.

To donate to Saint Luke's United Church's programs, visit its donation website.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY: Reporter Alice Chen had covered the issue of people who are homeless before. But now, with the winter approaching, supports still seemed to be insufficient, so she decided to dig into how many people need shelter and what the solutions could be.

Tents in Allan Garden

Document TORCOM0020221129eibn00003

Insight

A perfect storm of lethal danger ' '; There has been a spike in homeless deaths in Toronto and other cities in the past couple of years. With a toxic drug supply, increased cost of living and a housing crisis, those on the front lines aren't surprised

Omar Mosleh Edmonton Bureau

2,180 words

16 July 2022

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

IN1

English

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David Meyer is trailing an elderly fellow with an unsteady gait; the older man hunches over a shopping cart, his quivering fingers squeezing the handlebars as if he's holding on for dear life.

"If he drops, I'll call the ambulance," Meyer says, half a cigarette dangling out of his mouth, his trusty naloxone kit hanging from his hip.

As if spurred by his words, the sharp squeal of sirens cleaves through the air.

"This damn thing drives by 20 times a day," Meyer says of a passing fire truck, shaking his head as he leans on a cane. "Every 20 minutes or half an hour, you hear the sirens, and they're not going to fires - they're going to another call for another sick person on 'down' who's going to die if they don't get help."

The "down" Meyer refers to is illicitly produced fentanyl, believed to be in everything sold on the street as opioids these days.

Those in the know say the tainted drug supply is one of the major causes of a spike in deaths of people experiencing homelessness across multiple cities in this country.

But it's not the only reason. Experts point to reduced capacity at shelters, more difficulty accessing services, and an overall delayed "pandemic effect" - sickness, long-term health complications and trauma from losing loved ones.

Edmonton saw a 70 per cent increase in homeless deaths - 222 people were identified as having died due to homelessness in 2021, compared to 132 in 2020, and 99 in 2019. Toronto saw a 50 per cent increase in 2021 from the previous year - 216 Torontonians without a home died, with more than half of those deaths occurring within the shelter system.

Meanwhile, the Vancouver Police Department says it saw a 40 per cent increase in sudden-death files for people with no fixed address, responding to 65 such incidents in 2021.

Meyer is standing on 96 Street in Edmonton, less than a block away from a park where three men were found dead in 2021. No public explanation has been provided for how all the men died. As Meyer looks on, the man with the shopping cart finds haven in kamâmak nihtâwihcikan, a small Indigenous medicine garden in downtown Edmonton. Meyer tells his friends to try to keep him upright - if he lies all the way down, he might throw up and choke on his own vomit.

Meyer is hoping he won't have to use his naloxone kit again today - he says he's already intervened twice to help someone. He often walks up and down this street and keeps an eye on people who are nodding off.

"You can do this all day long, all night long," Meyer says. "Can I stop? I don't know that I actually can. But I'm getting tired."

Meyer, who is Iroquois and Métis from the Thunder Bay area, moved to Edmonton some 40 years ago. He drove a truck for roughly 30 years before rolling a tractor-trailer, which he says caused an undiagnosed condition that gives him random blackouts and prevents him from working.

He's been living on Edmonton's streets and in the river valley for about four years, which he says is by choice. He gets through by panhandling and collecting bottles and cans; he says he spends about half of what he makes on buying blankets, clothing and tents to give to others.

He's entirely unsurprised when he hears of the 70 per cent increase in deaths, and asks aloud how people would react if there was that same increase among staff or students at a local university. "People would lose their f---ing minds," Meyer says. "People would actually do something about that. But because these people are homeless, because they're on drugs, because they're hurting, nobody gives a s---."

As he sits on a ledge to roll a joint, he runs a hand through the hair on his mostly shaved head. "People say it's a drug and alcohol problem down here. That's bulls---," Meyer says. "Drugs and alcohol are the aftermath. What we're dealing with is spiritual, mental, emotional pain these people are hiding from. Some of them have been abused their whole life."

It's the kind of trauma Diana Chan McNally regularly encounters or hears about in her time as a community worker and saw at her previous role as a co-ordinator at the Toronto Drop-in Network. Throughout the pandemic, she has seen how the trauma many clients carried from their lives was compounded: losing their friends, loved ones or those who help them get by to deaths from opioid overdoses or COVID-19.

She says it created a cycle of grief, where people would turn to drugs to deal with loss, and sometimes succumb to overdose themselves.

"It very much resonates with what I hear from people who are constantly surrounded by death and constantly talking about the impacts of that on them," Chan McNally says. "So yes, the toxic drug supply, but also the fact that the more people are overdosing, the more people use ... I do think there's that kind of snowball effect of grief and trauma."

She says there were also folks who got sick from COVID and died, as well as people who experienced long-term complications from the acute infection and saw worse health outcomes as a result.

Further, some found it harder to access services and get help. There were lineups, reduced capacity and the overall chaos of the pandemic.

Some drop-in centres, for example, were only offering takeaway meals or supplies, making it harder for people to connect to health and housing workers, Chan McNally says, adding that a lot of those services either never returned or did so at reduced levels.

Some people voluntarily left the shelter system because of overcrowding and fear of COVID-19, while others were forced out due to reduced capacity. As more reports emerged of people dying in Toronto's shelters, that system didn't seem a safer alternative to the streets, Chan McNally says.

"Especially when you know that your friends and your family are dying in there all the time."

As a result, more people were sleeping rough. Add to that a toxic drug supply, an increasing cost of living and a housing crisis, and it created "a perfect storm of lethal danger" for vulnerable people, says Tim Richter, CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness.

"I think this unfortunately was kind of out of sight and out of mind," Richter said. "And people who have been invisible to society forever also died invisibly."

Toronto's monitoring of shelter deaths goes back to 2007. Between that year and 2019, there is not a single month where shelter deaths reached double digits. It happened in July 2020 for the first time, when 13 people died in city-run shelters. In 2021, it was common - deaths reached double digits every month in eight months out of 12.

Overall, deaths in city-run shelters increased by 78 per cent from 2020 to 2021.

Toronto has the most comprehensive data set for its homeless population, which it pegged at 7,347 in 2021, but the true number of people is still unknown. In 2018, the Ontario government introduced legislation requiring all municipalities in the province to conduct a homeless count every two years.

But there is little data for when people experiencing homelessness die. Housing status is generally not noted in hospital records or death certificates. In Alberta, the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness tracks homeless deaths by contacting all the shelters to find out if any of their clients died, then cross-referencing for duplications.

Jim Garnett, with the coalition, said most of those deaths aren't caused by what is typically characterized as a "homeless death," generally, exposure to the elements.

"I really think the reason we're seeing more people die, unique things like drug poisoning aside, is simply that we have more and more people who have been stuck in homelessness way too long," Garnett said. "And they're just being slowly destroyed by it."

Doug Johnson Hatlem, a street pastor at drop-in centre Sanctuary Toronto, strongly agrees. He watches as freezing deaths capture headlines every winter - but deaths caused by the long-term impacts of chronic homelessness receive little attention. "There's a kind of Canadian-versus-the-natural-elements drama built into our national identity, and I think those deaths do shock and get at people's most basic sense of compassion," Hatlem said.

"But they are relatively rare compared to the regular old heart attacks and the opioid deaths."

Statistics show the average life expectancy for a person experiencing chronic homelessness is about 50, compared to 80 for the average Canadian.

Data from Toronto Public Health shows drug toxicity was by far the leading cause of death (55 per cent) among people experiencing homelessness in 2021. The percentage of deaths caused by drug toxicity hovered around 30 per cent for years until 2020, when it jumped to 53 per cent.

The second leading cause of death was cardiovascular disease, while about one-fifth of deaths were attributed to unknown causes.

In an emailed statement, Toronto Public Health said it's taking a multi-pronged approach to address the increase in homeless deaths, including developing a Toronto Drug Strategy consisting of four integrated parts: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement. It is also working more closely with shelters to ensure that they have harm reduction supplies and naloxone available and staff trained in overdose prevention.

It noted that TPH submitted a request to Health Canada to decriminalize personal possession of drugs as part of recognition that "drug use is a public health issue." Toronto Public Health added that it's more accurate to characterize the drug supply emergency as a drug poisoning crisis, not an opioid crisis, because of the sheer number of other drugs, such as benzodiazepines (a sedative) that are being sold as opioids and contributing to overdose deaths.

"We are also very concerned about the impact that COVID-19 is having on people who use drugs. The dual public health crises of drug poisonings and COVID-19 are having significant and increasingly dire impacts on people who use drugs, their families and communities," TPH said in a statement.

When not at the drop-in, Hatlem, the pastor, spends much of his time bargaining with city police to not take down homeless encampments. He says the city's fixation on encampments points to its priorities.

"It's gutting. And it just keeps growing. The city's priorities are all wrong. They don't care how many people die, it seems," Hatlem said. "They care about how many tents there are."

One of the most significant changes in 2021 was the city moving people from standard shelters into emergency hotel shelters to provide single-occupancy rooms, as Toronto faced a lawsuit about physical distancing in the shelter system.

In the second half of 2021, which Hatlem says is when the hotel shelters really started ramping up, there was a 35 per cent increase in deaths compared to the previous six months. While the winter season does generally see higher mortality rates, it's believed the isolation of the shelter hotels contributed to more people using - and dying - alone.

It's why Meyer, back in Edmonton, says he chooses to stay on the streets. He says he feels he has a duty to look out for others and believes he's making a small difference. But he has also lost count of how many bedsides he has stood by as people took their last breath. He has also had instances where he tried to resuscitate someone in the midst of an overdose, but was too late.

"After a while, you become numb to it," he says. "But you carry it with you. After a while, you have dreams and nightmares about this s---."

Meyer is off to catch supper at a local shelter before returning to his tent in Edmonton's river valley later this evening. While he contends living in a tent is his choice, he acknowledges he doesn't currently have many options. He says he can't work because of his undiagnosed injury, and even if he were on social assistance, the \$866 he would receive monthly wouldn't cover rent and damage deposit.

As of now, he has no hope to get into housing.

"The whole system is flawed," Meyer says.

"They'll pay \$200 a day to keep someone in jail. But they can't give me 50 bucks a day to f---ing live."

Document TOR0000020220716ei7g0001d



News

'People shouldn't be freezing to death,' - Sub-zero temperatures led to cold-exposure deaths among the city's homeless

Simran Singh

293 words

5 February 2022

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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The number of cold-exposure deaths has risen in the last seven days for Toronto's homeless.

Sanctuary Toronto's Street Pastor, Doug Johnson Hatlem took to Twitter on Friday to share there are more or less three credible reports of cold exposure deaths in Toronto in the last seven days.

Co-organizer at the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society Zoe Dodd says took to Twitter and shared her sentiments saying, "people shouldn't be freezing to death."

According to Hatlem and Dodd, they reported a man was found frozen to death at a bus shelter on Shuter and Sherbourne Streets.

Hatlem told the Star that "there aren't spaces for everybody that's homeless in Toronto, and they haven't been for a long time."

"I don't think the city has done anything, I think it has tried to do a little bit of PR by opening a few dozen beds, but that's nowhere near [enough] ..."

He added saying, during his nightly walks, he often comes across 50 people sleeping in the surrounding area.

Last week, the Star reported that one patient had died after two underhoused patients were treated at St. Michael's emergency department for life-threatening hypothermia.

Earlier in January, housing advocates "warned the shelter system was in near collapse" due to the rise in Omicron cases in the city.

Police were unable to confirm the total number of cold-exposure deaths in time for publishing.

Simran Singh is a reporter for the Star's radio room based in Toronto. Reach Simran via email: simransingh@thestar.ca With files from Megan Ogilvie and Ben Cohen

Document TOR0000020220206ei250002t

Opinion

Why some people experiencing homelessness refuse to come in from the cold

Denise Davy

803 words

31 January 2022

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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His home is a sad pile of rubble beside a busy street, where he sits surrounded by old tires, mud-soaked pillows and rotten food.

His reddish hair and beard are scraggly and his coat is ripped and ragged. At night, he burrows under dirty sleeping bags to try and escape the frigid temperatures. He's been here for more than a year and is well known to police and social service agencies in Hamilton, Ont., who check in on him regularly.

Much to their frustration, he refuses to go to a shelter — and there's nothing they can do to make him. So far, he's been kept alive by the goodwill of the community, as people drop off food, clothing and hand warmers for him.

"I'm busy. Don't bother me," he yells, in a thick Russian accent, when asked if he'll go to a shelter.

It's beyond tragic watching him wade through the snow-covered garbage in his raggedy clothing, but what's worse is that he's not alone. He is one of around 35 people in Hamilton who are sleeping outside in these freezing temperatures. Hundreds more can be found in larger cities like Toronto.

They are all living embodiments of what's wrong with our shelter system, and each one speaks to the need for change. Shelters were already problematic places where outbreaks, violence and bed bugs were common. The pandemic shone a spotlight on those problems and has heightened the urgency.

Many overcrowded shelters were like petri dishes; once Omicron hit, it spread through them rapidly. Last week in Toronto, there were 50 shelters in outbreak mode. Then there are those homeless who can't handle the crowded, chaotic environment of shelters, where privacy is nowhere to be found.

This is especially true among the group of homeless people who have a mental illness, which includes up to 67 per cent of that population, according to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Known as the chronically homeless, they've been on the streets the longest and suffer from a serious mental illness, and/or substance use disorder, or physical disability. While the chronically homeless only make up around 20 per cent of the homeless population (varies depending on city), because of their heavy reliance on costly services, such as emergency departments, they use up more than half the resources.

Along from the problematic environment of shelters, there's another major obstacle that stands in the way of helping get people off the street. Many who work with homeless people say they feel handcuffed by the Mental Health Act, which only allows a person to be involuntarily admitted to the hospital if they're considered to be a danger to themselves or others.

There's a process to involuntarily commit a homeless person, said Dr. Tim O'Shea, infectious disease specialist in Hamilton. However, it not only requires them to determine that a person is at risk to themselves and others; it also requires them to determine the person's mental health diagnosis.

"The criteria are vague enough that many people could be admitted," said O'Shea, who is also a member of the Hamilton Social Medicine Response Team (HAMSMaRT), which helps homeless people.

However, even if they manage to admit them, said O'Shea, it's only for 72 hours. To keep them longer, a second form must then be completed by a psychiatrist. In his experience, very few homeless people who are admitted stay beyond the 72 hours.

And here's the larger question: even if they were able to admit them, where are they supposed to go with hospital beds full and shelters in outbreak mode?

So what can be done? We need an immediate redesigning of shelters to include more private rooms for better infection control. We need to be more open to alternative housing solutions, like tiny homes which give people the privacy they need in a safe, contained space.

And we need to think outside of the box with creative options, like the portable solar-powered sleeping pods which are being piloted in a city in Germany. Finally, it's time to consider a rewrite of the Mental Health Act so that it better recognizes a person's need to be safe, while still affording them autonomy.

The one-size-fits-all shelter system is only working for a small subsection of people, which means it's not working at all. It's clearly time for change when we have people living in piles of rubble in frigid weather, dying a slow death.

Denise Davy is an award-winning journalist and author of "Her Name Was Margaret: Life and Death on the Streets."

Document TOR0000020220131ei1v000jo



News

Communities supporting Toronto's homeless raise nearly \$100,000 in 2 days as temperatures plummet

Manuela Vega

1,110 words

13 January 2022

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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Amid what one outreach worker called a “giant systemic collapse,” people pushing for social change in the city are feeling reinvigorated.

In two days, an organization that advocates for prisoners’ rights, in partnership with other community groups, have raised approximately \$96,000 to keep the city’s unhoused population warm as many city shelters remain full and temperatures plummet.

The city announced the opening of warming shelters when the weather alert took effect Jan. 7, but advocates said no beds were available to people who

needed them.

“The amount of money that we’ve been able to raise — it gives you another little second wind within this work to keep going,” Toronto Prisoners’ Rights Project organizer Lindsay Jennings said, adding that they saw more than 1,500 individual donations. “It shows how much community can mobilize and that we don’t necessarily need John Tory or other government officials in order to get what we need for our folks.”

On Monday, Toronto Prisoners’ Rights Project posted an urgent call for donations to social media to provide tents, warm clothing and other necessities for people who would be bracing for a freezing night with no roof over their head. An extreme cold weather alert was in effect for the city as the temperature dropped to -26 C.

“No one deserves to die frozen on the street. Every person deserves dignity and a warm place to stay. Please help us keep each other safe by providing financial support for survival supplies for our houseless kin,” the Instagram post read.

After 24 hours, the fund reached \$64,000.

With the money, the organization will be working sex workers’ rights advocacy group Maggie’s Toronto to place bulk orders of supplies and distribute them to pick-up spots throughout the city. The remaining money will be equally distributed to the organizations involved in the mutual aid initiative, including Maggie’s, Unity Kitchen, Toronto Indigenous Harm Reduction and Sanctuary, in order for each organization to decide how best to meet the needs of their communities.

While donations have been helpful, Sanctuary outreach organizer Lorraine Lam said we’re seeing is a “giant systemic collapse,” pointing to the lack of indoor space and isolation recovery beds. This pushes people to survive with whatever they can access, such as tents and sleeping bags, she adds.

“Homelessness is on the rise, with evictions continuing and people losing work because of COVID and not being able to pay rent,” Lam said. “City data shows that there’s more and more people entering the shelter system every month.”

The City of Toronto told the Star in an email that its Streets to Homes outreach team “continues to connect with those living outside and encampments, seven days a week, to encourage them to come indoors and to hand out blankets, sleeping bags and warming winter clothing. Additional street outreach teams are deployed during Extreme Cold Weather Alerts.”

The city also said that while demand was high for warming centres on that cold Monday night, there were spaces available at various locations, adding they're accessible by TTC, and tokens are available at the city's drop-in programs.

However, that's a different story on the ground Lam explains, noting there are only four warming centres in the entire city, and just two of them are downtown.

The urgency continues as temperatures this weekend are forecasted to hit below -20 C.

The "survival fund" is still accepting e-transfers and new or gently used items. People are encouraged to donate items directly to Unity Kitchen at 10 Trinity Square from Monday to Friday between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Another way people can help is by donating to the Prisoner Emergency Support Fund, Jennings said. The fund helps prisoners afford essentials and phone calls to friends and family, assists recently released prisoners with housing and food, and provides for loved ones to make phone calls and canteen purchases.

People can also help by donating their time; becoming informed on the systemic issues at play and writing to their local city councillors to act, Lam stressed. She says the problem also starts with the criminalization of poverty, archaic social assistance rates and a decades-long affordable housing waitlist for a single person, to name a few.

Symptoms of these failures include the emergence of encampments and the move to evict the people living there, rather than moving with urgency to find long-term solutions, Lam said. She emphasized that the extra \$25 million that the Toronto police recently got approved for is money that could be invested into those solutions, and bring the people in the city to a situation in which they are no longer "constantly reacting."

"This is an election year," Lam added. "What we really want to do is change the realities that are leading to this."

On Tuesday, various shelters across the city were at full capacity, with the median occupancy rate in shelter programs at about 99.7 per cent. Additionally, as of Wednesday, 46 shelters and respite sites across Toronto were experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks, with 345 active cases and one hospitalization.

On Tuesday, 12 names were added to Homeless Memorial. In December there were a record 34 names added. "These policies are life and death," Lam said.

Jennings said part of the problem is that people being released from jails don't usually have vaccine documentation, and aren't tested for COVID-19 before they leave. If they are looking to access shelters or looking for priority into a recovery or isolation site, they require a positive test, she said.

"When you are not eligible to access certain supports, such as COVID sites due to a gap in services, then people fall through the cracks," she said. "Supports are not set up to help individuals integrate, which then contributes to recidivism and the cycle of incarceration."

The City of Toronto said in an email that it recognizes that there continues to be high demand for shelter services, which is why it has developed a winter services plan that has continued to expand the number of spaces available for people to be indoors this winter. It added that it has renewed calls for government partners to continue the cooperative work to implement more housing solutions.

"The City is committed to engaging and works closely with all of our community partners and stakeholders to develop collaborative solutions to addressing homelessness."

Manuela Vega is a Toronto-based digital producer for the Star. Follow her on Twitter: [@_manuelavega](#)

Document TOR0000020220113ei1d001gu

Search Summary

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News

Keep warming centres open 24-7, board of health urges; Homeless face 'deadly crisis' with lack of shelter, council told

David Rider and Alyshah Hasham Toronto Star

996 words

17 January 2023

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

A1

English

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Cold-weather services for homeless Torontonians are a "systemic failure," the public health board said Monday, urging the city to ensure people have access to warm spaces around the clock until mid-April.

The board of health voted after hearing of a surge of people desperately seeking warmth, losing limbs to frostbite or freezing to death outside. A mother pleaded with board members to help provide a safe, warm place for her homeless son with bipolar disorder.

The city opens its three warming centres, with a total of 112 cots, during cold snaps. Guidelines that can trigger their opening include temperatures plunging to -15 C.

The reduction of these sites to three, from as many as 40 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, has sent more warmth seekers, including those with mental illness, into libraries and onto the TTC, the board heard.

Dr. Raghu Venugopal, an emergency room physician at three Toronto hospitals, has witnessed a surge of people seeking refuge in ER waiting rooms. When he calls a city line seeking shelter beds, he sometimes gets no answer.

One man vandalized a Walmart to get arrested, Venugopal said, adding: "He was brought to the emergency room in handcuffs by police and his only request was for food and shelter."

Board members heard mentally ill people are especially vulnerable and in need of increased help. "We are all parents," said the mother of a bipolar man, describing his stays in shelters and her dismay that he was told it could be years before he gets a shot at moving into supportive housing.

"He's in a standstill because of his condition, I don't want him to fall through the cracks of Toronto homelessness ... he needs a chance to get his life back," she said.

Coun. Gord Perks, a health board member, said the city needs more warming centres and must relax the criteria for opening them.

"We are facing one of the worst public health emergencies, other than the pandemic ... it's certainly the worst it's ever been in my life," Perks said. "If the mayor wanted to, he could find the money to meet this urgent and deadly crisis."

Gord Tanner, the city's director of homelessness initiatives and prevention services, warned that two of the warming centres are not suitable for 24-hour occupation. Metro Hall, for example, has no shower facilities.

Tanner said his department was already tasked with reviewing cold-weather services and plans to report back with recommendations in April.

Perks, along with fellow health board members Coun. Ausma Malik and Coun. Alejandra Bravo, said that's not enough, tabling four successful motions.

They include urging city council to ensure, until April 15, round-the-clock indoor spots, either in warming centres or in community spaces. Council should also declare a crisis "based on systemic failure of all three levels of government to provide adequate 24-hour respite spaces," they said.

In addition, the board asked public health chief Dr. Eileen de Villa to work with doctors and other experts to review "the intersection of health and homelessness."

The motions go to council for budget deliberations Feb. 14.

Advocates say some people experiencing homelessness died of cold-weather-related injuries last winter, and, as the city debates its 2023 budget for services including those for the homeless, there will be more such deaths.

Dr. Samantha Green recalled a woman with no winter coat or boots who came to an urgent care clinic. When staff were unable to find her a shelter bed or a space at a drop-in centre, she spent the night in the St. Michael's Hospital emergency room.

"That is not a solution," said Green, who is one of 1,500 health care workers who have signed an open letter calling for city council to make warming centres available when the weather reaches 0 C and before freezing rain or snow, rather than only when the forecast is for -15 C.

"Moderate cold still kills people," added Dr. Talveer Mandur, co-chair of Health Providers Against Poverty.

Rev. Angie Hocking, a minister at the Regent Park Community Ministry and community outreach worker for 16 years, is one of the more than 150 faith leaders who signed the letter.

"The situation is the worst I have ever seen it. People are experiencing abuse, major health issues and trauma on the nightly and sometimes death without safe spaces to go," she said.

On Thursday, Hocking tried to help a man find space in a warming centre after being told shelters were full.

"It is nearly impossible for me and my colleagues to navigate the opening and closing times of warming centres, and they often open a day after inclement weather has started," Hocking said, adding that she got conflicting information from the 211 phone service and the central intake line about whether the centres were open at all, what times they operate, and whether calling in advance to register is required.

The man ended up splitting his night between transit and Tim Hortons, she said.

"We are calling on everyone here - the city councillors, the mayor, the business owners, churches, the neighbours - to open our eyes and see through the lens of humanity. See who lies on the pavement right in front of us," Hocking said.

Mayor John Tory "supports a pragmatic approach based on the best advice from our city staff and Dr. de Villa," a Tory spokesperson said, noting de Villa's statement that -15 C is only a guideline and centres are often opened at higher temperatures.

Tory "will continue to have discussions ... about this issue to make sure the best system possible is in place to keep people safe," while increasing the supply of permanent housing for people escaping homelessness, Taylor Deasley said.

Document TOR000020230117ej1h0005t

News

It's 'damning on us as a society:' Toronto falls behind in offering warming centres for homelessness

May Warren Janiece Campbell

842 words

30 December 2022

The Toronto Star

TOR

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English

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One of the most “morally upsetting” nights of Maggie Helwig's life was earlier this winter.

There was a man at Toronto's Church of Saint Stephen-in-the-Fields, near Bathurst and College Street where she's the priest and runs a drop-in program, who was “obviously unwell” and “couldn't even get his socks on properly.”

The shelters were full. The only thing she could do was walk him out to the encampment near the church, wake up some people there, and ask them to take him into their tent for the night.

“It was a very very cold night but the warming centre wasn't open,” Helwig recalls.

That man this past November was welcomed into someone's tent. But Helwig said another individual died in a tent over Christmas, when there was a cold alert and warming centres were open, but very busy. The person was not in an encampment community at the time. Their friends are trying to honour their wishes for privacy.

As Hamilton expands access to warming centres, following a public outcry over a Christmas gap in services, advocates are calling for Toronto to do the same, and highlighting that temperatures don't need to be super cold for people to die on the streets.

As it stands now, warming centres are “generally activated” when an Extreme Cold Weather Alert (ECWA) is issued by Toronto Public Health — when the temperature is forecasted to be -15 C or colder, or -20 with the wind chill — said a city spokesperson in an email.

“There may also be instances when the city decides to open warming centres independent of ECWA “out of an abundance of caution due to colder nighttime temperatures and forecasted wind chill values. For example, warming centres were open and accessible from December 23 at 7 p.m. until noon on December 28,” the spokesperson added.

The city is “aware of unconfirmed reports of the death of a person experiencing homelessness on or about Christmas Eve,” they said.

“The cause of death of people experiencing homelessness, and discovered outside at any time of year, is determined by the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario and only communicated to the next of kin.”

“Toronto used to do a lot more,” said Helwig of warming centres.

“Before the pandemic there actually was a whole network of warming centres all over the city.”

Now there are just three, all walk-ins, and they were “very crowded” over Christmas when they were open during the extreme cold temperatures.

Some of them closed because of the pandemic, some have become part of the 24 hour respite system, but what's needed is a “low barrier flexible winter space,” she said.

“The need is just growing, and growing in every area all the time.”

The city of Hamilton announced on Wednesday expanded warming centre hours until the end of March, following public pressure.

Dr. Stephen Hwang, director of MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions, said his team conducted a study in 2019 that showed about 70 per cent of injuries due to cold happen when the weather is warmer than -15 C.

"I don't believe there's evidence to support -15 as being the correct threshold. I suspect that it's driven more by resource constraints than by anything else," he said in an interview with the Star. There's a need for shelter beds. But "on nights where it's cold, there should be enough warming centres available that people can at least get out of the cold," he added.

"Unfortunately, currently we have neither of those in the city of Toronto. Speaking as a physician who takes care of patients who are homeless and currently in the hospital, we have patients who we can't discharge because they are homeless and we don't want to discharge them to the street and we're unable to obtain shelter beds for them," he said.

Dr. Andrew Boozary, a physician and the executive director of social medicine at Unity Health Network, said it's "damning on us as a society" that "there's such a need for warming centers" and it shows that we are "failing on housing as a human right." The solution is "permanent housing," he said.

But in the short term, expanding access to warming centres would be "really welcome."

"These are real pressures in the shelter system and given that I think we need to see a potentially different response for the warming centres," he added.

"It is matter of life and death."

May Warren is a Toronto-based housing reporter for the Star. Follow her on Twitter: @maywarren11

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Volunteers residents help tidy an encampment outside The Church of Saint Stephen-in-the-Fields in on Dec. 4, 2022.

Document TOR0000020221230eicu000e2

News

Toronto to add beds, hotel rooms to struggling shelter system ahead of winter

Victoria Gibson

932 words

7 November 2022

The Toronto Star

TOR

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English

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The city of Toronto says it will add around 230 beds to its homeless shelter system this winter, by boosting the number of beds in existing facilities as well as leasing new hotel room spaces.

In a winter service plan released Monday, the city said it would add 132 spaces for single people by expanding the capacity of existing sites, would add 100 hotel rooms for refugees — whether single or with families — and have 60 warming centre spaces during extreme cold.

The city's moves are an effort to ready its embattled shelter system for the winter — and address the capacity crunch that caused an average of 169.9 people to be turned away from beds per night in September, in a marked surge from the 24.4 person average last fall.

“Despite continuing to add beds, the ever-increasing pressure on the shelter system — which is at capacity most nights — continues,” said Gord Tanner, head of the city’s shelter department. “The reality is that simply adding additional beds to the system is a short-term emergency solution that is not sustainable.”

The 60 warming centre spaces — available when the weather is especially treacherous — are a reduction from last year’s winter shelter plan, which promised 150 spots at four locations. So far this year, the city has only nailed down two locations, at Metro Hall and another one at Scarborough Civic Centre, and says it’s searching for others. To street nurse Cathy Crowe, it’s not nearly enough to meet the city’s need. “What about Etobicoke? What about North York?”

Greg Cook, an outreach worker with Sanctuary Ministries, pointed out this year’s plan was also released weeks later than last year’s. “Already, it’s clear they’re playing catch-up,” he said.

Tanner says the overall plan may “evolve” over the coming months. Asked by the Star what criteria would be used to determine when more beds may be added, he said decisions would be made using a combination of intake data, information from the city’s referral centre and observations from the Streets to Homes outreach staff who move between outdoor camps.

There have been mounting signs that this will be a particularly difficult winter for people seeking refuge in Toronto’s shelter system. There are more people considered actively homeless as of September than in the same month last year — 9,690 people in 2022 versus the 8,760 in 2021.

In addition to more people turned away, shelters and respites are often near, if not at, their total capacity — and where beds are available, they sometimes require travelling to areas such as Scarborough or Vaughan. While city council once had a target of keeping shelters below 90 per cent capacity, the emergency system was at 99.1 per cent capacity Thursday night.

Meanwhile, the city has continued its efforts to close all 27 of its temporary pandemic shelters by the end of next year. The Novotel on the Esplanade is next in line, with more than 200 people staying there as of late October now facing a shutdown date of the end of 2022.

In October, the city acknowledged “undeniable pressures” on the emergency system, while stating it would reduce the extra space between beds during COVID-19 from two metres to 1.25 metres, as some sites would also change from single to double occupancy.

The latter idea has raised some alarm among advocates as well as those staying in the city's shelter network. "Putting strangers into rooms together behind a closed, potentially locked door is a real recipe for disaster," housing advocate A.J. Withers told the Star earlier this year.

Tanner, on Monday, acknowledged that COVID-19 transmission in shelters also continues to be a concern. However, he labelled extreme cold as a "greater risk" in the months ahead.

Crowe sees reducing the distance between beds as a lost opportunity to emerge from the pandemic with a better system. "They're still not recognizing that crowding is a problem in shelters. They're literally inching their way back to the shelter standard from before," she said.

Diana Chan McNally, who works in crisis support and case management with All Saints Church-Community Centre, said the risks of crowded shelters predated COVID-19, including the transmission of other infections. (In 2018, Seaton House had a deadly outbreak of the flu.)

"We set the bar higher during the pandemic; why are we lowering it, especially when we know that many people don't feel, and factually aren't, safe inside congregate settings?"

At city hall, Tanner stressed the city's stance that creating more housing was the real path away from running an ever-strained system. While he expects 400 new deeply affordable homes with support services to open this winter, Toronto has seen a wide gap between need and supply.

Last year, fewer than 4,000 people were housed from shelters as more than 8,000 entered them.

"Until there is greater commitment from all levels of government to help address the complex elements of Toronto's homelessness issue, the city's shelter system will continue to remain at capacity and under strain," Tanner said.

Victoria Gibson is a Toronto-based reporter for the Star covering affordable housing. Reach her via email: victoriagibson@thestar.ca

There are more people considered actively as of September than in the same month last year - 9,690 people in 2022 versus the 8,760 in 2021.

Document TOR0000020221107eib7000f

News

Communities supporting Toronto's homeless raise nearly \$100,000 in 2 days as temperatures plummet

Manuela Vega

1,110 words

13 January 2022

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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Amid what one outreach worker called a “giant systemic collapse,” people pushing for social change in the city are feeling reinvigorated.

In two days, an organization that advocates for prisoners’ rights, in partnership with other community groups, have raised approximately \$96,000 to keep the city’s unhoused population warm as many city shelters remain full and temperatures plummet.

The city announced the opening of warming shelters when the weather alert took effect Jan. 7, but advocates said no beds were available to people who

needed them.

“The amount of money that we’ve been able to raise — it gives you another little second wind within this work to keep going,” Toronto Prisoners’ Rights Project organizer Lindsay Jennings said, adding that they saw more than 1,500 individual donations. “It shows how much community can mobilize and that we don’t necessarily need John Tory or other government officials in order to get what we need for our folks.”

On Monday, Toronto Prisoners’ Rights Project posted an urgent call for donations to social media to provide tents, warm clothing and other necessities for people who would be bracing for a freezing night with no roof over their head. An extreme cold weather alert was in effect for the city as the temperature dropped to -26 C.

“No one deserves to die frozen on the street. Every person deserves dignity and a warm place to stay. Please help us keep each other safe by providing financial support for survival supplies for our houseless kin,” the Instagram post read.

After 24 hours, the fund reached \$64,000.

With the money, the organization will be working sex workers’ rights advocacy group Maggie’s Toronto to place bulk orders of supplies and distribute them to pick-up spots throughout the city. The remaining money will be equally distributed to the organizations involved in the mutual aid initiative, including Maggie’s, Unity Kitchen, Toronto Indigenous Harm Reduction and Sanctuary, in order for each organization to decide how best to meet the needs of their communities.

While donations have been helpful, Sanctuary outreach organizer Lorraine Lam said we’re seeing is a “giant systemic collapse,” pointing to the lack of indoor space and isolation recovery beds. This pushes people to survive with whatever they can access, such as tents and sleeping bags, she adds.

“Homelessness is on the rise, with evictions continuing and people losing work because of COVID and not being able to pay rent,” Lam said. “City data shows that there’s more and more people entering the shelter system every month.”

The City of Toronto told the Star in an email that its Streets to Homes outreach team “continues to connect with those living outside and encampments, seven days a week, to encourage them to come indoors and to hand out blankets, sleeping bags and warming winter clothing. Additional street outreach teams are deployed during Extreme Cold Weather Alerts.”

The city also said that while demand was high for warming centres on that cold Monday night, there were spaces available at various locations, adding they're accessible by TTC, and tokens are available at the city's drop-in programs.

However, that's a different story on the ground Lam explains, noting there are only four warming centres in the entire city, and just two of them are downtown.

The urgency continues as temperatures this weekend are forecasted to hit below -20 C.

The "survival fund" is still accepting e-transfers and new or gently used items. People are encouraged to donate items directly to Unity Kitchen at 10 Trinity Square from Monday to Friday between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Another way people can help is by donating to the Prisoner Emergency Support Fund, Jennings said. The fund helps prisoners afford essentials and phone calls to friends and family, assists recently released prisoners with housing and food, and provides for loved ones to make phone calls and canteen purchases.

People can also help by donating their time; becoming informed on the systemic issues at play and writing to their local city councillors to act, Lam stressed. She says the problem also starts with the criminalization of poverty, archaic social assistance rates and a decades-long affordable housing waitlist for a single person, to name a few.

Symptoms of these failures include the emergence of encampments and the move to evict the people living there, rather than moving with urgency to find long-term solutions, Lam said. She emphasized that the extra \$25 million that the Toronto police recently got approved for is money that could be invested into those solutions, and bring the people in the city to a situation in which they are no longer "constantly reacting."

"This is an election year," Lam added. "What we really want to do is change the realities that are leading to this."

On Tuesday, various shelters across the city were at full capacity, with the median occupancy rate in shelter programs at about 99.7 per cent. Additionally, as of Wednesday, 46 shelters and respite sites across Toronto were experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks, with 345 active cases and one hospitalization.

On Tuesday, 12 names were added to Homeless Memorial. In December there were a record 34 names added. "These policies are life and death," Lam said.

Jennings said part of the problem is that people being released from jails don't usually have vaccine documentation, and aren't tested for COVID-19 before they leave. If they are looking to access shelters or looking for priority into a recovery or isolation site, they require a positive test, she said.

"When you are not eligible to access certain supports, such as COVID sites due to a gap in services, then people fall through the cracks," she said. "Supports are not set up to help individuals integrate, which then contributes to recidivism and the cycle of incarceration."

The City of Toronto said in an email that it recognizes that there continues to be high demand for shelter services, which is why it has developed a winter services plan that has continued to expand the number of spaces available for people to be indoors this winter. It added that it has renewed calls for government partners to continue the cooperative work to implement more housing solutions.

"The City is committed to engaging and works closely with all of our community partners and stakeholders to develop collaborative solutions to addressing homelessness."

Manuela Vega is a Toronto-based digital producer for the Star. Follow her on Twitter: [@_manuelavega](#)

Document TOR0000020220113ei1d001gu



News

Extreme cold weather alert issued for Toronto, with storm coming this weekend for the GTA

Miriam Lafontaine

385 words

8 January 2020

The Toronto Star

TOR

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English

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You might want to stay inside tonight. Toronto's Medical Officer of Health has issued an extreme cold weather alert.

Temperatures are expected to fall to -13°C Wednesday evening, and could feel closer to -16°C with the wind chill. The City of Toronto issues extreme cold warning whenever they anticipate temperatures could drop below -15 C, or when the wind chill is projected to reach -20 C.

People are reminded to stay in touch with friends, family and neighbours, especially those with pre-existing heart conditions, respiratory illnesses, the elderly, and those with infants and young children.

"People with heart problems can experience worsening of their condition up to several days after cold weather occurs," the city said in a statement Wednesday.

Anyone who needs assistance finding a warm place to stay can call 311.

A warming centre will open after 7 p.m. at 55 John Street and is expected to remain open until the warning ends. Additional outreach teams will be canvassing streets overnight to monitor anyone found sleeping outside, and organizations serving the homeless are being asked to limit service restrictions as much as possible, the city said.

If you have to spend a significant amount of time outside, the city recommends taking breaks inside when possible.

Environment Canada is also warning of storms this weekend through Saturday and Sunday morning. Heavy snow and freezing rain is expected in Southern Ontario, though Toronto will mostly just see rain, according to Gerald Cheng, a meteorologist with Environment Canada.

"Significant rainfall amounts are expected for areas north of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. Freezing rain is expected to affect most areas from east of Lake Huron to eastern Ontario," the agency said in a warning issued just before 11 a.m Wednesday.

A "significant" amount of snow is expected east of Georgian Bay, though the agency said there's still "uncertainty as to which areas will be the most impacted."

Miriam Lafontaine is a breaking news reporter, working out of the Star's radio room in Toronto. Follow her on Twitter: @mirilafontaine

Temperatures are projected to reach -13° C Wednesday night the city has issued an extreme warning.

Document TOR000020200108eg180018i

Greater Toronto

Too few warming centres, advocate says; Only one location is open this week, and it was at capacity within two hours

Sahar Fatima Toronto Star

723 words

14 November 2019

The Toronto Star

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English

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When Toronto was hit with extremely cold weather this week, with temperatures dropping as low as -13 C early Wednesday, just one warming centre was open downtown for vulnerable people across the city.

That's a problem, says street nurse and longtime advocate Cathy Crowe.

As part of its response to extreme cold alerts, the city opens a hallway in Metro Hall with cots, curtains for privacy and a capacity for 50 people. This time, the city opened up the warming centre on Monday, in advance of the alert, and is keeping it open until noon on Thursday, even though the alert ended on Wednesday at noon.

But while that's a step the city hasn't taken before, Crowe says it's not enough.

"Metro Hall is just one little space when there's hundreds and hundreds of homeless people outside," she said. "The city of Toronto is an enormous geographic area. Even people on Bloor St., for example, are not necessarily going to hike to Metro Hall. Physically, how do they get there without transportation? And there's Scarborough, Etobicoke."

Crowe said the city should open at least four to six more warming centres, "so they could be in different geographic parts of the city."

On Monday night, she noted, Metro Hall was at capacity within an hour and 20 minutes, although the city said it did take in about 20 more people as well.

"Which is really, really remarkable given people only just found out it was opening that day," Crowe said, adding that one outreach worker arrived with someone who could not get a cot and chose to step back out into the bitter cold rather than spend the night in a chair. "It just seems kind of illogical to only have one."

Gord Tanner, the city's director of homelessness initiatives and prevention services, said that although only one warming centre is open during an alert, the city is about halfway through rolling out its winter plan, which will see an additional 485 new beds in the shelter system.

There are also seven existing 24-hour respite centres closer to the city centre, though one is in Scarborough, and drop-in locations to get people out the cold, Tanner said.

"Everyone was caught off a little bit by the early arrival of winter, but I'm super happy we got that warming centre open on Monday in advance of the really bad weather coming," he said.

During an extreme cold alert, shelters and respite centres are asked to relax their standards around capacity. The city also distributes transit tokens at all these locations and deploys more outreach workers on the streets to bring people indoors.

"This would be the sixth winter season that the city has opened up more beds than have ever been available before in the city," Tanner said. "We currently don't have plans to expand the warming centre option, but it's not to say we wouldn't look at that in the future."

On Tuesday, all shelters in Toronto, apart from motel programs, were operating at or near capacity, as were respite centres. Both of the city's 24-hour women's drop-ins were over capacity.

Crowe said the death of one homeless person was reported Tuesday night, adding up to a total of eight who have died within the past month.

"This is a population that is very, very vulnerable," she said.

Relaxing capacity standards "just adds to crowding," Crowe said, instead arguing for more warming centres.

"The warming centre is a bit of a harm reduction kind of model where people who can't get into the shelter system or are 'shelter weary,' like they just can't take it any longer, they will come in to a warming centre," she said.

Crowe said the city should guarantee three meals a day at these sites and offer informal health care through public health nurses or community agencies.

"It's like a very clumsy system that is not taking into consideration not just the risk to life, but the incredible physical health challenges of having to be outside during weather like this," Crowe said.

Document TOR0000020191114efbe000mr

Editorial

Stop bungling on shelters; Homelessness crisis

882 words

24 January 2019

The Toronto Star

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A12

English

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The heart-wrenching debate over how to help homeless people that blew up this week as Toronto shivered through an extreme cold weather alert is, sadly, nothing new.

Each and every winter, outrage builds among homeless advocates as the shelters and respite and warming centres are filled to overflowing.

And rightly so. That's when conditions deteriorate and people are sometimes turned away, as they were last year because of a baffling miscommunication between shelters.

What the situation clearly calls for is a focus on long-term solutions by all levels of government that would have the goal of actually ending homelessness.

But over and over again the city bungles the emergency response at hand, distracting elected leaders from addressing its root causes.

Last winter the shelters were so crowded that the city had to open up federal armouries and commandeer arenas, community centres and college dormitories to handle the overflow. That was on top of the thousands of motel beds the city books for those in dire need of affordable housing.

This year was supposed to be different. To its credit, the city actually planned ahead, announcing in June that it had bought four temporary structures with beds for about 100 people each. Two, it said then, would be up by August, long before the cold weather arrived.

But, unbelievably, at this point only one of the four is actually up and running in Liberty Village.

Another one was supposed to be located in Etobicoke. But after then-premier-designate Doug Ford expressed concerns to Mayor John Tory and the local city councillor, it was put on hold - and never reappeared.

And the remaining two now aren't expected to open until March or even April - long after the coldest weather has passed. Why? Fully seven months after the city purchased the structures for \$2.5 million apiece, it still hasn't managed to hook them up to water and electricity.

Whether it's ineptitude or NIMBYism, it's both incomprehensible and shameful.

So what to do about it? Critics are calling on the mayor to declare an emergency.

But Tory is right that a dramatic gesture like that won't in itself do anything to solve the problem. It won't free up any new funds or special services. In many ways it would just be a distraction from getting on with finding long-term solutions.

And what might those be? A look at the city's 2018 "street needs assessment" provides clues, as the mayor points out.

It found, for example, that 32 per cent of the homeless have a mental health issue and 27 per cent have problems with addiction.

Declaring an emergency won't help those people, who need supportive housing and other supports as well. That would require a lot more funding from the province. Yet the Ford government is going in the opposite direction; it actually cut \$335 million from planned spending on mental health services when it took office last summer.

Nor will declaring an emergency provide shelter for those whose basic challenge is affording sky-high rents in Toronto.

That requires all three levels of government to hammer out a housing strategy. That takes time and focus.

So far, Ottawa is on the right path. It set aside \$2.1 billion over the next decade for its homeless strategy, on top of a \$40-billion national housing plan aimed at cutting chronic homelessness by 50 per cent.

Still, the federal government isn't moving fast enough. It has promised a \$4-billion Canada Housing Benefit, which would provide an average annual \$2,500 rent subsidy for 300,000 households, for example, but that won't kick in until 2020.

That's too late for those struggling with the cost of housing now. Their situation has been exacerbated by the Ford government's cuts in planned hikes to social assistance rates and minimum wages, as well as its decision to remove rent control on new buildings.

Nor would declaring an emergency free up funds to house the growing number of refugees and asylum claimants, who now account for 40 per cent of those staying at city-administered emergency shelters.

On that front, Ottawa is falling short. It has provided Toronto with an extra \$11 million, but the city spent \$65 million on shelter for refugees and asylum claimants over the past two years. It should be getting more.

For its part, the city is doing more. Once the temporary shelters are erected, it will be able to accommodate 8,000 homeless people in beds and respite centres, 1,000 more than last year. And it's spending a lot of money to deal with homelessness - almost a quarter of a billion dollars this year alone.

But all governments are just playing catch-up with a problem that continues to get worse for a host of complex reasons.

That requires a long-term solution. In the meantime, though, the city must meet the immediate needs for this winter. And that means getting the temporary shelters it promised last year up and running now - not in two to three months.

has only managed to open one of four respite domes it bought in June to house the .

Document TOR0000020190124ef1o000vn

News

Homelessness is everyone's responsibility

Rosie DiManno OPINION

1,415 words

18 January 2019

The Toronto Star

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A2

English

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The homeless, the hard homeless, build nests to survive.

Spinning a protective cocoon on the streets of Toronto.

Often elaborate, constructed from repurposed detritus, bits of scrapyard refuse, plastic sheeting, milk cartons, discarded mattresses, layers of threadbare blankets. Somebody else's tossed away junk.

For better or worse: home.

In front of St. Michael's Hospital, a man has co-opted pylons from a nearby construction site, to delineate his space.

At the bottom of Bay St., the de facto squat - there appears to be a couple sleeping beneath - sheltered up against the partially glassed-in walkway, close to Scotiabank Arena. The space they've claimed stretches for about eight feet.

And of course, here and there, under the Gardiner Expressway, almost a semi-permanent address, one fellow such a long-time "resident" that his name and quotes can be found in media archives dating back several years. Roust him during occasional removal sweeps by the city and he'll return in a few days' time, ingeniously recreating his one-man encampment, complete with propane heater.

Many of these poor souls have fallen through the social welfare cracks; others dove into the crevices by route of addictions, alcoholism and mental illness. So much mental illness untreated, a generational consequence of decisions made by various levels of government but most especially Queen's Park under premier Mike Harris's downloading schemes in the mid-'90s - downloaded to the amalgamated metropolis.

Yet the Doug Ford administration appears to have gouged deeper, as per campaign promises to cut the deficit. Crunching available numbers, the Ontario Health Coalition cites a figure of \$22 billion that will disappear from funding for public health services and programs over the next three to four years.

It's cold out here and getting colder.

Over the past week, three homeless individuals died in Toronto, says the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, which on Thursday staged another rally demanding action from all levels of government to alleviate the urgent housing crisis.

There was Crystal Papineau, apparently trapped inside a clothing donations near Dovercourt and Bloor, where she may have been scrounging for items to sell, which is a common practice among the indigent. Another female, not yet identified by police, was struck and killed by a truck backing up into an alley in the area of York and Adelaide Sts. where she had been spotted sleeping over several nights. Sanctuary Ministries has confirmed that a third person, an Indigenous male around 25 to 30 years of age, died as well, around the same time in another laneway, though this death has not yet appeared on any police blotter that I could find.

The Star's Emily Mathieu reported that the city's 4,430 emergency beds for women, men and youth were nearly full last Thursday - according to city data - in the midst of Toronto's first cold weather alert of 2019. A block of about 2,850 beds and hotels and motels, added to the stock to alleviate strain on the system, were 85 per cent

full. An additional 1,034 people sought shelter inside drop-ins, the warming centre at Metro Hall, and three Out of the Cold program locations.

It requires only an eyes-on glance to grasp that the homeless population is ever-increasing. Last April, Toronto's medical officer of health, Dr. Eileen De Villa, revealed the findings of the city's inaugural death data compilation - at least 100 people had died in 2017.

This is down to us, everyone who calls Toronto home and why poverty activists are urging that a further 2,000 shelter and respite beds be opened immediately.

Even if that were possible - and there's no indication it will happen - the underlying reasons for homelessness are so diverse and complicated to address, no matter how well-intentioned the steps that have been already taken, the slapdash emergency response and the tireless efforts of the housing activist community.

Much hand-wringing ensued after the death of Papineau, rightly so, but the emphasis on donation bins as a cause - at least eight deaths since 2015, The Canadian Press has reported - are not the core issue, even as manufacturers promise to correct the death-trap risk by redesign, a long-term undertaking.

Yet there were details about the Papineau tragedy that weren't reported amidst the grieving by her friends and social agency advocates, contributing factors which convolute the blame-game.

Papineau, 35, had essentially been banned, temporarily, by Sistering, a women's 24/7 drop-in where she'd been a regular client. Administrators don't like to speak of it but Papineau had recently been violent, assaulting other women and causing a problem on the shelter side of the facility.

"She was on what we call a respite," explains Patricia O'Connell, executive director. "She had hit so many people, it had become really bad."

But O'Connell emphasizes that Papineau was still able to access the "full support services" available through Sistering, with her regular team.

Papineau had been last seen sitting on the steps outside around 2 a.m. Thursday, before telling friends she was off to search for items in a collection bin, what O'Connell describes as "goodies" that homeless women collect for sale, to make a bit of money.

This is certainly not meant to blame Sistering, which does the work of angels. But Papineau was well-known for her addiction problems and, at some point, the greater good must be put first. Violence is hardly uncommon among those struggling with alcohol and drug dependency. The safety of others became paramount in this case.

Homelessness can be the outcome of addiction and mental illness or those ills can lead to a ramshackle life on the streets. Some hard-core homeless will only come in from the cold sporadically because they fear the tumult and thieving at shelters. Or simply because they are remarkably self-sufficient and will not be coerced into the shelter system.

Everyone has the right to make their own decisions. But where does our collective responsibility lie? What of a city's competing interest to not look so shabby and implicated in the deterioration of shared public space?

Every so often, when the overtly visible encrustation of squalid encampments is deemed too much of an eyesore - or, purportedly, out of concern for the inhabitants - other parts of the city's intervention apparatus step in.

Beginning last week, staff have been warning encampment denizens in some downtown priority areas that their self-constructed shelters will be dismantled with 14 days of eviction notice delivered. As of this past Wednesday, eight notices had been issued, says city spokesperson Brad Ross.

Yet Ross claims there's "no D-Day" for removal of the designated tents and haphazard camps.

"You can't camp in a city park so you can't camp on other city proper either. There are bylaws against it."

There's a risk to their own safety because some have propane heaters. In some areas, they encroach on the sidewalk and people have to walk around them.

At the same time, the city is working with those affected to access the Streets to Homes program and other shelter accommodation. "Frankly, there is space at the shelters," says Ross. "I do appreciate that it's not the

permanent housing people want. Hopefully, some people actually take us up on the services offered. Maybe they won't but that doesn't mean we should stop trying."

We know, however, that these occasional root-out ventures are stopgap measures - expensive "whack-a-mole" mobilizing by city forces, as critics call it - and quickly undone. According to the city's Transportation Services, staff cleared out encampments under the elevation portion of the Gardiner Expressway at Spadina Ave. four times last summer. Each time it cost the city about \$3,500 for that one location alone.

Where to go, though, where to go? Unlike shelters, a self-reliant encampment doesn't turn out residents during daytime hours to shuffle along city streets or huddle in parks and doorways.

They're as close to a foothold of permanency and ownership that too many chronically homeless in Toronto will ever know.

Twitter: @rdimanno

Beginning last week, city staff have been warning those camping in some downtown areas that their self-constructed shelters will be dismantled 14 days after an eviction notice is delivered. Richard Lautens Toronto Star

Document TOR0000020190118ef1i000vw

Greater Toronto

City adds 3 shelters to help this winter; Staff hopes 'Sprung' structures will avoid chaos seen last year during season's extreme cold

Donovan Vincent Housing Reporter

799 words

12 November 2018

The Toronto Star

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English

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The head of Toronto's shelter and housing support division says he's "very confident" his department has taken steps to avoid a repeat of the "challenges" it faced last winter finding shelter for the homeless during cold weather.

On Friday, the city rolled out its 2018-19 winter plan for the homeless.

The plan calls for three new prefabricated structures - there's an option for a fourth if demand warrants - that can house single adults or couples, as well as pets.

The portable "Sprung" structures, manufactured by a Canadian company will be scattered in the east, west and central sections of the city.

The first, to sit on a Green P parking lot behind Lamport Stadium on King St. W. near Dufferin St., will open Dec. 15.

The other two - one on a green field on Fleet St. near Strachan Ave., the other on a parcel of undeveloped property at Lake Shore Blvd. E. and Parliament St. - are set to launch Jan. 31.

The openings are staggered because the structures, which have metal skeletons, fabric coverings and thick core insulation, each take about 10 to 12 weeks to erect, the city said.

The King St. and Lake Shore Blvd. structures have a capacity to shelter 100 people each while the capacity of the one on Fleet is 80 people.

The Lamport site will remain open for 12 months of the year while the others will stay open based on demand, Paul Raftis, general manager of the city's shelter, support and housing administration, told reporters during Friday's press conference at city hall.

All three, which cost \$2.5 million each, have washrooms as well as shower and laundry facilities.

In addition, the city is opening a temporary 24-hour respite site with up to 200 spots at the Queen Elizabeth Building at Exhibition Place beginning Nov. 15, which will be phased out at the end of January as the three prefabricated structures come online. In all, there will be 11 all-day respite centres - eight in regular buildings - that will be run during the winter by various social service agencies, up from one respite centre four years ago.

The changes this year will see about 600 respite spaces in total this winter, up from the previous 455, and the city is budgeting \$3 million to operate the winter enhancements, money that includes staffing, food, security and costs to operate the buildings.

The city will continue to use its Metro Hall facility as a warming centre when an extreme cold weather warning is triggered - when temperatures drop to colder than -15 C or -20 C with wind chill.

Last winter, this happened on 31 days.

The harsh cold caused chaos for the city. Some community centres and the Moss Park Amoury were pressed into service as shelters.

This won't have to happen this year, the city says.

A March report by the city's ombudsman that blasted its winter respite services found staff gave inaccurate information about capacity at the Better Living Centre at Exhibition Place on at least two occasions.

"It is only reasonable to infer that they (staff) gave out this sort of misinformation in more instances than just the ones we investigated," ombudsman Susan Opler wrote in her report.

The report also found staff at Toronto's intake call centre and the 311 information line had outdated details about the addresses for respite sites and their capacities.

Raftis told reporters Friday that the findings from Opler's report informed the enhancements the city is making.

Aside from adding 102 net new beds to the city's permanent shelter system by the end of this year (the city has 7,000 beds in 63 city shelters), Raftis told reporters the city has invested in its central intake referral service, with additional staff to respond to calls from the public.

There will be better technology to manage the intake calls and new working space to help boost call centre productivity.

The changes include the creation of a duty officer role.

The duty officer will be responsible for flagging problems that arise and will be working with central intake to ensure homeless clients coming into the system are transitioned smoothly.

"We improved operational reliability and system oversight of the entire shelter system to address any unexpected events that may arise," Raftis said.

He went on to say he's confident the changes will avoid what happened last winter.

"But we can't predict demand. So it's possible we will receive many more people in the city looking for shelter services and we will respond to that demand."

Document TOR0000020181112eebc000mv

News

Scarborough's first winter respite for the homeless may double in size

252 words

5 February 2018

Scarborough Mirror

SCARM

Final

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English

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Scarborough's first winter shelter for the homeless should double in size, because extra spaces are definitely needed, says Glenn De Baeremaeker.

At the Scarborough Centre councillor's urging, Toronto city council on Feb. 1 agreed to study expanding the respite centre at 705 Progress Ave. from 49 to 100 beds.

De Baeremaeker said the cold-weather shelter, set up quickly and cheaply in a city-owned industrial park "was an experiment" when it opened last fall.

It's been at capacity, or very nearly so, almost every night since.

De Baeremaeker was surprised, he said, since "homelessness in Scarborough isn't in your face like it is downtown," but he's convinced most people who use the place to sleep or get a hot meal are from Scarborough themselves, and Scarborough is "where they feel the most comfortable."

They're grateful they don't have to travel downtown, he added this week.

Winter respite centres are meant to shelter people for short periods, but many remain at 705 Progress overnight, sleeping on cots or floor mats.

"There are some people we've seen every day since the place opened," said Ginelle Skerritt, executive director of the shelter's operator, Warden Woods Community Centre.

Expanding to 100 beds would require another industrial unit, or something at another location, Skerritt said.

The City of has opened a 24-hour in the industrial park at 705 Progress Ave.

Document SCARM00020180207ee2500001

Greater Toronto

Warming centre leaves some cold; Regent Park residents say facility isn't solution for city's homeless issues

Ainslie Cruickshank Toronto Star

539 words

26 January 2018

The Toronto Star

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ONT

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English

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Toronto's scramble to provide emergency refuge for the homeless as icy weather took hold left youth in Regent Park largely shut out of their community centre, highlighting more issues with the city's handling of the shelter crisis.

"I don't feel that recreation centres are permanent solutions," said Councillor Lucy Troisi, who was appointed in November to represent Ward 28 (Toronto Centre-Rosedale), which includes Regent Park.

"We really need to think about emergency shelters during cold patches where it doesn't affect other vulnerable populations," she said.

The 24-hour warming centre at Regent Park Community Centre opened earlier this month amid criticism that the city wasn't doing enough to provide shelter from the cold for those in need. It will remain available until further notice, said Patricia Anderson, a spokesperson for the city's shelter, support and housing administration.

In the meantime, instructional and drop-in programming at the centre has been suspended, said Jane Arbour, a spokesperson for the city's parks, forestry and recreation department.

On average, the centre runs 20 drop-in programs each day in the gyms, youth space, fitness centre and community rooms, Arbour said. She added that staff estimate they would have had about 6,500 visits by participants since the programming was suspended.

The suspended instructional programs serve about 590 registered participants each week, she said.

The city has moved after-school recreation care programs to Nelson Mandela Public School and last week opened the fitness centre, older adult lounge and youth space under modified hours.

Next week, some drop-in programs will be reinstated as space becomes available, Arbour said.

For the youth, who came to rely on the centre as a space to hang out, exercise and participate in activities, the loss has been frustrating, said Kenneth Slater, the manager of children and youth programs with Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services.

"A lot of young people are just feeling like they don't have much options in terms of engaging in activities," he said.

Dixon Hall, which helps run a basketball league in the community, is now struggling to find an alternative space to accommodate the league, Slater added.

"That's really, really frustrating. A lot of kids were excited about the league," he said.

Ines Garcia, a mother of four who has lived in the neighbourhood for 29 years, said the centre is important for the young people in the community because "it's keeping them out of trouble."

"It's always packed with youth," she said.

It's not just the youth missing out; Garcia hasn't been able to attend her weekly Caribbean dance class.

"It's hard, but it's all dancing and it's wonderful," she said.

While Garcia said she's happy to see the city find more space for the homeless, especially with the freezing weather, she wants to see a long-term strategy that doesn't involve displacing youth.

Regent Park resident Ines Garcia said the centre is important for youth because "it's keeping them out of trouble."

Andrew Francis Wallace/ Star

Document TOR0000020180126ee1q000iz

News

Charity hands out winter supplies; Engage and Change offers aid to overstretched shelters

Samantha Beattie and Alanna Rizza Toronto Star

755 words

14 January 2018

The Toronto Star

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ONT

A2

English

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A local charity distributed almost \$500,000 worth of sleeping bags, clothing and other necessities to Toronto's homeless this weekend, but organizers said that meets only a fraction of the demand, as shelters continue to be overwhelmed by the extreme cold this winter.

Engage and Change's founder, Jody Steinhauer, told a crowded warehouse of more than 100 volunteers Saturday that in her almost 20 years running the charity, she's never seen shelters and service agencies scramble so desperately for supplies.

"Three out of five days this week, we received calls from respite and emergency shelters in a panic that the number (of clients) was twice as much as they'd anticipated," Steinhauer said. "We had to rush supplies down."

Margaret's Housing and Community Support Services, which runs three respite centres in Toronto, were packed this week with people needing a place to stay, said manager Greg Rogers. He called Engage and Change for help and they delivered 74 blankets in 25 hours.

"(This winter has) exceeded what we expected, and there's way more people on the streets than anybody expected," Rogers said. "But the homeless don't need your sympathy. They need your help."

Moss Park Armoury was near capacity Saturday after it opened as an extra shelter space last week. Meanwhile, Toronto Public Health extended an extreme cold weather alert as temperatures dropped to -25 C with the wind chill.

Patricia Anderson, manager of partnership development for the city's shelter, support and housing administration, told the Star in an email that there were 103 people in the armoury around midday. She said numbers have been at or near capacity as people come and go.

Staff at Moss Park Armoury helped moved people to beds at Birchmount Residence, Seaton House and New Hope Leslieville, which opened on Jan. 11 as a shelter for men, Anderson said. Two warming centres were also opened for 24-hour service - Metro Hall and Regent Park Community Centre.

Friday night, outreach teams approached 25 people outdoors, and five accepted service, Anderson said, adding that a team checked in at the Moss Park safe injection site and transported four people to shelters.

Overdose-prevention worker Molly Bannerman said the Moss Park armoury and Regent Park Community Centre have been beneficial to her clients. "We've seen an improvement in terms of being able to do overdose prevention work knowing we can get people to the armoury or Regent Park and we've heard good things about these two sites."

The federal government announced that the use of Moss Park Armoury would be extended to Jan. 29. After that, a shelter will be set up at the province's defunct York Detention Centre.

But these efforts still aren't enough, Steinhauer said.

"This is about a collaborative partnership because the government can't help the people on the streets as much as needed," she said to volunteers who attempted to make a dent in social service agencies and homeless shelters' requests for a total of 13,000 "winter survival" kits.

They packed 3,000 backpacks each containing a sleeping bag, gloves, hat, socks, snacks, reusable water bottle and personal hygiene products, worth a total of \$450,000, and delivered them to 170 organizations across Toronto and the GTA. More kits will be assembled this winter as donations come in.

Outside the non-profit community agency Street Health, a group of clients gathered around an Engage and Change van filled with the bright blue backpacks.

"Having a survival kit, I will now survive," said an excited Sean Devonish. He is homeless and sleeps in shelters, on friends' couches or outside at Moss Park.

"It's killer out there these past three weeks. Being on the streets all the time, I'm always cold," he said.

Street Health fundraiser Cathy Callaghan said giving out the kits is a way to reach people who need help.

"They help us build relationships," Callaghan said. "Some of these people have had negative experiences and need basic human kindness so they can take steps toward improving their well-being."

Displayed on a table are the individual items put into Engage Change's survival kits, which are sent out for delivery in boxes. Rows of volunteers race to pack 3,000 "winter survival" kits that will be delivered to 170 relief agencies, shelters outreach providers. Bernard Weil/ Star photos

Document TOR0000020180114ee1e000jy

News

Moss Park Armoury will open its doors to Toronto's homeless

649 words

8 January 2018

City Centre Mirror

CENTRE

Final

1

English

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City staff are expected to open Moss Park Armoury as Toronto's seventh winter respite location as of Monday morning.

The federally owned armoury, whose availability was just confirmed by the Government of Canada on Friday, will be available as a 24/7 winter respite location for two weeks starting on Jan. 8, providing 100 cots to meet "increasing and unprecedented demand."

"I would like to extend my sincere thanks to both the federal and provincial governments for responding to our request for additional space in this part of Toronto," Mayor John Tory said in a statement.

"The temporary opening of the Moss Park Armoury will help make sure we continue to deal with the unprecedented demand our shelter system and winter respite system is facing this winter."

With the opening of the Moss Park Armoury, the total number of winter respite spaces in Toronto will rise to 510 - a stark increase from last year's capacity of just 160 spaces.

When fully operational, services at the city staff-operated shelter at Moss Park Armoury will include access to meals, showers, hygiene kits and referrals to additional supports, such as case management and housing supports.

Meanwhile, the province is currently working with city officials to secure an additional, longer-term 24/7 winter respite site to be used following the closure of the Armoury site in two weeks - a site which, Tory said, is expected to remain open until April 15.

"This is a demonstration by all three levels of government that we are committed to providing a safe, warm, and welcoming space for all those who need it," he said.

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) called the opening of the armoury and involvement of all three levels of government a "good step" and "important victory" for Toronto's homeless, but organizers said they fear city officials continue to "scramble" to find adequate winter respite space to accommodate all in need this frigid winter - including the 630 people who sought shelter in the city's Out of the Cold program, and 24/7 drop-in warming centres on Thursday night.

"In order to meet the demand, at least 630 new permanent beds must be added to the shelter system by April 15 to ensure that people currently forced to stay in winter respite sites and drop-ins have a safe place to go," OCAP organizer A.J. Withers said in a statement.

"While warming centres will save lives this winter, conditions within most are appalling and these facilities don't necessarily meet the city's own shelter or public health standards. The city is relying on these substandard survival spaces, but we need permanent beds in the downtown core and we need them now."

Meanwhile, city officials said the current warming centres at Metro Hall and Regent Park Community Centre - which are being operated with the support of the Canadian Red Cross - will remain open 24/7 until the winter respite centre at the Moss Park Armoury opens on Monday.

At that point, those seeking shelter at the Regent Park and Metro Hall warming centres will be offered transportation to the armoury, as those two warming centres will close.

In addition to the winter respite sites, the city has also added an overnight shift for two street outreach teams during extreme cold weather alerts.

City officials are also reminding Toronto residents that anyone can come in from the cold at all public buildings during regular business hours, including civic centres and libraries. In addition, first responders, TTC operators and city staff have been asked to remain alert for anyone in need of homeless services and to contact 311 to engage outreach support.

Moss Park Armoury, located at 130 Queen St. E., is expected to open as a temporary winter respite for 's on Monday morning.

Document CENTRE0020180109ee1800006



The Salvation Army Shelters at Capacity as They Respond to Extreme Cold Alert in Toronto

The Salvation Army - Ontario Central Division; Canada NewsWire

380 words

5 January 2018

21:36 GMT

Canada NewsWire

CNNW

English

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TORONTO, Jan. 5, 2018 /CNW/ - In response to the Extreme Cold Weather Alert issued by the City of Toronto, The Salvation Army has opened all available emergency shelter beds in the downtown core. The Salvation Army is now at capacity with 616 shelter beds and temporary beds occupied. The Salvation Army is also providing 21 Winter Respite spots in Parkdale as part of the city's Winter Response.

"The extremely cold temperatures as we know pose a significant risk to people on the streets," said Major John P. Murray, spokesperson for The Salvation Army. "We continue to monitor the situation in an effort to keep our community's homeless safe from the extreme cold."

The Salvation Army has teams in the community checking on the vulnerable to make sure they are safe from the extreme elements. Teams provide transportation to Winter Respite, Warming Centres and Shelters.

MEDIA INTERVIEWS:

This evening Salvation Army leadership will be touring the facilities from 8pm and are available for interviews.

About The Salvation Army:

The Salvation Army is an international Christian organization that began its work in Canada in 1882 and has grown to become one of the largest direct providers of social services in the country. The Salvation Army gives hope and support to vulnerable people today and every day in 400 communities across Canada and 128 countries around the world. The Salvation Army offers practical assistance for children and families, often tending to the basic necessities of life, providing shelter for homeless people and rehabilitation for people who have lost control of their lives to an addiction.

When you give to The Salvation Army, you are investing in the future of people in your community who are in greatest need. News releases, articles and updated information can be found at salvationarmy.ca.

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SOURCE The Salvation Army - Ontario Central Division

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on The Salvation Army or for Interviews, please contact: Neil W. Leduc, Divisional Director of Marketing and Communications, c) 416-578-7998, neil_leduke@can.salvationarmy.org

Document CNNW000020180105ee1500565

Local / News

City shelters stretched to the limit in cold snap; Alert could remain in place until Sunday

Natalie Paddon The Hamilton Spectator

814 words

5 January 2018

The Hamilton Spectator

HMSPT

First

A1

English

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As a blast of Arctic air continues to blanket the city, some local homeless shelters where resources were already stretched say the pressure is growing.

Men's shelters have operated close to capacity during this recent cold snap, which started Christmas Day. When it comes to services for women, the demand is even greater, and not just as the temperature dips.

"The pressure in the women's shelter system is persistent and alarming and at crisis level," said Katherine Kalinowski, Good Shepherd's assistant executive director of programs. "We are turning away year-round.

"We simply don't have enough resources to support all the women."

Hamilton's medical officer of health issued a cold weather alert Dec. 25, which is expected to remain in effect until at least Sunday.

During that time, the Salvation Army's shelter - which includes 82 beds, 10 overflow beds plus additional mattresses on the floor - has been running close to capacity, said public relations director Dan Millar.

"We're definitely seeing an increase in people coming to the shelter," he said.

It's a similar situation at Good Shepherd, which operates a shelter for adult men, one for families experiencing homelessness, another for youth, one for women, and another for women and children fleeing situations of violence and abuse.

"Right through the Christmas season and certainly over the last few days, we've been operating at capacity or more often over capacity in all of our centres," explained Kalinowski.

Shawn MacKeigan, director of men's services at Mission Services, said they have not experienced a significant change in demand at their 58-bed shelter, nor are they operating overcapacity.

If that were to happen, shelters work together to find people a place to stay the night and transportation to get there, he said.

Shelter occupancy is high and inching up in Hamilton.

The overall average occupancy for November 2017 was 95.4 per cent, up from 91.8 per cent the same month the year before. This year's annual average can't be calculated yet, but the city says it's on pace to be higher than 2016, when it was 96.2 per cent.

"Shelters have been operating over capacity for the last few days, however shelters continue to accommodate all individuals who are seeking space," city spokesperson Allison Jones said in an email. "No individuals have been turned away from shelter."

An increase has been felt at Carole Anne's Place, a shelter overflow program providing roughly a dozen spots for homeless women when single women's shelters are full.

Now in its second year, the program - funded by Hamilton's Out of the Cold program and run out of a gymnasium space at the YWCA's seniors' centre - has seen a dramatic change from last year, said Violetta Nikolskaya, manager of transitional living programs at the YWCA.

While they often saw between four and seven women last year, this year's average has been 10, with 11 women sleeping on air mattresses most nights, she said.

"What's really terrifying is, this is on top of the fact that all of the women's shelters have over-capacity beds that are full," Nikolskaya said. "These are the women who would have no other refuge from the cold had it not been for Carole Anne's Place."

Deirdre Pike, co-ordinator of the Women's Housing Planning Collaborative, said an average of 20 women a night are being turned away from local shelters and instead are turning to places like Carole Anne's Place, coffee shops, malls and hospital waiting areas.

She would like to see immediate action taken, such as temporarily opening up the main floor of Hamilton City Hall until people can access appropriate housing.

"It's about permanent housing and permanent resources," Pike said.

In Toronto, where they are also experiencing an extended cold snap, the city is revisiting a shelved proposal to use a federal armoury to cope with unprecedented demand on its homeless shelter system.

npaddon@thespec.com

905-526-2420 | @NatatTheSpec

With files from The Canadian Press

Where to get help

Carole Anne's Place, which is run out of 75 MacNab St. S., offers overflow space for homeless women when single women's shelters are full. It started Dec. 1 and runs until the end of March. Contact: 905-522-9922, ext. 112

Public health issues a cold alert when the temperature drops below -15 C. The alert triggers a special response from the city and agencies to help find shelter for the homeless. Contact: 905-546-2424, ext. 8035

The Salvation Army's soup van makes three stops every night between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. Contact: 905-527-1444

Document HMSP000020180105ee15000bk

News

City says shelters still had space but people at Moss Park site left scrambling

Ainslie Cruickshank Alexandra Jones

1,038 words

31 December 2017

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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A shocking miscommunication left a group of people gathered in the tiny trailer on Moss Park grounds Saturday night scrambling to find shelter, unaware that there was still space at the Better Living Centre respite site and other locations.

Members of the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society took to Twitter, calling out Councillor Joe Mihevc (Ward 21, St. Paul's West) for the lack of shelter spaces on a night when temperatures felt like minus 29 C with the wind chill. But city staff said that there was more space available than people were aware of.

Gord Tanner, director of Homeless Initiatives and Prevention Services with the City of Toronto said as of midnight, the Better Living Centre had filled approximately 60 cots — 20 less than they were anticipating for the night, and far below their capacity of 110.

"City shelter staff and shelter agencies have been working hard for months to deal with the unprecedented demand for our shelter system," Mayor John Tory's director of communications Don Peat said in a statement.

"Staff have advised the Mayor that shelter occupancy was at 95 per cent last night, consistent with other nights over the past month."

Peat added that aside from about 60 spaces available at the Better Living Centre and the women's respite on Cowan Ave., there were also 20 to 30 spaces at the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre on Peter St.

However, Gillian Kolla, a Toronto Overdose Prevention Society staff member, said she was told there was no space available when she called Saturday night. The site at Moss Park was swamped with people who believed they had nowhere to go, Kolla said.

"I remember opening the doors to the other side which is where we do distribution — people will grab water — and it was just filled with people coming in to warm up," she said. "We're not there to be a warming centre, but we're the only warm thing in Moss Park."

With the supervised injection site set to close at 10 p.m., Kolla called the central shelter intake and the Better Living Centre on CNE grounds, where more than 100 new cots were set up in response to the growing demand for more shelter spaces, to see if there was room.

She said she was told "we don't have any space."

Kolla said she ended up giving people at the supervised injection site in Moss Park gift cards so they could warm up in coffee shops.

An extreme cold alert has been in effect in Toronto since Christmas Day.

"People are doing what they have to do to survive," she said, "but it's dangerous right now."

It's unclear what caused the crossed wires.

Tanner said he checked in with the Streets to Home Assessment and Referral Centre, which keeps tabs on the capacity of all shelters in the city so that they can advise people where to go to get off the streets for the night.

The referral centre, Tanner said, told him Saturday evening that there was indeed still space at the Better Living Centre and at a 21-bed women's respite centre in Parkdale.

"Some of these centres are brand new, so even the Better Living Centre opening last week on Tuesday, sometimes it takes a little time to get the word out," he said. "We've got a lot more winter sites this season than we've had before, so we need to continue to get that message out and let people know where there is space and how to access it."

Tanner said the referral centre at 129 Peter St. also has space for people to warm up and spend the night, although it has no beds.

"Our main purpose right now is to get people out of the cold weather," he said.

The city is meant to keep shelters at 90 per cent occupancy, yet the system has been over capacity every day for more than a year, said Councillor Joe Cressy (Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina).

On Dec. 28, 5,500 people used the shelters bringing the system to 95 per cent occupancy. Eighty homeless people have died this year.

"We have a shelter crisis and we are as a city on every spectrum of the shelter situation failing," Cressy said.

The city aims to keep shelters at 90 per cent capacity so that anyone who needs a bed can find one, he explained.

"If we are over 90 per cent, somebody looking for a bed can't find it and that means somebody looking for a bed might be left out in the cold on a very cold night," he said.

He and others have called on the city to open 1,000 new permanent shelter beds next year and to immediately increase emergency shelter capacity by opening the armouries.

Peat said the mayor and "the majority of council" are relying on the advice of city staff to address concerns shelter capacity.

"Based on that advice, the City is continuing to expand our shelter system. On top of the additional 400 beds or spaces approved earlier this month, more than 290 shelter beds will be opened in 2018 as part of five new shelter programs serving men, seniors, youth and LGBTQ2S youth," Peat said.

"Council also voted earlier this month to direct City staff to expedite the opening of three additional new shelters next year that were originally planned for 2019, as well as adding three more shelters to the 2019 plan."

More is still needed, Cressy said.

"We aren't doing enough, it's just that simple," he said. "I know people with best intentions are trying, but as council as a whole when we're in the midst of a crisis we need to be a little more bold."

With files from Annie Arnone

Lake Ontario in the frigid morning air along the shoreline of on New Year's Eve. The city has been under an extreme since Christmas Day. The respite site at the Better Living Centre had cots available Saturday night.

Document TOR0000020171231edcv000ul

Editorial

Toronto needs a long-term solution; Homelessness

1,065 words

9 December 2017

The Toronto Star

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IN10

English

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Last February, Pierre Gregoire died in the bathroom of a fast-food restaurant from a suspected fentanyl overdose. He ended up there after being told there was no room for him at a downtown drop-in centre. He was only 28.

Sadly, Gregoire isn't the only person who gets turned away from the city's shelter system.

Despite adding 1,288 more beds to the system since this time last year, the shelters are consistently facing occupancy rates well above the 90-per-cent rate the city has determined means they are full and there is a risk of homeless people being turned away.

And if last month is any indication, the situation is only going to get worse this winter. City officials say there was a 30-per-cent increase in the number of people using the shelter system in November over the year before, partly because of an increase in refugee claimants.

In other words, in the weeks leading up to the first official day of winter, the city is once again facing a homelessness crisis. It's got to stop. The first step is to make sure there are enough beds to shelter the 5,000-plus homeless people who sleep outdoors and in emergency shelters each night before the city's first extreme cold weather alert hits. Then the city must work with the provincial and federal governments to end this scourge once and for all.

On the first step, Mayor John Tory and Councillor Joe Mihevc deserve credit for obtaining the needed support to push a \$100-million proposal through city council this week to quickly add hundreds of new spaces to the existing shelter system this year and create two new shelters next year.

The plan includes adding beds to the city's existing 62 shelters and booking more motel rooms so the spaces can be opened up within weeks, if not days. As well, the city is also hoping to find more room at existing winter drop-in centres, which provide mats and chairs but not beds.

It's not a perfect solution. Critics say the shelters and respite centres are already overcrowded, which can lead to the spread of disease and increase the risk of violence. Indeed, Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam was in tears as she sided with a group of housing advocates who want the city to ask the Department of National Defence to open up two armouries to deal with the increased need. Without them, she predicted "we will see deaths this winter just as we have seen deaths in previous winters." Her motion to do so, however, failed.

Despite that, city council is making a "major, major investment in the shelter system that has not happened in at least a decade," Mihevc said. That is commendable progress. Still, the answer to homelessness isn't emergency shelters. It's ensuring there is affordable accommodation so people don't find themselves on the doorsteps of emergency shelters or, worse, on the street.

To do that the city needs the help of Premier Kathleen Wynne and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Both could immediately begin to ease the city's chronic housing shortage by funding two programs that are already in the works.

To start they could help tackle an urgent repair backlog at the Toronto Community Housing Corp. The city has said it doesn't want any units closed in 2018, but if left unattended the corporation has said it will have to close 1,000 units by the end of next year and 7,500 over the next eight years.

That is unconscionable when 181,000 people are on the waiting list for public housing in this city. Many are forced to seek a bed in the city's emergency shelter system or sleep on the streets (almost 500 do each night) while they wait for affordable units to open up. Others who are slightly better off pay rents that are so high they can't afford to buy enough food or take transit to job interviews.

In view of this crisis, the city developed a 10-year, \$2.6-billion repair plan in 2014 that called on Ontario and Ottawa to each invest \$864 million, or one-third of the cost. So far neither the federal nor provincial governments have committed the money they promised. That is shameful.

The second step would be for the Trudeau government to fast-track the Canada Housing Benefit it promised last month in its new national housing strategy. It could fight homelessness by giving an estimated 300,000 families an average of \$2,500 a year for housing costs. But the program isn't scheduled to kick in until April 2021. Needless to say, help is needed now.

More to the point, not only is funding both programs immediately the right thing to do for the homeless, it's the responsible thing to do for taxpayers.

Consider that a 2015 study by the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis found that shuttering the Toronto Community Housing units would lead to higher health-care spending, rising crime and a host of other social costs borne largely by the province. At the same time the study found investing in repairs would create thousands of jobs, spur private investment, and generate billions of extra dollars in federal and provincial taxes.

Or that a 2013 study found homelessness costs taxpayers \$7 billion a year - a substantial portion of which is related to hospitalization and incarceration.

Or that the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area estimated last spring that the cost of having 5,253 people on Toronto streets added up to \$420,000 a night, including the cost of shelter funding, police interactions, hospital stays and nights in jails. By contrast, it estimated the cost of putting the homeless into social housing would be just \$34,000 a night.

The situation is clearly urgent. But short-term emergency and long-term permanent solutions are at hand. It should go without saying that no one in a country as rich as Canada should have to seek out an emergency shelter bed, never mind be turned away from one. Especially in winter.

A 2013 study found that homelessness costs Canadian taxpayers \$7 billion a year, much of which is related to hospitalization incarceration. Richard Lautens/ Star

Document TOR0000020171209edc9000fr

Greater Toronto

Activists want armouries open for homeless; Far too few shelter beds available to protect people from cold, street nurse says

Emily Mathieu Toronto Star

1,058 words

19 December 2016

The Toronto Star

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English

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Cold winds, drifting snow and far too few shelter beds will result in serious injury or death on the streets, say advocates for the homeless who are calling on the city to open the armouries at Fork York and Moss Park.

"What is happening on the streets is dismal. There is no shelter space and the Out of the Cold (program) is full and we are abandoning people. The armoury would work," said Cathy Crowe, a longtime activist and street nurse who is calling on Mayor John Tory to arrange for the two buildings to be opened as emergency shelter space.

"It is clear that it is going to be a long time until we see new housing allocated and built," or for more city shelters to open, Crowe told the Star.

The mayor's office directed questions to the city's shelter, support and housing administration division, but provided the Star with a letter sent to Crowe stating that city staff does not consider the armouries "adequate" or "appropriate" for emergency shelter.

However, the city is working to make sure more shelter spaces are "brought online quickly" and to "find more appropriate places for vulnerable people," the letter says. The mayor "cares deeply" about the issue and thanked Crowe for her leadership, staff concluded in the letter.

On Thursday, Crowe and members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty marched through a snowstorm to draw attention to what they describe as a lethal lack of shelter beds and accessible warming spaces, and ultimately a desperate need for safe and affordable housing.

About 70 people trudged north on Bay St., then east on Dundas St., to a vacant two-storey building near Yonge and Dundas Sts., which they plastered with posters stating "This Should Be Shelter."

The chilling temperatures merited an extreme cold weather alert, a public warning issued when temperatures drop to -15 C or below, or register a wind chill of -20 C or lower. An alert was also issued for Sunday and Monday when, with the wind chill, it is expected to feel like -18C.

Tory spent part of the night Thursday at the city's assessment and referral centre. On Friday, when asked about shelter conditions during a scrum, he said "I think we are doing our best," but added he "learned some things, last night in a shelter (St. Margaret's Shelter) that was quite crowded," including getting feedback on food and clothing and housing generally.

"In the end, shelters are no place for any citizen of Toronto to be for more than a night in an emergency. We need to provide proper housing for people" and it is something he continues to work on with all levels of government, Tory said.

Thursday was also the first night for an overnight warming centre at St. Lawrence Community Recreation Centre, to catch the overflow from two existing 24/7 facilities that have historically hit capacity during the cold winter months. By 11 p.m., two hours after it opened, five people were using the space to keep warm.

The three drop-in programs can hold up to 130 people, according to city staff, with an additional 100 spaces in two year-round drop-ins for women. The Out of the Cold program has up to 109 spots and shelter capacity is about 4,300, with an extra 85 beds added on weekends.

On Thursday, according to the city's own numbers, shelters for women and youth were at 98 per cent occupancy and men's shelters at 96 per cent. Family shelters, not counting spots in motels, were completely full.

Earlier in the week, Crowe decried the city's reliance on the Out of the Cold program - a temporary warming program operated out of churches and other community spaces - on Rabble.ca, calling it a "second-tier" and unsafe solution.

People using the program, Crowe wrote, sleep on mats, in facilities without adequate showers or washrooms and improperly trained staff.

"Hundreds of people take part in a nightly migration to the next (Out of the Cold) site, with no guarantee they will get in, and if they get in they still face poor conditions," including the risk of disease transmission, Crowe wrote.

Former mayors Mel Lastman and David Miller had opened the armouries during their terms in office "a total of four times, sheltering hundreds and undoubtedly saving countless lives," she wrote.

Tory's office, in the letter, said city staff "do not believe armouries provide adequate or appropriate shelter space," which is why they are working with other levels of government and the not-for-profit sector to find better spaces for vulnerable people, including decommissioned schools.

The city is also negotiating with a hotel for the use of 34 rooms.

Patricia Anderson, with the city's shelter, support and housing administration division, said in an email an armoury wouldn't be a "good option or first choice because of lack of privacy for service users, no communal space (all sleeping spaces), inadequate washroom facilities, lack of food preparation facilities, and risk to client and staff safety," because of the number of people and the staff costs to run it.

The Out of the Cold programs follow the same guidelines as Toronto shelters, Anderson said, though the "standards relating to number of showers and washrooms may not always be achieved."

Crowe said this year she's seen a "shocking" number of people unable to access even the lowest tier of shelter and any new emergency space should have cots, privacy areas for women to feel comfortable asleep, meals and full-time staff. "There is no question people would come in."

The impact of sub-zero weather on the body is "devastating, especially when people are hungry or dehydrated" and not dressed properly, she said. "I don't know how people survive."

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty marched up Bay St. covered a city-owned vacant building with posters demanding the city open more shelters. Cathy Crowe, left, has asked the city to open more shelter beds, as she and other activists are concerned that people will die on the streets this winter. Steve Russell Photos/ Star

Document TOR0000020161219eccj000h7

News

Toronto's medical officer of health issues extreme cold weather alert

378 words

11 February 2016

Beach Mirror

BEACHM

Final

1

English

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Winter's back.

An extreme cold weather alert has been issued by Toronto's Medical Officer of Health Dr. David McKeown for Thursday, Feb. 11.

Alerts are issued whenever temperatures are at risk of dropping below -15 C with windchill.

Environment Canada is calling for a high of -7 C for the day, with a wind chill making it feel like -25 C this morning.

During extreme cold weather, residents are encouraged to call or visit vulnerable friends, neighbours and family to ensure they are not experiencing any difficulties related to the weather. Those most at risk of cold-related illness are people who work outdoors, people with a pre-existing heart condition or respiratory illness, those taking certain medications, infants and young children, and those who are homeless. People with heart problems can experience worsening of their condition up to several days after cold weather occurs.

During an extreme cold weather alert, members of the public are encouraged to take the following precautions:

Dress in layers, making sure your outer layer is windproof and cover exposed skin.

Wear a hat, warm mittens or gloves and warm boots.

Stay dry. Your risk of hypothermia is much greater if you are wet.

Choose wool or synthetic fabrics for clothes instead of cotton, because cotton stops keeping you warm once it gets wet.

People who normally spend long periods outside should seek shelter. Depending on the wind chill, exposed skin can freeze in minutes.

Avoid alcohol as it increases blood flow. You may feel warm even though you are losing body heat.

Consider rescheduling outdoor activities, or limiting time outdoors, especially if it's windy.

Keep home heating at 21 C or warmer if babies or elderly people are present.

If you see someone on the street who needs outreach assistance - which may include a shelter bed due to the cold temperatures - call 311. For medical emergencies, call 911.

The extreme cold weather alert will be in effect until further notice. More information and tips for staying warm during extremely cold weather are available at www..ca/health

's medical officer of health issues extreme for Thursday, Feb. 11, until further notice.

Document BEACHM0020160213ec2b00002

Toronto seized under 11th extreme cold alert this winter

713 words

31 January 2015

ForeignAffairs.co.nz

PARALL

English

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MIL OSI -

Source: China State Council Information Office - Press Release/Statement:

Headline: Toronto seized under 11th extreme cold alert this winter

Toronto is in the grip of inordinately cold temperatures as the biggest city in Canada is placed on Friday under its 11th extreme cold weather alert this winter.

The alert was issued by the city's Medical Officer of Health Dr. David McKeown, when temperatures are set to reach minus 15 degrees Celsius or colder, according to Environment Canada's forecast.

Temperatures are expected to fall throughout the day to minus 12 degrees Celsius with a wind chill near minus 23 by Friday afternoon. The alert is in effect until further notice.

Toronto has a minus 15 degrees Celsius minimum temperature requirement to sound the extreme weather alert. As the temperatures were hovering just below this threshold, it took the death of two men to spark the City of Toronto's response.

Toronto is known for its bitterly cold winters, which is deadly for the 200,000 people who use homeless shelters. Two men died on Jan. 5 and 6 as a result of the cold snap. A third died in a shelter after being exposed to the weather.

As the deaths were publicized, over 2,000 protesters and supporters of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty gathered on Jan. 6 outside of Toronto City Hall, demanding the newly-elected Mayor John Tory open up the emergency warming centers and call the alert for emergency responses to assist the city's homeless population.

Toronto's Medical Officer of Health normally makes the decision to open the centers but the demonstrators' strident pleas forced the mayor, who took office on Dec. 1, 2014, to step in and help those in need. This occurred as the city sounded an official severe temperatures warning. Temperatures on Jan. 7 were around the minus 30 degrees with wind chills.

Last January witnessed Toronto's worst winter in decades, with 16 alerts. This winter all alerts were called in January, as the average temperature so far this month was minus 11 degrees Celsius with wind chills pushing it to an average low of minus 23.

Friday's cold alert once again opened up the 24-hour warming shelters for the homeless and the public was advised to curtail errands until the alert is canceled later in the weekend.

Since the city halted building affordable houses in the 1980s, Toronto's homeless situation has been under study for several years with no adequate responses.

Mayor Tory said the homelessness issue was under review and will produce some future results. "The death of anyone on the streets of Toronto, any single person ever, is one too many," Tory told reporters, "We have to redouble our efforts."

Stephen Gaetz, a York University professor and director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, said "We don't need research, we know what the problem is, and we know what the solution is."

"Absolutely, homelessness and the bitter cold is a big challenge and a complex problem. Our service plan does acknowledge that this is not a problem that can be solved by the City alone, and will involve partnership with other service systems, such as health and corrections. At the same time we do what we can to assist people with the resources we have available," Laural Raine, a shelter policy consultant of City of Toronto, told Xinhua.

A review confirms that over 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness in any given year and 150,000 Canadians a year use a homeless shelter. A total of 30,000 Canadians are homeless every night with 50,000 Canadians being part of the "hidden homeless".

The figures come from the Canadian Homelessness Research Network and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the groups behind what they call the first extensive national report card on homelessness.

The extreme winter alert was not just for Toronto but was issued earlier this week as the east coast of Canada and the United States braced for "snowmageddon," a term coined to demonstrate the effects of a large weather system that was forecast to dump over 3 feet of snow from New York to Maine and up to the maritime provinces in Canada.

Document PARALL0020150131eb1v00017

Toronto
Tory calls fatal hut fire in Scarborough 'tragic'; Man, 49, killed

Emily McWilliams And Natalie Alcoba

National Post

512 words

15 January 2015

National Post

FINP

National

A7

English

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The death of a man who became "engulfed in flames" outside his makeshift hut in Scarborough on Tuesday night is unacceptable, the mayor says.

A 49-year-old man, who has not been identified by Toronto Police, was sleeping outside when he died, although it could not be confirmed that he was homeless. Toronto Fire discovered the remains of a wooden hut at the scene behind a cement factory on Mc-Cowan Road and said it was likely that the victim had been living there.

The city was under an extreme cold weather alert at the time of the fire, allowing shelters to exceed capacity for a limited period of time. The daily shelter census reports that Toronto's shelters were at a 93% occupancy rate on Tuesday. Mayor John Tory called the death a tragedy that should not have happened.

"It's sad no matter what, but if it's at all related to the situation of homelessness, it is really just underlining what I said before, which is any one death or any number of deaths ... is something that is not acceptable and is tragic," said the mayor, who was attending the Dairy Farmers of Ontario annual general meeting Wednesday. He said additional space is expected in Toronto's shelters by the end of the week. The city has been cracking down on man-made shacks since the early 2000s and the eviction of tent city on Cherry Street, said Tanya Gulliver-Garcia, research co-ordinator of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Still, ones like those involved in Tuesday's fire do exist in areas around the city.

"If you drive along the Don Valley or the Bloor Street viaduct, especially in winter, and look down into the valley, you'll see blue tarp and chairs and things that you realize were somebody's shack," she said. Overcrowding, violence and communal living conditions deter people from seeking safety at shelters, said Gulliver-Garcia, encouraging the construction of temporary homes in remote locations.

"Creating an encampment is creating their own private space," she said. "They're less prone to infectious diseases. They're less prone to experience violence. So for them they see it as a form of safety."

However, Tuesday's fire was a fatal reminder that these huts are not safe. Tim Richter, president of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, said these types of structures are often dangerous and prone to accidents.

"I've heard of different setups like this exploding," he said. "People have propane tanks or kerosene and some kind contraption explodes and burns people."

Councillor Michael Thompson, who represents a part of Scarborough, although not the area in which the deceased was found, said clearly homelessness is an issue felt across the city.

"I don't think necessarily shelters are the answer," said Mr. Thompson. "It's a temporary solution. I think long term, it's a question of how we find ways to house people."

Document FINP000020150115eb1f00037



News | Toronto Star

Homeless man dies at Toronto shelter during extreme cold

312 words

13 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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A homeless man died last week after seeking respite at a Toronto shelter, a city official has confirmed.

“Very sadly, we confirm that a 61-year-old male client of the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre passed away in his sleep the morning of January 8, 2015,” said Patricia Anderson of the city’s Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division in a statement to the Star.

“He was using the respite program by choice and not waiting for a shelter bed.”

On Wednesday, an extreme cold weather alert issued by City of Toronto had opened warming centres for the homeless as temperatures dropped to -17C.

The Peter St. centre in the Entertainment District provides temporary shelter while helping its clients transition to permanent housing.

Anderson added that Toronto police, paramedics and the coroner all went to the facility. Next of kin information was supplied to police.

The Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division is investigating the death. Anderson did not describe the cause.

She also did not disclose the man’s identity, citing client confidentiality.

Early Tuesday morning last week, a man was found in a bus shelter at Yonge and Dundas Sts. wearing a T-shirt, jeans and a hospital bracelet. He was taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

A day earlier, a man in his 60s, believed to be homeless, was discovered in a truck at a shipping yard near Davenport Rd. and Lansdowne Ave. He was pronounced dead on the scene.

Environment Canada issued extreme alerts for areas surrounding the city early Tuesday as temperatures in Toronto dropped to -19C. The alerts were lifted by mid-morning.

A 61-year-old man died in his sleep last Thursday at the Streets to Homes Assessment Referral Centre on Peter St.

Document TOR0000020150113eb1d001e2

Editorial

Deep freeze demands action

696 words

13 January 2015

The Toronto Star

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English

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With Toronto plunged into another deep freeze there's fresh worry about how thousands of homeless people will cope, especially after two died in a cold snap just last week. The city's overburdened shelter system needs fixing, to be sure, but that's not all that needs to change. Deeper, more far-reaching reform is necessary to move vulnerable people off the street.

The immediate crisis is being addressed. With forecasts calling for wind chill levels as low as -27 C, Medical Officer of Health Dr. David McKeown has, quite rightly, issued an extreme cold weather alert. That makes more shelter beds available; rules for staying at a shelter are relaxed; and two 24-hour drop-in centres are open.

Street outreach efforts are also geared up, with crews checking on homeless people who haven't taken shelter and making them aware of the danger posed by severe weather conditions.

These steps might well save lives. But, even so, worthwhile emergency measures such as these can't hide the fact that Toronto's shelter system is sorely in need of improvement. Crowding is a serious issue with the city's shelter network often running well in excess of 90-per-cent capacity.

That typically means some people must be turned away. Shelters are scattered across the city and an empty bed in the west end is of little comfort to a homeless person faced with full beds in the east. Furthermore, women-only shelters and co-ed facilities may be jammed while there's space available at centres reserved for men.

When an extreme cold weather alert has been declared, and a packed shelter must turn people away, those left out are given a TTC token to reach a shelter with available space. But being sent away with a token, and perhaps a supportive pat on the back, is obviously of limited comfort to someone needing to stay out of the cold.

It's thought the system should run at no higher than 90-per-cent capacity to ensure available beds for everyone. City officials are working on a report, to be tabled in March, that is expected to detail ways to reach the 90 per cent goal.

Councillor Joe Mihevc wants "whatever is necessary" done to add capacity to the shelter system, including opening Metro Hall to the homeless. As reported by the Star's Marco Chown Oved, Mihevc plans to put a motion to this effect before Toronto's community development and recreation committee on Thursday. It deserves strong support.

The city must also get moving on a now-overdue 24-hour drop-in centre for homeless women. "Street-involved" women, including sex workers, are at particularly high risk of physical and sexual assault and they lack a place to go once hostels and other services have closed.

A new centre serving this vulnerable population was supposed to have been in place by last month, but now it appears it won't open until spring - if then - depending on how the city's budget process unfolds. City council, to its credit, voted in June to create such a facility "no later than December" and it's unconscionable to find that this still hasn't been done. Money needs to be found for such elementary reform.

The ultimate solution to the challenge posed by homelessness is to put a permanent roof over more people's heads. There's a desperate need for affordable housing in Toronto and, indeed, across Canada. It would be a huge help if Ottawa finally developed a coherent national housing strategy, backed by long-term federal funding to address this problem.

The Conservative government has been notably indifferent to such a commitment but 2015 is an election year and, in a few months, the country could soon find itself under more amenable leadership.

There's no doubt that, as a society, we can do considerably more for those among us in the grip of homelessness - and not just now, as mid-winter temperatures plunge. What's lacking is political will. And the best mechanism for turning that around is an engaged, caring and concerned electorate.

Document TOR0000020150113eb1d000me

News

'We've got to fix this protocol' \ Mayor Tory says system for declaring cold weather alerts in the city is too rigid

DON PEAT, CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF

499 words

8 January 2015

24 hours Toronto

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English

2015 Sun Media Corporation

Mayor John Tory wants to make it easier to declare an extreme cold weather alert in the city.

A day after Tory ordered the city to open its two warming centres rather than wait for a formal extreme cold weather alert declaration, the mayor expressed frustration with the current process and pledged to undertake a review.

The system for declaring cold weather alerts is too rigid, he said.

"Clearly the right thing to do when you had a day that was as cold as (Tuesday) with everybody's projections that it was going to be even colder (Wednesday) was to do what I did, which is to open the shelters," Tory said. "I think that would have been helpful if it was accompanied by a cold weather alert."

Tory ordered the city to open its two warming centres on Tuesday after an outcry over the lack of an extreme cold alert and the death of two men presumed to be homeless in two days. It still isn't clear why the two men died -- one was found in a downtown bus shelter on Tuesday and one was found in a van on Monday.

Toronto Public Health finally declared an extreme cold weather alert on Wednesday morning when temperatures dipped below -15C--the threshold for an alert to be declared. Tory stood by his decision Wednesday to open the warming centres half a day before the alert would have opened them.

"I knew it was damn cold out there, that the windchill was one of the bitterest days we've had in a long time and that the right thing to do was to open those shelters," he said. "I'm glad that I did that and I would do it again but in the meantime we've got to fix this (alert) protocol to allow for a greater measure of proactivity and discretion."

Tory said he's not "being critical" of the chief medical officer of health -- who has the power to declare an alert -- but he said there needs to be "more discretion and better guidance."

When the forecast is for cold weather and there is already a tremendous windchill, steps should be taken to get ahead of the situation, he said.

"I think we should be more proactive about this and we should be taking a look at the policy and the protocol to make sure it allows the chief medical officer of health to be as proactive as possible in protecting those who are vulnerable."

PHOTO BY STAN BEHAL, QMI AGENCY \ The knocked some old TTC streetcars out of service Wednesday, with buses being deployed along some routes instead. \ \ PHOTO BY DAVE ABEL, QMI AGENCY \ John Tory, seen speaking during Ron White's Annual Shoe Drive kick-off Wednesday, says it's "damn " out there. \

Document TWFHTO0020150108eb180000f

Greater Toronto

Shelter capacity numbers mask crowding; Empty beds may be available, but they might not suit those in need during cold snap

Marco Chown Oved Toronto Star

739 words

8 January 2015

The Toronto Star

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ONT

GT4

English

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As the latest wave of frigid temperatures descends on Toronto, the city's network of emergency beds, shelters and church basements to keep people off the streets doesn't appear to be bursting at the seams.

There are more free beds now than there were during the warmer months last fall. According to historical data published by the city's housing and homelessness services, more people use the shelters in October than in any other month.

On Tuesday night, the first after two men appeared to freeze to death in two nights on the streets of Toronto, there were more than 400 empty spots around the city. Of the 4,635 spaces, 4,233 were occupied - a 91-per-cent occupancy rate.

But this rate is deceiving because not all beds are created equal, said David Reycraft, head of the Out of the Cold Program at Dixon Hall.

"When the city says there's a 93-per-cent occupancy rate, that's surprising to me because our shelters are at 98 to 99 per cent capacity," Reycraft said.

Different beds serve different populations, and just because there's an empty bed in one place doesn't mean that bed would be suited for everyone.

"Many of the people that use the Out of the Cold Program are people who wouldn't use the emergency shelters. Often times, they're people who come to the city and then they're leaving to other communities in the north," he said.

The city has a latticework of public, private and volunteer services to put roofs over people's heads in the winter. In addition to the nine city-run shelters, there are 49 privately run shelters supported by the city, said Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing spokeswoman Patricia Anderson. These emergency shelters provide the lion's share - 4,074 - of the city's beds.

From November to April, the Out of the Cold program opens up church and synagogue basements, adding anywhere from 60 to 167 extra spots, depending on the day of the week. When there's an extreme cold weather alert, the city adds 26 shelter spots and opens two 24-hour drop-in centres, which can accommodate 50 people each. In February, a third, youth-only drop-in centre will be added.

Some of the city's shelters are reserved for men, others for women, youth or families. All except family shelters are fuller than the city average, a number that is dragged down by the fact that the city has funding to rent motel rooms for 350 family members, yet filled only 69 per cent of them on Tuesday night.

Because of this, research has shown that the shelter system should be below 90 per cent capacity to ensure that everyone can get a bed, said Toronto Councillor Joe Mihevc, a member of the city's community development and recreation committee, which oversees services for the homeless.

He said he will be making a motion at the committee's meeting next Thursday calling on the city to "do whatever is necessary, including opening Metro Hall, to add capacity to the system."

"We do not have enough shelter beds or Out of the the Cold beds," Mihevc said Wednesday. "People are being systematically pushed out. We need something to be done yesterday."

In the meantime, the system tries its best to accommodate everyone, especially when the mercury drops. If someone shows up at a shelter that's full, the shelter is required to help find that person a space and will give them a TTC token to get there, said Anderson.

And unlike the year-round shelters, which have hard caps, the Out of the Cold program relies on a rotation of informal spaces, each open once a week.

"Typically these are facilities that have quite large (spaces). They're not going to turn somebody away," Anderson said. "If they're funded for 55 guests and a 57th person shows up, they'll just throw a mat on the floor."

Anyone looking for a bed should call 311 and they'll be directed to the nearest shelter with space.

The same service can be accessed free from any pay phone by calling 1-877-338-3398.

With files from Laurie Monsebraaten

Document TOR0000020150108eb18000og

Editorial

Issue smarter alerts

540 words

8 January 2015

The Toronto Star

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A16

English

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No one can say for certain that lives would have been saved had Toronto's public health authorities issued an extreme cold weather alert at the beginning of this week. Two men died since then - one was living in a ramshackle truck near Davenport Rd. and Lansdowne Ave., and the other was found early Tuesday morning in a glass-walled transit shelter at Yonge-Dundas Square.

We don't know if an alert would have changed their fate. But it's likewise impossible to be sure that help wouldn't have come in time. An official alert, inspiring a bit more vigilance in authorities and the public, might have made a difference - especially for the man, wearing only a T-shirt and jeans, found with no vital signs in one of the country's most prominent squares.

That's why public health officials should have raised an alarm, even though temperatures didn't quite hit the -15 C level that automatically triggers an extreme cold weather alert. It's vital to exercise discretion in such matters and to err on the side of public safety.

Mayor John Tory expressed precisely that view Wednesday in describing a need to "think first and protect people who are homeless and vulnerable - that's got to be our first objective."

He called for a review of Toronto's existing cold weather alert policy with an eye toward boosting flexibility on the part of public health officials. "We've got to fix this protocol to allow for a greater measure of proactivity and discretion," Tory told reporters.

That might seem an obvious reform except that Toronto's existing Cold Weather Plan, issued in November, already allows for considerable flexibility. It explicitly states that: "At all times, the Medical Officer of Health will apply the guidelines with some discretion after consideration of current and expected weather conditions."

The official plan goes further, noting that extreme cold weather alerts may be issued for warmer temperatures when Environment Canada's forecast includes "one or more factors that increase the impact of cold weather." The plan even lists a variety of factors to consider, such as wind chill, days and nights of cold weather coming in a row, sudden cold weather and precipitation.

It's telling that while temperatures on Monday and Tuesday weren't forecast to dip down to -15, they were expected to plunge close to that. Wind chill values hit -20 and went even lower. And the big freeze was expected to intensify and stay for days.

Failure to issue an extreme cold weather alert, under these circumstances, seems less a problem of flawed policy and more an error in judgment on the part of public health authorities.

It's probably no coincidence that this is the first winter that the task of issuing such alerts has been left to Toronto's Medical Officer of Health. In the past this was done by the city's shelter, support and housing administration. One can only hope the bitter experience of these past few days will inspire public health officials to make wiser use of the discretion they already have in issuing cold weather alerts.

People's lives might well hang in the balance.

Document TOR000020150108eb1800mz

Two outdoor deaths prompt city of Toronto to review how it treats the homeless

CP

355 words

7 January 2015

23:16 GMT

The Canadian Press

CPR

English

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TORONTO _ The deaths of two men exposed to sub-zero temperatures earlier this week prompted the mayor of Toronto on Wednesday to call for a review of the way the city operates shelters for homeless people.

The city has only two overnight warming centres for the homeless and they can only be open when Toronto's chief medical officer of health issues an extreme cold weather alert.

Mayor John Tory said the city needs to fix the protocol that says extreme cold weather alerts can only be issued when the temperature falls below -15 C.

He ordered the centres opened immediately on Tuesday, just hours after a man was found without vital signs in a downtown Toronto bus shelter.

On Monday, a homeless man was found dead inside a truck at a west-end Toronto shipping yard on a day when temperatures plunged and the wind chill made it feel colder than -21 C.

Tory suggested the city should look at the forecast for the week, issue an alert and open the warming centres at the first sign of severe cold weather.

"Clearly we probably need to have sort of more discretion and better guidance in the hands of the chief medical officer so that we can make sure that we think first of protecting people that are homeless and vulnerable and that's got to be our first objective," said Tory.

Toronto Public Health said it has yet to receive a formal request for a policy review from Tory's office, but added that they would have "absolutely no concerns or issues with such a request."

Tory's decision to pre-emptively open the centres came after anti-poverty activists protested at city hall on Tuesday, saying the city was not doing enough to protect its vulnerable citizens.

Environment Canada issued its own extreme cold warning for most of the province, saying a cold front that passed through southern Ontario early Wednesday brought very cold temperatures and winds resulting in wind chill values near -30 C or lower.

20150108CPCPC3799

Document CPR0000020150108eb170006j

Other

Mayor Tory wants cold weather alerts to be ‘more pro-active and flexible’; Alerts were not issued earlier this week – when the two men died – because the actual temperature late on Monday was -14 C, even though the wind chill made it feel more like -21 C

ANN HUI

415 words

7 January 2015

The Globe and Mail (Breaking News)

GMBN

English

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Mayor John Tory says he is not satisfied with the city’s system for issuing extreme cold weather alerts and plans to launch a review to find ways for it to be “more pro-active and flexible.”

After the deaths of two men this week – one of them found in a bus shelter wearing only a T-shirt and jeans – and questions about whether the city does enough to protect homeless residents during cold temperatures, Mr. Tory told reporters on Wednesday he is going to take a closer look at the issue.

“I think the next step in terms of this policy in particular with cold weather alerts is to try and make it more pro-active and flexible,” Mr. Tory told reporters.

The city’s medical officer of health usually issues cold weather alerts when temperatures are expected to hit the -15 C threshold. The alert allows the deployment of additional resources for homeless people, including emergency warming centres and extra street outreach.

Alerts were not issued earlier this week – when the two men died – because the actual temperature late on Monday was -14 C, even though the wind chill made it feel more like -21 C.

Mr. Tory intervened on Tuesday afternoon, ordering the opening of emergency warming centres and spurring Toronto Public Health to issue a statement that it expected it would call an alert the next morning.

The mayor said on Wednesday he would “continue to do what I did yesterday and not allow these pieces of paper to stand in the way of doing the right thing. I believe what I did yesterday was the right thing, which is to say that I knew it’s damn cold out there and that the wind chill was one of the bitterest days we’ve had in a long time.”

Mr. Tory added that he is not blaming anyone.

“I’m just saying that clearly, we need to have more discretion and better guidance in the hands of the chief medical officer, so that we can make sure that we think first [of] protecting people who are homeless and vulnerable. That’s got to be our first objective.”

Globe and Mail Update

Document GMBN000020150108eb170005I

Greater Toronto

How many deaths before we declare a weather alert? Public Health's strict adherence to policy leaving too many vulnerable people out in the cold

Edward Keenan Toronto Star

991 words

7 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

GT1

English

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We've been suffering under extreme cold weather this week in Toronto. It feels a lot like the "Polar Vortex" we came to know and fear last year, although I'm informed it's an "Arctic Mass" this time instead. Whatever it is, it's extreme. And it's cold. And it's weather.

If you don't believe that it is extremely cold, I invite you to step outside to read the rest of this column while exposed to the weather, and alert me to your conclusions when you're done.

I extend that invitation especially to the staff in the city of Toronto's office of public health, whose job it is to declare an Extreme Cold Weather Alert. When they do officially declare what everyone with access to the outdoors can feel, additional "warming stations" are opened to shelter the homeless and vulnerable, outreach workers are sent out to get people sleeping on the streets indoors and emergency homeless shelters relax their entrance requirements.

Plus, transportation money is provided to those needing access to open shelter beds. Basically a whole lot of life-saving resources are made available to people who might otherwise sleep on the street.

Public Health did not declare an extreme cold weather alert Sunday night, when the city of Hamilton did. A homeless man died sleeping in the back of a truck in a shipping yard in Toronto's west end.

Public Health did not declare an extreme cold weather alert Monday night. A man died after he was found lying in a transit shelter at Yonge and Dundas, suffering hypothermia in only a T-shirt and jeans.

Public Health did not declare an extreme cold weather alert Tuesday afternoon as protesters took over the mayor's office, demanding to know how many people have to die before we can officially confirm it is too cold to tolerate people sleeping outdoors.

Associate medical officer of health Howard Shapiro made the media rounds explaining that they declare an alert only when overnight temperatures are forecast by Environment Canada to be -15 or lower. Since temperatures for Tuesday night were forecast to be only -13, with gusts of wind reaching 50 km/h, his office would not make the call.

I'm not sure how the medical officers - the doctors who run Public Health - can square their rigid insistence on technical guidelines with the ethics of their profession. To deny the availability of potentially life-saving service interventions based on the minute specificity of weather forecasts - parsing it down to the distinction that a -17 low wouldn't be reached until Wednesday morning, so Tuesday night wouldn't qualify - strikes me as falling under the category of "doing some harm," but then I never went to medical school.

I explained my take on that to Shapiro, and he said that this extreme cold weather alert threshold was set to indicate an "emergency" level - unusually cold temperatures - and that if the guidelines were set simply at the level where there's a risk of hypothermia, it would be above zero. "We're trying to have a system where these alerts only come up so often," he said.

Cathy Crowe, a street nurse and researcher who has been studying homelessness in Toronto for more than a decade, told me she'd feared this would happen. She and a group of other advocates met with the public health

office in November, because they were pleased the department had been given responsibility for triggering the alerts that provide services for the first time this year.

She was aghast, then, to hear that they planned to adhere stringently to the -15 guideline, even though the city's instructions seem specifically to give them flexibility to declare an alert because of other factors like wind and sustained cold over multiple days. When I spoke with her Tuesday, she was pleading with the mayor by email to take action, and had scheduled a meeting with the chief medical officer for Wednesday afternoon.

Early Tuesday, when asked about this, Mayor John Tory said that any death - homeless or not - is too many, and then proceeded to emit an arctic mass of his own about how he couldn't comment because it is Public Health's call. By mid-afternoon, his office swarming with angry protesters, he announced that he's ordered the warming centres open, and the city then announced it would activate the full range of extreme weather services. At least the politicians responded, even if the official alert was still withheld.

Around 3 p.m., Environment Canada issued an Extreme Cold Weather Warning. Toronto Public Health, around the same time, issued a statement saying they expected they might get around to declaring an extreme cold weather alert on Wednesday.

"I understand this is because the threshold was not met. But if today and yesterday didn't meet the criteria and the threshold, then there's something wrong with the criteria and the threshold," said Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell, Tory's appointed adviser on poverty.

That's true.

"In my mind what this points to is the need for other measures outside what the threshold is," Shapiro said.

Also true. But if people apparently freezing to death on the streets isn't cold enough to trigger an alert designed to save people from freezing to death on the streets, what's the point of having it at all?

Edward Keenan writes on city issues ekeenan@thestar.ca. Follow:

[@thekeenewire](https://twitter.com/thekeenewire)

Activist Gaetan Heroux at a protest outside the mayor's office against the recent deaths of two men. John Clarke of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty spoke as protesters gathered at the mayor's office Tuesday. Tara Walton/Star

Document TOR0000020150107eb17000q1

News

Second homeless man dies in bitter cold; City not doing enough to protect most vulnerable from deep freeze, advocates say

Daniel Otis Toronto Star

525 words

7 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

A2

English

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Clutching candles and shivering, about two dozen people gathered at the southwest corner of Yonge and Dundas Sts. on Tuesday evening to mourn the second person to die in two days in the bitter cold that has enveloped the city.

"A man died here last night and there was no need for it," said Keith Nunn, a member of the Church of the Holy Trinity, which organized the memorial. "We need to take full responsibility as a society for all the members in it."

Bouquets of flowers and rose petals were left in the streetcar shelter where an unresponsive man in his 40s was discovered early Tuesday morning wearing little more than a T-shirt, jeans and a hospital bracelet.

As temperatures continued to plummet across the GTA Tuesday evening, the city of Toronto opened up additional shelter spaces as well as two 24-hour warming centres. The announcement came amidst outrage from advocates for the homeless who felt the city wasn't doing enough for those most at risk from the cold.

As attendees prayed at the memorial near Yonge-Dundas Square, a woman openly wept while another, who said she knew the homeless man, said the city needs to do more to protect its most vulnerable.

"Everyday, one of my street family is dying because of this cold weather," Tabitha Turk, who has lived on the streets of Toronto for 15 years, said at the vigil. "Nobody (cares) about us out here. They treat us like we're invisible."

Emergency personnel were called to the scene shortly before 5:30 a.m., said police spokeswoman Const. Jeniffer Sidhu. The man wasn't moving when police found him.

The man's death followed another on Monday when a man in his 60s, also believed to be homeless, was discovered inside a truck near Davenport Rd. and Lansdowne Ave. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Police have yet to release the names of either man or the exact causes of their deaths. With wind chill, temperatures hovered close to -20 C when both men were found.

On Tuesday, protesters criticized Toronto's Medical Officer of Health for not issuing an Extreme Cold Weather Alert. Such an alert would have immediately triggered additional services for the homeless.

Alerts are declared by the city when Environment Canada forecasts temperatures of -15 C or below. As of Tuesday night, no such alert had been issued. On Tuesday morning, Mayor John Tory told reporters that although issuing an alert was not his call, he hoped public health officials would exercise discretion "in favour of homeless people."

"The death of anyone on the streets of Toronto, any single person ever, is one too many and so I think that we have to sort of redouble our efforts."

With files from Sidney Cohen,

Sam Colbert, Betsy Powell

and Edward Keenan

Alice Mathias, right, lights candles in a bus shelter at where a man was found dead in the Tuesday. Tara Walton/
Star

Document TOR0000020150107eb17000pv

News | Toronto Star

Mayor Tory orders warming shelters to open

503 words

6 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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With anti-poverty activists standing outside his office demanding action, Toronto Mayor John Tory issued a statement asking the city manager to open warming centres after two men died on city streets.

“We expect it will happen immediately,” the mayor’s spokesperson Amanda Galbraith said in an emailed statement.

Advocates for homeless people called it a good first step.

“We’ve won a small measure that may save some lives over the next few days but this matter has ...been far from dealt with,” John Clarke, of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, said after a brief discussion with a mayor’s aide.

“We want the warming centres to remain open and we need additional space to be opened up.”

Tory did not meet with the protesters who were asking him to issue an extreme cold weather alert — or instruct Toronto’s Medical Officer of Health to do so.

Last July, city council approved the transfer of responsibility for co-ordinating Toronto’s cold weather alerts from shelter, support and housing administration to the Medical Officer of Health.

The Medical Officer of Health’s criteria for issuing the alert is Environment Canada forecasting overnight temperatures to plummet to minus 15 C or colder. The protesters said the requirement was being too rigidly applied.

By 3:15 p.m. Tuesday, Toronto Public Health issued an extreme cold weather alert for Wednesday morning.

“Low temperatures are expected very early tomorrow morning, reaching minus 15 C by 9 a.m.,” said a statement.

The “city of Toronto and community services which respond to extreme cold weather alerts will initiate services in time to support vulnerable individuals.”

Earlier at city hall, the mayor told reporters he hoped the Medical Officer of Health would exercise flexibility around the minus 15 C requirement, taking things into account such as wind chill.

“I would hope that those criteria are being applied as they have in the past,” Tory said.

“The death of anyone on the streets of Toronto, any single person ever, is one too many and so I think that we have to sort of re-double our efforts.”

The intent of the alert is to warn vulnerable people that cold weather is expected and trigger a response from the city and community partners.

Clarke said shelters are running well above the 90 per cent occupancy level set by council.

“That is putting intolerable pressure on the system, it’s causing people to be turned away and it’s causing people to be put at risk and it’s killing people.”

The city has undertaken a review of the shelter system that is expected in March.

More to come

With files from Jennifer Pagliaro

John Clarke, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty Organizer, speaks with reporters outside of the mayor's office Tuesday January 6, 2015 at city hall. A group of OCAP demonstrators gathered at Mayor John Tory's office Tuesday, protesting the recent deaths of two men.

Document TOR0000020150106eb16001me

Toronto News

Cold weather alert policy questioned after Toronto street death

Rosemary Westwood

382 words

6 January 2015

Metro Canada

MOTTA

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English

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A Toronto councillor is questioning the city's cold weather alert policy after a man was found dead Tuesday morning in a bus shelter.

"If you do not have opportunities to find shelter that is warm and safe, and you're exposed to longer durations of extreme weather conditions, especially cold in the winter time, is -15 C adequate?" Kirstyn Wong-Tam said in a conversation with Metro. "Or should we be lowering that threshold to, perhaps, -10 C and then factoring in the wind chill?"

Wong-Tam was referring to the city's policy of issuing a cold weather alert - and opening emergency shelters - when Environment Canada is forecasting an overnight low of -15 C.

Dr. David McKeown, the city's medical officer of health, is responsible for gauging the forecast each morning and deciding if an alert should be issued. There is some discretion to include factors like wind chill and precipitation.

A cold weather alert wasn't issued Monday when the overnight low hit -14 C with wind chill, making it feel somewhere between -20 C and -24 C, according to Environment Canada data.

Police said freezing temperatures undoubtedly played a role in the bus shelter death. A man in his 50s, wearing only jeans and T-shirt, was found unresponsive about 6 a.m. on Yonge Street just west of Dundas.

Officers at the scene said they were familiar with the man and described him as having a "troubled past." They said he has at times been homeless, though it's not known if he was without housing when he died.

An official cause of death has not been determined.

Despite the ongoing deep freeze, McKeown has no plans of issuing a cold weather alert for Tuesday when the overnight low is forecast to hit -7 C, feeling like -15 C with wind chill.

The forecast is "well below the Environment Canada cold weather warning level," McKeown wrote in an email to Wong-Tam and other politicians Tuesday morning.

"At this point the forecast for tomorrow, January 7, suggests that the conditions for an alert may occur. This decision will be made early tomorrow morning based on the updated forecast at that time," the email continued.

Document MOTTA00020150106eb16000rx

News | Toronto Star

How many Torontonians does it take to declare an extreme cold weather alert?

987 words

6 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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We've been suffering under extreme cold weather this week in . It feels a lot like the "Polar Vortex" we came to know and fear last year, although I'm informed it's an "Arctic Mass" this time instead. Whatever it is, it's extreme. And it's cold. And it's weather.

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Cathy Crowe, a street nurse and researcher who has been studying homelessness in Toronto for more than a decade, told me she'd feared this would happen. She and a group of other advocates met with the public health office in November, because they were pleased the department had been given responsibility for triggering the alerts that provide services for the first time this year.

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That's true.

"In my mind what this points to is the need for other measures outside what the threshold is," Shapiro said.

Also true. But if people apparently freezing to death on the streets isn't cold enough to trigger an alert designed to save people from freezing to death on the streets, what's the point of having it at all?

MORE

Mayor Tory orders warming shelters open, city activates additional services

Edward Keenan writes on city issues ekeenan@thestar.ca . Follow: [@thekeenanwire](https://twitter.com/thekeenanwire)

John Clarke spoke to media as a group of Ontario Coalition Against Poverty demonstrators gathered at Mayor John Tory's office Tuesday, protesting the deaths of two men who died on the streets during the latest snap.

Document TOR0000020150107eb1600004



News | Toronto Star

Two men found dead overnight, OCAP decries lack of warming centres

Sam Colbert

234 words

6 January 2015

The Toronto Star

TOR

English

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A man has been pronounced dead after he was found Tuesday morning in a bus shelter at Yonge and Dundas Sts. wearing a T-shirt, jeans and a hospital bracelet, police say.

The man was in his 40s and had no vital signs when rushed to hospital, Toronto Paramedics said.

Police were called at 5:26 a.m. for a man lying down in the shelter at the intersection's southwest corner. He wasn't moving when police found him, said police spokeswoman Const. Jeniffer Sidhu.

"He was immediately transported to hospital," said Sidhu. "Police drove the ambulance while paramedics worked on the man."

On Monday, a body was found in a truck at a shipping yard near Davenport Rd. and Lansdowne Ave.

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty issued a statement Tuesday in response to the two deaths. OCAP called out the city for not issuing an extreme cold weather alert, which would trigger the opening of warming centres available to the homeless.

"It is unacceptable for homeless people to be left to freeze to death outside," read the statement. "The City of Toronto has the power to act immediately to address the homeless crisis and to prevent further deaths."

Police were not releasing further information about the man found Tuesday while trying to notify next of kin.

Document TOR0000020150106eb16001gx

Toronto under its 35th extreme cold alert of the winter

CP

94 words

15 March 2014

15:35 GMT

The Canadian Press

CPR

English

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TORONTO _ Another extreme cold weather alert has been issued for Toronto.

It's the 35th alert this winter, and comes a day after officials lifted the previous one.

That's compared with nine for all of last winter.

Calling an alert automatically increases services for homeless people, including opening more shelter spaces and asking shelters to relax any service restrictions they may have.

The temperature is forecasted to drop to -16 C on Saturday and feel even colder with the windchill. (AM640)

20140315CPCPN0233

Document CPR0000020140316ea3f00011

Greater Toronto

Council decides homeless no 'crisis'; Discussion on shelters delayed as left loses bid for key committee seats

Daniel Dale and Paul Moloney Toronto Star

789 words

21 February 2013

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

GT2

English

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It wasn't a great meeting for Toronto city council's left wing.

First, left-leaning councillors failed to get council to discuss a winter "crisis" in homeless shelters. Then, after a debate marked by bickering and name calling, the Rob Ford administration easily defeated a bid to put some left-leaning councillors on the executive and budget committees.

Ford loyalist Vince Crisanti joins the 13-member executive, replacing Mike Del Grande, who resigned last month. Councillor Frances Nunziata takes the budget spot vacated by Frank Di Giorgio, who has been promoted to budget chief.

A report on the shelter issue goes to a committee next month. But Councillor Adam Vaughan said the situation is a "crisis" that demands immediate discussion - a position shared by Ontario Coalition Against Poverty supporters who protested outside Ford's office last week and attended Wednesday's meeting.

Council voted 24-20 in favour of holding the debate immediately, but the motion needed 30 votes to pass. Three shouting OCAP supporters then interrupted the meeting, forcing an early lunch break.

"Shame on this council," one woman yelled from the public gallery. "You have blood on your hands," she said, referring to a recent spate of homeless deaths in the midst of bitter weather.

OCAP leader John Clarke pledged to turn Metro Hall, on nearby John St., into a "shelter" next month. "March 7 opening of #MetroHallShelter must be an outpouring of community solidarity with homeless," Clarke tweeted. "We must act."

Seven homeless people have died so far this year, according to street pastor Doug Johnson Hatlem, who keeps statistics for the Toronto Homeless Memorial Network. The network has counted 700 such deaths since 1985.

Vaughan said his goal was to get approval for a temporary emergency shelter. "The clear indication we're getting is that this is a crisis, people are in harm's way, and the city is failing to take care of them," he told reporters.

Several right-leaning councillors who opposed Vaughan's proposal to open debate also expressed concern about the plight of the homeless, but argued the issue should go through the usual procedure.

Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong, Deputy Mayor Doug Holyday, and Ford's staff argued that the shelter situation is not as dire as Vaughan and OCAP say.

"Every night, there are empty beds in Toronto shelters," Ford's staff said in talking points distributed to his allies and seen by the Star. "Toronto shelters are currently running just under capacity (average of 96 per cent at capacity) suggesting the system is the right size. How many more empty beds should taxpayers pay for?"

Minnan-Wong (Ward 34, Don Valley East) distributed a city occupancy report from Tuesday that showed a 4 per cent vacancy rate across the shelter system. Of 167 total beds available, there were 144 for men, eight for women and 14 for youth.

"I think what we've heard in the past when we've had these debates (is that) there are going to be individuals, no matter what, will not be convinced to take a shelter space. And that's a real challenge for us. The worst thing is someone who doesn't take a bed; we want everyone in those beds. But in terms of availability, yesterday there were 167 spaces, and if we were to hit a cold weather alert, we'd have about 300 spaces available," Minnan-Wong said.

Vaughan (Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina) said vacancies don't always correspond with need. Beds are sometimes available only in certain areas of the city, far from people who need them, or only for certain groups.

He said the referral centre on Peter St. in his ward has been allowing about 70 people to sleep there, many on couches and the floor because it has only 40 beds. The facility is not supposed to function as a shelter.

Vaughan suffered a setback later in the day when his nomination to the executive committee was rejected and Crisanti was picked in a 40-4 vote.

A bid to put left-leaning Councillor Janet Davis on the budget committee was rejected in favour of council Speaker Frances Nunziata, who got the spot in a 40-3 vote.

In other business Wednesday, council voted 42-0 to change the name of Don Jail Roadway to Jack Layton Way as a way to honour the late former Toronto councillor and federal New Democratic Party leader.

OCAP protesters hang on to their sign in council chambers as a security guard attempts to take it from them.
BERNARD WEIL/ STAR

Document TOR0000020130221e92I0003p

News

Bracing for a winter blast; Toronto can expect type of cold 'that will freeze flesh in a few minutes'

Michael Woods Toronto Star

515 words

3 January 2012

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

A3

English

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It's a little late in the season, but Toronto is finally plunging into the deep freeze.

After temperatures dropped steadily on Monday due to a cold Arctic wind, Tuesday's mercury is projected to stay well below its typical level. The forecasted high for Toronto is -12C, but the wind chill will make it feel more like -27C.

"That's brutally cold," said David Phillips, senior climatologist at Environment Canada. "That will freeze flesh in a few minutes."

The City of Toronto issued an extreme cold weather alert on Monday as the temperature began to drop early in the afternoon. The alert, in effect until further notice, is to ensure homeless people have warm places to go to escape frigid temperatures.

The alert means shelters relax service restrictions and some drop-in locations supply TTC tokens so people have transportation to shelters. In addition, 172 shelter spaces are added across the city. At least one of the shelters providing extra cots was already full as of early Monday evening.

An extreme cold weather alert is called when Environment Canada predicts a temperature of -15C or lower, issues a wind-chill warning or predicts extreme weather conditions such as a blizzard.

Environment Canada also issued a special weather statement on Monday for much of southern Ontario warning of heavy flurries, gusty winds and blowing snow.

Environment Canada warned that gusty winds may whip up the snow and cause sudden low visibility for motorists. The federal agency also warned of winds of up to 60 kilometres per hour for most regions, with some areas of Ontario seeing as much as 15 centimetres of snow.

Snow squall watches took hold Monday for a large part of southwestern Ontario. Some places north of Toronto, such as Barrie, witnessed snow squalls Monday which substantially reduced visibility on area roads.

The sudden cold is a change from the warmer-than-usual temperatures the city saw through most of December.

It's also a different story out West, where the Prairies are seeing temperatures well above normal. In Calgary, temperatures are predicted to reach as high as 13C on Wednesday.

But the cold in the GTA will be short-lived: temperatures in Toronto are expected to rise to around freezing on Wednesday and 5C by the end of the week. There's even a chance of rain on Saturday.

"It's literally a one-day wonder," Phillips said. "Nature can't figure out what it wants to give us."

If you see someone you think requires street outreach assistance, call 311. If it's an emergency, dial 911.

Pedestrians bundle up outside the Canon Theatre on a frigid night. Tuesday's forecast high is -12C, but it will feel like -27C with the wind. A person sleeps near a steam grate at the corners of Victoria Queen Sts. in spite of a extreme for on Monday. STEVE RUSSELL photos/ STAR

Document TOR0000020120103e81300003

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SHELTERING THE HOMELESS

Toronto News

Lessons from one man's death on the street; Activists are pointing fingers at the city, but outreach workers say gaps in the system are to blame when people die in the cold

JEFF GRAY

1,035 words

8 March 2008

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

A16

English

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Robert Maurice spent much of the last few months of his troubled life on crutches, panhandling in the cold, complaining at times that he was “sick of life.”

Outreach workers found him on the streets more often, sometimes drunk, near the end of last year. But he was known to crack a joke, especially before a broken leg appeared to plunge him deeper into depression.

“He had a real dry sense of humour. He went by ‘Rob Banks’ on the street,” said Doug Johnson Hatlem, 31, an outreach worker with the church-run downtown Sanctuary drop-in centre near Yonge and Bloor Streets. “He would deliver that line totally deadpan and then wait for you to get what he was saying, and then crack a small smile.”

On Feb. 28, Mr. Maurice's crutches were found on a landing in a parking garage stairwell, and his body was discovered several flights below. The garage is known as a place where some street people smoke crack or use other drugs, Mr. Johnson Hatlem said. Mr. Maurice, 50, was found by a homeless man around 7:30 p.m., on an evening when temperatures dipped below –20.

He did not exactly die in obscurity. Just four days after his body was found, activists for the homeless, including members of the often-confrontational Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, invoked his death at a city hall protest, halting a council debate. One activist shouted that Mr. Maurice, a native man, was dead because of “colonialism”; all angrily accused city councillors of killing him.

They said Mr. Maurice was homeless and that the city's overcrowded shelters turn homeless people away, even when the city declares a cold weather alert as it did that night. But city officials say the shelter system had empty beds that night and every night, and that no one seeking shelter is turned away.

Regardless, it is extremely unlikely that Mr. Maurice was headed to a city shelter. Despite the protesters' rhetoric, he actually had a bed in a small room, which he shared with a roommate, at a licensed rooming house near Bedford and Davenport Roads. Managers at Bedford House, a red-brick building with special services for the mentally ill, where he was also fed meals and snacks, said he had been living there since August, 2006, placed there by Habitat Services, a city agency.

The outreach worker said he sympathized with the protesters' goals, but said more shelter beds would not have saved Mr. Maurice: “I tend to think more shelter beds need to be opened. But I don't think more shelters opened that night would have saved his life.”

For city Councillor Joe Mihevc (Ward 21, St. Paul's), the references to Mr. Maurice's death in a loud, angry protest were an example of the “politics of shouting at people, and the politics of misinformation” practised by radical anti-homelessness activists in this city.

The left-leaning Mr. Mihevc, chairman of the city's community development committee that oversees the shelter system, said the protests did not help homeless people.

“The radicals need to refocus their politics and they need to focus it away from the shelter system, which is not the problem, and focus it on the lack of housing,” Mr. Mihevc said. “That's the problem.”

He said that although the city has 200 fewer shelter beds than it once did, the city's Streets to Homes program, which aims to get homeless people off the street and into permanent housing, has found apartments for more than 1,500 homeless people since 2005.

Cathy Crowe, a nurse who co-founded the anti-homelessness Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, had said in a letter to the editor in The Globe and Mail that she had "confirmed" that Mr. Maurice was homeless. Asked this week to comment on the fact that the man actually lived in a rooming house, Ms. Crowe argued that the point she was making still stands.

"I think the way we understand it now, he spent a lot of time outside of that room," Ms. Crowe said, adding that many who knew him say he had been homeless for a long time before he moved into the room. "...He certainly lived in abject poverty and had many needs."

Mr. Johnson Hatlem said the real lessons to be learned from Mr. Maurice's death shouldn't be lost in the back-and-forth between protesters and the city.

For instance, he said, the most outreach workers can offer a homeless alcoholic is a 21-day detox program, which is unlikely to offer a permanent solution. There are no long-term addiction treatment programs to which he can refer people, he said.

Despite city assurances that there are always shelter beds available, he said there are "communication problems" between the city, outreach agencies and the shelter system that result in confusion and, sometimes, in homeless people going without a shelter bed. For example, he learned only recently that the city's downtown homeless referral centre was now the central place to call, or to send a homeless person when looking for a shelter bed.

Once, he said, he was given the wrong phone number. Another city phone line, still used by outreach workers, often reports that no beds are available, he said, or are only available at Seaton House, a large shelter that some homeless people find so unpleasant they prefer to sleep outside.

Mr. Mihevc agreed that such gaps may exist, and blamed part of the problem on turnover in outreach agencies, which tend not to pay very well. He said the city plans to put its shelter referral program for outreach workers online to better co-ordinate the patchwork of agencies that staff the front lines.

"You send out memos, you do your education, and you find that the sector, within a year, has turned over," Mr. Mihevc said. "...Things are evolving to help with that."

Illustration

Document GLOB000020080308e4380003m

MUNICIPAL POLITICS

Toronto News

Antipoverty activists storm council; Protesters say city policies causing deaths on the streets; police push group out of chambers

JEFF GRAY

With a report from Jennifer Lewington

459 words

5 March 2008

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

A12

English

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Saying that Toronto's policies are causing deaths on the city's streets, activists against homelessness walked onto the floor of city council yesterday morning, forcing a stop to a debate on funding for shelters.

About a half dozen members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty – a group that also disrupted council in 2005 – tried to deliver letters to councillors, shouting “Shame!” and ignoring orders to leave before being pushed back by security.

OCAP activist Gaetan Heroux said the recent death of 50-year-old Robert Maurice – found last month at the bottom of a parking garage stairwell – showed that a lack of shelter beds was causing the homeless to freeze to death, an accusation denied by city officials and police.

“Do you know who Robert Maurice was?” Mr. Heroux shouted. “Do you care who he was? ... Your people are dying on the streets. Your shelters are overcrowded and full!”

After 10 minutes of shouting and speeches, about a dozen police officers moved in and pushed the group of about 20 activists out of the council chamber. Council then remained recessed for lunch.

According to city politicians, officials and police, Mr. Maurice, who died Feb. 28, was not homeless at the time of his death. Police say they found identification on him that showed he lived in a rooming house, and officers found his personal belongings there.

Mr. Heroux told reporters he knew Mr. Maurice and that the man attended Sanctuary, a church-run drop-in centre, although he acknowledged he had not seen him in about 18 months.

Councillor Joe Mihevc (Ward 21, St. Paul's), who chairs the council committee that oversees shelters, said the city has extra beds available every night. During the last cold-weather alert, when officials opened 80 emergency beds, just 36 were occupied, he said.

City officials said the city usually has 170 vacant shelter beds a night.

Councillor Adam Vaughan (Ward 20, Trinity Spadina), said he agreed with the protesters that conditions in the city's shelters were terrible.

“They're not wrong,” Mr. Vaughan said, saying the city should open more beds. “ ... This crisis has not gone away, despite all government efforts.”

Later, council voted to send off to various committees several motions put forward by the mayor's critics, including a proposal to slash the number of councillors in half to 22 and another to freeze their salaries.

A motion by Councillor Rob Ford (Ward 2, Etobicoke North) to name new streets after Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan was also referred to a committee for further study.

Illustration

News

Extreme cold alert, extreme warnings; City adds beds, services, outreach workers warn of frostbite, amputation

Joanna Smith

Toronto Star

465 words

11 February 2008

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

A08

English

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Being on that corner makes him feel closer to his father.

Gazing south down Bay St. from his spot atop the subway grate on the corner of Queen St. W., he explained that his father was a foreman when several of the nearby bank towers were built.

His father died last June and when Matt, himself a former journeyman, began surviving on the sidewalks, he found himself gravitating to the shadows of his father's work.

Matt, 30, says he has a ticket to Saskatoon and plans to reunite with his wife there as soon as he can find enough cash to get his stuff out of storage. But he was planning to spend last night on that corner, even though the City of Toronto issued an extreme cold weather alert.

The city rolled out extra services like 80 more beds, extended hours at drop-in centres and free subway tokens to get the homeless into shelters as temperatures were expected to drop to "13C overnight, with a wind-chill factor of "26C.

"I'm out here, man," said Matt, who would not give his last name. "There are other people who need the shelters. I can handle the cold."

Lori Wolfshout, a street outreach worker with Toronto North Support Services, said she tries to tell people reluctant to go into shelters what could happen if temperatures drop.

"Basically we do the best we can do to let them know that it is going to be freezing cold outside and even if they choose not to go into a shelter, to possibly go indoors somewhere," Wolfshout said from the outreach van last night.

"You can get frostbite. You can lose your hands or feet. You could freeze to death," she said she tells them.

Timothy Walmsley, a client care worker at Na-Me-Res (Native Men's Residence), said it is hard to get people on the street to come into the shelter, with some not wanting to follow the strict house rules against drugs and alcohol.

"Some people prefer to actually continue with their addiction rather than come into a shelter for the night," he said.

City of Toronto spokesperson Brad Ross said capacity in Toronto's shelters reaches an average of 92 to 94 per cent during an extreme cold weather alert, adding that the city's contracts with motels means there would always be room for everyone seeking shelter.

This is the fourth cold weather alert in Toronto this year.

With files from Chris Jai Centeno

985954-671703.jpg | Richard Lautens star Matt, outside coffee shop at Bay Queen, said he would ignore the sleep outside. | ;

Document TOR0000020080211e42b0000t

News

City declares cold weather alert; Shelters add 80 sleeping spaces Frigid weather here to Thursday

Vanessa Lu and Curt Rush

Toronto Star

453 words

13 December 2005

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

B02

English

Copyright (c) 2005 The Toronto Star

Toronto Hostel Services declared an extreme cold weather alert yesterday, setting in motion a system to get homeless people out of the bitter cold.

Under the alert, called when the temperature dips below minus 15C without the wind chill, Toronto shelters will open another 80 emergency sleeping spaces, street outreach services will be beefed up and TTC emergency tickets will be distributed through drop-in centres and outreach agencies.

People can call the Street Helpline at 1-866-392-3777 to find shelter or services, and to let the city know if they see a homeless person sleeping outside.

The temperature at noon yesterday was minus 12C, with an overnight low of minus 15C.

The cold is expected to be with us until Thursday, when the temperature will warm up to zero and above heading into the weekend.

With the cold weather, the Toronto Municipal Licensing and Standards department is reminding landlords that the air temperature in rental housing must be at least 21C.

"No tenant should be without adequate heat at this time of the year," Richard Butts, the department's acting executive director, said in a news release. "During this extreme cold weather, we have arranged to have staff on call in order to investigate complaints and assist in emergency situations."

Many people, of course, love the cold and snow.

Ski operators across Ontario have opened their slopes in the past week, helped by the season's first snowstorm last week.

Phone lines are jammed with people making Christmas plans to ski and snowboard at various resorts, including Collingwood's Blue Mountain Resort.

"We're booked right through Christmas and New Year's, but there is limited room before Christmas and we have some great deals after the New Year," said Blue Mountain spokeswoman Shannon Bell.

She said Blue Mountain opened last Wednesday, earlier than last year. Twelve of 35 trails and four of 14 lifts are open.

At Glen Eden in Milton, the hills opened this past weekend.

"We've got a good base of 40 centimetres and we're making snow around the clock," executive manager Bob Harris said, adding six lifts are open.

Last year, Glen Eden wasn't able to open until Dec. 18.

Harris said the cold temperatures have been a boon to ski operators because a big snowfall in southern Ontario is often followed by a warm spell.

482672-336715.jpg | Vince Talotta star Street people huddle yesterday at Queen Victoria Sts. as the city declared an extreme . More sleeping spaces will be opened in shelters. | ;

Document TOR0000020051213e1cd00005

News

Shelters fill up as chill grips city On a frigid day, a hot roast beef dinner to comfort the homeless; 100 extra beds made available Extreme cold weather alert in effect

Jordan Heath-Rawlings and Andrew Mills

Toronto Star

825 words

20 December 2004

The Toronto Star

TOR

ONT

A03

English

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It was minus 22C and Jim Snow wouldn't leave the blue tarp shelter - his home - in a field along the Don Valley Parkway.

"Nope. Won't go," he told the Street Help workers pleading with him to come inside last night.

"I know," Snow said. "I'm freezing. I'm freezing."

Had he come with them, and so many wouldn't on the first night of an extreme cold weather alert - the season's first - they would have had to scramble to find a place

All spaces in the Out of the Cold program were full. The city's newest shelter, at 110 Edward St., which opened Thursday by referral only with dormitories and beds still under construction, took in people on an emergency basis and let them sleep on the floor.

The Maxwell Meighan Centre on Sherbourne St. was the only other place taking people in last night. And as temperatures dropped, those beds were filling up quickly.

Earlier in the day, about 300 of the city's homeless were able to escape the deep freeze of the streets for a warm restaurant setting for a few hours in the afternoon. At Biagio's on King St. E., owner Biagio Vinci opened his doors for the restaurant's seventh annual Sunday Christmas Brunch for the homeless.

Word spread quickly on the frigid streets, and by 2 p.m. Vinci, his family and friends and restaurant staff had served more than 250 meals of minestrone, roast beef, mashed potatoes and fresh vegetables with an English trifle dessert.

"It's fantastic - best meal I've had in a long time," said John Sterjovski, who didn't have a rooming house lined up for the night and was planning to "go from one place to another, just trying to keep warm."

Vinci was not the only one throwing open his doors. Out of the Cold, a coalition set up to open public facilities like churches and synagogues to help the homeless, opened three temporary shelters yesterday afternoon. All were filled last night. Drop-in centres and other soup kitchens were also preparing for a very busy evening.

The forecast high of minus 18C for the city yesterday prompted Toronto's Hostel Services Unit to declare the extreme cold weather alert, swinging the city's emergency shelter plans into action.

The night's low of minus 22C would make yesterday the second-coldest Dec. 19 on record, Environment Canada said, behind a minus 24C day in 1942.

More than 100 extra beds were made ready at shelters across the city, and extra outreach vans were patrolling the streets, trying to persuade as many as possible to come in out of the cold.

At minus 36C, the expected low for last night with the wind chill factored in, exposed skin can freeze in about 12 minutes, said Environment Canada senior climatologist David Phillips.

"It's very dangerous for those out on the street," he said. "For them, tonight, survival could depend on finding that warm grate or at least some place to keep themselves out of the wind."

With a high of minus 13C forecast for today, Hostel Services will wait until this morning to decide whether to extend the alert. Temperatures are expected to rise back above freezing tomorrow.

Some people in East York were forced to face the weather without electricity for nearly four hours yesterday, as a broken insulator cut power in the area at about 8 a.m., said Thelma Hatzis, a spokesperson for Toronto Hydro.

Meanwhile, at 110 Edward St., the new city-provided resource for those in danger of being left on the cold streets, the staff of six worked to find beds at other shelters around the city. By nightfall, as beds around the city filled up, the shelter allowed some to stay even though there were no beds ready. About 80 beds, still being put together yesterday, should be open before Christmas.

The shelter is the first part of a broader homeless plan that Mayor David Miller has said will be introduced in January

"We have about 100 extreme weather beds that are added to the system at these times of year, and we have called a cold alert for today so those beds will be added on for tonight," said Maura Lawless, manager of hostel operations for the city.

"We've been working pretty closely with the outreach vans since we opened the Edward facility," she said.

with files from Jen Gerson

245362-168687.jpg | Rick Madonik star Angelo Vinci helps serve a roast beef dinner to people yesterday at his brother's King St. E. eatery, Biagio's Ristorante. "It's fantastic," said one happy man. | ;

Document TOR0000020041220e0ck00064

Toronto News

City urges homeless to sleep indoors; Bitter cold prompts efforts to encourage street-dwellers to seek shelter

JAMES RUSK

643 words

20 December 2004

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

A12

English

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In the face of bitter cold that brought the winter's first extreme cold-weather alert, outreach workers went to the streets last night to try to convince homeless people to sleep indoors.

"We know there are people out there who are reluctant to go to a shelter," said Elaine Smyer, manager of emergency planning for the city's hostel services.

The emergency was called when temperatures fell precipitously during the day. Overnight temperatures were forecast to fall to -22 and, with wind chill, to -33 .

Under emergency conditions, outreach workers look for people attempting to get through the night on the street and try to persuade them to come in from the cold, an effort that may take a number of visits as the workers check on people during the night, Ms. Smyer said.

"Depending on their age, or their health, or if they are using any medication, or if they are using any substance or alcohol, they might not be able to tell if it's really cold," she said.

"So the vans are out there telling them this is not regular cold. This is an extreme-cold alert, and you've got to come in. They may not just think this is going to affect them."

Outreach workers drive people to shelters if they decide to go to one, and they also distribute TTC tickets to help the homeless reach shelters on their own, she said.

The city has 107 emergency beds in its shelter system, and agencies that feed and house people in the Out of the Cold Program can provide about another 100 beds, Ms. Smyer said.

Last week, under a plan approved by city council at the beginning of the month, the city opened a referral centre on Edward Street near City Hall, and although the city plans to put 80 emergency beds in the shelter, they are not available yet, she said.

The centre, staffed by city employees, is open all night, and workers give those who come in a cup of coffee and a referral to a place where they can sleep for the night.

"Some people have specific needs, and they'll work with the shelter to match people up and arrange for transportation."

Trying to convince people to come into the warmth of shelter is about the only way the city can help the homeless.

"That's all we can do," Ms. Smyer said. "Unless there is a change in the policy, we can't force people off the street."

"So we just try to convince them, and some of the outreach staff are very good at doing that."

There has been one change from last winter in the city's cold-alert response.

In previous years, the city opened warming centres in city-owned buildings where the homeless could drop in to thaw out when drop-in centres were not operating.

This year, the hours of operation at some drop-in centres have been extended and the city has opened the all-night centre on Edward Street.

The city calls an alert when Environment Canada predicts an overnight temperature of -15 , the wind chill reaches the level at which outdoor activity is not recommended, or extreme conditions such as blizzards are forecast.

Last winter, the city called three extreme cold-weather alerts, but because the cold snaps were long, those covered a total of 27 days.

The city will decide this morning whether to extend the alert, after it sees the forecast for tomorrow and for the overnight conditions tonight, Ms. Smyer said.

The city does not know how many people live on the streets in winter, she said.

Some reports have put the number at 500 to 1,000.

Illustration

Document GLOB000020041220e0ck0000a

News

Homeless advocates push for more winter shelter; Armouries, Metro Hall could be used Daytime warming centres needed

John Deverell

Toronto Star

682 words

10 January 2004

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

A18

English

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Dangerously cold temperatures are alarming advocates for Toronto's homeless.

With the mercury headed for minus 23 C (-9F) last night, and stiff winds blowing during a third straight day of cold alert, the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee called on local government to open Metro Hall as a warming centre.

The city did that several times last winter. An even better emergency measure, said the committee's Tony Tracy, would be to immediately offer the empty Moss Park Armoury at Jarvis and Queen Sts. or the Fort York Armoury near Bathurst and Front Sts. to people desperate for warmth.

"People are doing anything they can to stay alive during the day - going to coffee shops, libraries, community centres to warm up," he said. They also go to shopping malls, but mall security forces are trained to remove people who don't seem to have the money to shop. "We see those expulsions quite regularly at the Eaton Centre," Tracy said.

The crucial question, however, is how to make it through the night.

The city's 3,100 shelter spaces, particularly those for single men, are already overloaded. Jamming in extra cots and floor mats is a wrongheaded answer, Tracy said.

Beric German, an advocate with Street Health, said nobody should be fooled when city officials equate floor mats to beds. Nobody fares well in crowded conditions with low or no standards, he said. People are understandably reluctant to sleep on the floor cheek by jowl with strangers, and the risk of spreading bedbugs, tuberculosis and airborne viruses is obvious.

"Why do we wait for a cold snap to think these thoughts?" he asked. "It is possible to anticipate winter.

"People can die quickly in the cold, and it is simply not safe to live out. It is as if we are declaring that these people don't matter."

Pam Johnston, Winter Street Patrol co-ordinator for Anishnawbe Health, said her van drivers prefer to steer street people to Out of the Cold, a small supplementary shelter network operated by volunteers in various church halls and basements, because there they are treated kindly. In a cold snap, she said, those spaces fill early, "and then all we can do is offer blankets, and dry mitts and socks. It's cold now, but it will be worse when it snows."

Out of the Cold offers 100 to 200 shelter beds each night in Toronto, many churches taking one turn each week and some more, but the strain of doing this for 15 years has been taking a toll on church congregations.

"Our program was intended for the most vulnerable," says Sister Susan Moran, 65, Catholic co-founder back in 1988 of the multi-denominational church shelter effort. "Church people have to be with people in the street, but the lineups are discouraging. We are seeing too much suffering," Moran said. "The city has to take more responsibility, and I hope it will."

Bob Rose, program director at the Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre, was among 15 activists who showed up yesterday at Mayor David Miller's office asking to discuss the weather crisis.

"The mayor agreed on Dec. 20 to take a tour of the homeless situation in Toronto ... and we're here to appeal to him to do that," Rose said. "He needs to go out and assess the situation."

The group is urging Miller to engage Ottawa and make the Moss Park Armoury available now, Rose said, "before we face more deaths on the street."

Rose said that since mid-December, he and other street workers have catalogued eight deaths that were preventable.

With files from Bruce DeMara

: Peter Power/ star A man rubs his hands in a vain attempt to keep warm while trying to sleep atop a heat vent on York St. near King St. last night. Aid agencies are trying to get more of the city's off the street during the bitter snap.

Document TOR0000020040110e01a0000q



Temporary Warming and Referral Centre extended.

221 words

29 January 2003

Canada NewsWire

CNNW

English

(c) 2003 Canada NewsWire

TORONTO, Jan. 29 /CNW/ - Community and Neighbourhood Services - The temporary warming and referral centre at Metro Hall, which has remained open evenings and overnights this week to provide refuge for homeless and vulnerable people, will remain open this evening until the morning of Thursday, January 30. The hours of operation will be 8 p.m. to 8 a.m.

The centre has provided relief from the cold, hot beverages, as well as a point of contact for people to gain access to shelter services. The warming and referral centre has been provided in addition to existing Extreme ColdWeather Alert services.

Since its opening on January 17, the centre has logged over 1,300 visits by homeless people. More than 700 people went to shelters and "Out of the Cold" facilities, to which transportation was arranged. Of the 700, 150 people who were without shelter and came in to warm up were referred to shelters by the warming centre staff. Outreach services have also been enhanced.

"The centre has been used as an additional point of contact for homeless people to connect with shelters and other services during this extended period of extreme cold," said Phil Brown, the City's General Manager for Shelter, Housing and Support.

Visit our Web site at www..ca.

Document cnnw000020030129dz1t00619



Temporary warming and referral centre extended.

212 words

27 January 2003

Canada NewsWire

CNNW

English

(c) 2003 Canada NewsWire

TORONTO, Jan. 27 /CNW/ - Community and Neighbourhood Services - The temporary warming and referral centre at Metro Hall that remained open last weekend to provide refuge for homeless and vulnerable people will remain open evenings and overnight from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. until the morning of Wednesday, January 29.

The centre provides relief from the cold, hot beverages and a point of contact for people to gain access to shelter services. The warming and referral centre is being provided in addition to existing Extreme ColdWeather Alert services.

Since its opening on Friday, January 17, the centre has logged more than 1,000 visits by homeless people, provided more than 145 referrals to shelters, and arranged for transportation to the shelters. In addition, outreach services have been enhanced.

"The centre has been effective in providing an extra point of access for homeless people to reach shelters and other services during this period of extreme cold," said Phil Brown, the City of Toronto's General Manager for Shelter, Housing and Support. "We are prepared to maintain this heightened level of service as long as this cold snap continues to ensure people have the opportunity to come indoors."

Visit our Web site at www..ca.

Document cnnw000020030127dz1r003kt

News

Video shows shelter's dark reality --- Homeless people lying side-by-side in cramped space Advocates using images to call for immediate action

Nick McCabe-Lokos

Toronto Star

706 words

17 December 2002

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

B04

English

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They are images of life at night in an emergency shelter that few people see.

Mats inches thin lay side by side in the basement. People mill about stepping over each other in the dark, trying to stake out a piece of the ground on which they can spend the night.

The videotape is being released by housing advocates to show, what they say, is the dire need to open 200 new shelter beds in Toronto.

"We know that shelters are overcrowded," said Beric German, of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee.

"This video was shot to show the conditions and the fact that we have to have more shelter beds.

"We need affordable housing ultimately."

The footage was recorded on Sunday night by a housing advocate who posed as a homeless man.

"He went in with a secret video. It was in his cap," German said.

The CBC, which has exclusive rights to the video, will broadcast excerpts tonight at 6 p.m. during a report on the Toronto version of Canada Now.

Much of the tape is shrouded in darkness, but a basement full of mats and people can be made out.

The name of the shelter was not released, but it operates as part of the Out Of The Cold network of about 40 churches, synagogues and agencies that provide care in addition to Toronto's 70 shelters.

German said his group felt it was necessary to show the cramped conditions that people who depend on emergency shelters must endure; conditions he says are both physically and psychologically dangerous.

"That's particularly dangerous around the old diseases like tuberculosis. And it's particularly dangerous to mental health because people can't be that close together, strangers particularly. They can suffer from depression ultimately."

While portions of the video show empty mats, German says that by the end of the night the shelter was at capacity, holding about 150 people.

"City council had said that if shelters are running at 90 per cent capacity then they should open a shelter. Shelters are running at well over 90 per cent capacity."

Unfortunately, German says, the conditions shown are not unique to the shelter in the video. It is similar in shelters across the city.

"We need a 200-bed shelter for both couples and men in particular. It's becoming more and more dangerous."

The city of Toronto has already issued one cold weather alert this season. The alerts are called when temperatures drop below -15C. Under the alert, extra services like additional emergency sleeping spaces, increased street patrols and TTC tickets are made available.

German worries about Norwalk virus spreading through the shelters. Victims of the virus deal with days of vomiting and diarrhea and since the shelter in the video provides only nighttime shelter they would be without care.

"In that particular shelter, people can't stay all day. So if they get Norwalk virus, they have to go out into the cold," he said.

During the last census, Statistics Canada tried to get a grasp on the number of people using emergency shelters across the country.

It's difficult to nail down since the number is always changing. But on the day they counted, May 14, 2001, there were 14,125 people who stayed overnight - 2,570 of those were in Toronto.

Homeless workers say that number is much too low.

German estimates that on any given night there are 1,000 people on the street and 5,000 people in the shelter system.

Last year, the federal and provincial governments announced a plan to start addressing the nationwide housing crisis.

The program was supposed to eventually see 10,000 affordable housing units built in Ontario, half of them in the GTA.

One year later, no new units have been constructed.

There are 60,000 families in Toronto on waiting lists for subsidized housing. In the GTA suburbs, another 26,000 are waiting.

A frame from an undercover video recorded at an unnamed Out of the shelter shows men sleeping in a hallway.
Document tor0000020021217dych0001u



News

Hostel services on cold alert --- City takes steps to aid homeless Weather alert runs through tonight

Jeff Beer

Toronto Star

332 words

3 December 2002

The Toronto Star

TOR

Ontario

B05

English

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When the temperature drops, so does the chance of survival for the people who live on Toronto's streets.

Yesterday, the City of Toronto's hostel services unit issued its first extreme cold weather warning of the season.

The warning extends through tonight and is aimed to help the city's homeless make it through the freezing weather.

"It's important to create awareness among the homeless that it is dangerously cold, so people can take steps that are needed to get warm," said John Jagt, director of Toronto Hostel Services.

"No matter how conditioned you are to living outdoors, the margin of safety is very narrow when it gets this cold."

Jagt said Hostel Services sends out extra street patrols to bring anyone they can indoors and to check on those who insist on remaining outside. They've also given TTC tickets to 50 drop-in centres and community agencies around the city to give a warm ride to a shelter for those who need it.

Shelters provide additional sleeping spaces and relax their curfew rules to accommodate anyone stuck in the cold. Police and other emergency services are also on heightened alert.

Last year, Jagt said there were five cold weather warnings, spanning 12 days in total. Warnings are issued when the temperature reaches -15C, or during extreme weather conditions such as blizzards or ice storms.

"I don't know if we've ever had one this early. We didn't expect it this quickly," said Jagt.

Despite the cold sweeping in sooner than expected this year, Hostel Services runs its cold weather preparations from Nov. 15 to March 15 annually.

The city stepped up efforts to help the homeless during the winter months of 1995/1996 after three homeless men - Irwin Anderson, 63, Eugene Upper, 56, and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani, 41 - died as a result of sleeping outdoors.

Document tor0000020021203dyc30001u

Toronto News

Alerts persuade just some homeless Extra city services not fully utilized

GAY ABBATE

483 words

3 January 2001

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A14

English

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This winter's extreme-cold alerts have had only partial success in getting Toronto's homeless in out of the cold.

That is despite the additional resources, both financial and staff, that the city and outreach agencies have spent trying to encourage those living on the street to seek shelter on the coldest nights.

Toronto's medical officer of health has issued four cold alerts covering eight nights this winter, only four shy of the 12 nights last winter for which eight alerts were issued.

Extra services automatically kick in when a cold-weather alert is declared, including about 200 additional hostel beds and out-of-the-cold centres operated by churches.

But the nearly 100 extra beds in hostels remained half to two-thirds empty on cold-alert nights in December, Liz Jenzen, a regional director with Toronto Public Health, said.

She is chairman of a designated alert team that monitors weather forecasts and conditions on the street.

Denise Toulouse co-ordinates the Anishnawbe street patrol, which takes food, warm drinks and sleeping bags to street people.

"We like to believe the alerts help," she said.

On a recent alert night, the patrol's bicycle squad located 22 people sleeping in the city's more isolated areas, which the patrol's vans could not easily reach.

Fourteen asked for assistance in getting to shelters.

"This is a good number," Ms. Toulouse said.

The homeless who refuse to go to a shelter, no matter how cold the night, cite as their primary reasons the lack of privacy, fear for their safety and noise, she said.

Toronto Councillor Jack Layton, a member of the city's homelessness advisory committee, said the alerts "underline the terrible absurdity of the homeless crisis we're in and how large it's become."

The goal of a cold alert is not just getting people indoors.

The primary objective is to prompt those who do seek shelter to make a connection with social workers, learn to trust them and "hopefully, over time . . . accept more services," Ms. Jenzen said.

An alert was called on New Year's day, when Environment Canada predicted the night temperature would dip below -15 , the yardstick used by the health board.

None was called for last night because the temperature was expected to drop to only -12 .

A controversy about the standard continues today, five years after the first extreme-cold weather alert.

The homeless advisory committee has argued that the threshold should be zero degrees, because hypothermia can strike even at above-freezing temperatures, Mr. Layton said.

Ms. Jenzen said the hostels cannot accommodate the additional permanent beds that relaxed criteria for cold alerts would require.

As it is, the additional beds on alert nights are simply mats scattered on the floor, usually in the hostel's reception areas.

Document glob000020010711dx13001fe

Toronto News

Cold snap starts rush to aid homeless

JOHN SAUNDERS

416 words

28 December 2000

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A19

English

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For the third time since winter officially started last week, Toronto officials issued an extreme-cold-weather alert yesterday and the Anishnawbe Street Patrol did what it could to get the homeless indoors.

"There's a few out there who want to stay out there," said Lois Niahwegahbow, riding shotgun in a patrol van. "They're out on the grates and don't want anything to do with the shelters. Too much like prison."

Ms. Niahwegahbow, an Ojibwa from Manitoulin Island, and driver Robert Neobitung, a Saulteaux from Yellowquill, Sask., work for a native-run organization that helps people on the street regardless of race. The van had mitts and blankets for the stubborn and space for eight passengers willing to accept rides to a shelter.

Sharing the load were the Red Cross, the Street Helpline (392-3777), and such voluntary programs as Out of the Cold, which offers beds and meals in churches.

The temperature was forecast to hit -18 overnight, with a chance of wind chill equivalent to -30. At such temperatures, there is a risk of frostbite or hypothermia, federal meteorologist Andrea Sale said.

Toronto's Public Health Department issues cold alerts and calls for extra efforts to get people off the street when it expects a temperature of -15 or below or a blizzard, ice storm or other extreme event.

With temperatures forecast to stay low, the alert will apply tonight as well as last night. The last two alerts also covered two days each, bringing the total to six days with the winter barely begun.

In the Anishnawbe van, James Jacobs accepted a lift to a downtown shelter and explained why others would not. "A lot of people won't go into the shelters because there's body lice, a high rate of TB, violence," he said.

Mr. Jacobs, a 38-year-old Ojibwa from Gogama in Northern Ontario, said the unwary lose their packs and shoes. "Some people dig [rob] you when you're asleep. If you've got money in your pocket, they'll take a razor blade and cut your pocket and take the money out."

Volunteers across Toronto scrambled to help. Ann Knopf, outreach co-ordinator at St. Simon the Apostle Anglican Church on Bloor Street East, said the church offers bunks and meals for 65 people, seven days a week. Mats and blankets were available for an extra 10 people last night, she said.

Illustration

Document glob000020010806dwcs01qx8

Toronto-Cold Alert

CP

105 words

28 December 2000

09:48 GMT

Broadcast News

BNW

English

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TORONTO -- An extreme cold weather alert remains in effect for Toronto.

Today's high is only expected to reach minus-13.

The city's medical health officer issued the alert yesterday to get homeless people off the streets.

The alert means more sleeping spaces will be freed up in hostels and shelters.

There are about six-thousand beds in the city's shelter system, with about 100 emergency beds added during cold weather alerts.

Outreach services will be making every effort to pick up homeless people, or give them transit fares as an incentive to seek shelter.

(BN,CP24-s)

HEB

Document bnw0000020010803dwcs026ik



NEWS

Extreme cold fills the city's shelters --- Workers also deliver blankets, food to homeless

Andrea Houston and Peter Edwards

STAFF REPORTERS

301 words

26 December 2000

The Toronto Star

TOR

1

GT02

English

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The extreme cold weather alert, in effect since Thursday, could be extended again depending on how low the temperature dips over the next few days.

"It is just too cold to stay outside," said John Jagt, director of Toronto's Hostel Services. "Hypothermia can set in really quickly. The human body is not meant to stay out in conditions like this."

An extreme cold weather alert is called when temperatures drop below minus 15C with or without a wind chill. Extra emergency sleeping spaces are made available in the city's shelters during the alert and relief workers check on those sleeping on the streets all night.

Mary Perra, of the STREET helpline, said cold weather alerts send city relief workers on a frantic mission to get the homeless warm blankets and food or bring them to shelters.

"During the alerts all of Toronto's 4,600 shelter beds fill to capacity," Perra said. "The shelters are overflowing and have been since September. People are sleeping in the living rooms and on kitchen floors."

But Jagt said there is room for all the homeless in shelters this Christmas.

"We have lots of room right now," Jagt said. "Our only concern is that people avail themselves of it."

Perra said that those who do not want to go to shelters will be given blankets, coffee and soup to help stay warm.

One homeless woman woke up warm and grateful yesterday, in from the cold at the hostel at Sherbourne and Wellesley Sts.

"I can't complain," said Dianna, who asked that her last name not be used.

"We had turkey dinner and we had sandwiches."

With files from Tim Cook

Document tor0000020010813dwcq01dja

Toronto News
Extreme-cold warning issued

Estanislao Oziwicz

206 words

26 December 2000

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A26

English

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Toronto's medical officer of health issued an extreme-cold weather alert over the weekend to help get homeless people shelter.

Under such alerts, extra services are available to help homeless people. They include additional emergency sleeping spaces in hostels and shelters, beefed-up street rounds by Anishnawbe Health Street Patrol, distribution of TTC tickets and emergency transportation through the Canadian Red Cross.

"These alerts are a short-term emergency response to a serious social problem," Liz Janzen, regional director with Toronto Public Health, said in a statement over the weekend. "It in no way makes up for the desperate need for long-term solutions to the increasing problem of homelessness in our city.

"However, we hope that by co-ordinating our resources and temporarily increasing some services, we will avoid the kind of situation in which homeless people can't find space or don't know where to go for help when it is extremely cold."

An alert goes into effect when Environment Canada predicts a temperature of --15 or lower without wind chill, issues a wind-chill warning, or predicts a blizzard or ice storm.

The alert was issued for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Illustration

Document glob000020010806dwcq01qn7

Toronto

Shelters offer more beds after cold weather alert: 'Plenty of room for all': Van patrols give out blankets, food to those still on streets

Mark Gollom

National Post

566 words

26 December 2000

National Post

FINP

Toronto

A20 / Front

English

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Homeless shelters opened up more beds and street patrols extended their hours in the wake of an extreme cold weather alert.

The alert, which was issued on Sunday by the city's medical officer of health, came as temperatures dipped below -15C. Although Environment Canada said no records were broken, temperatures have been colder than would normally be expected for December.

Under the alert, TTC tickets are also distributed through 17 drop-in centres and outreach agencies to help homeless people reach shelters.

John Jagt, director of hostel services, said the weather alert prompted the opening of 100 more beds.

He said most hostels reported some vacancies, which meant there would be "plenty of room for all."

"We're in good shape right now. The numbers are not high right now because a lot of people take Christmas invitations," he said.

"Even the homeless still have connections with families and friends and get invited in."

Despite public perception, he said, very few homeless people will remain outside when temperatures plummet.

"We estimate that when it gets as cold as it did, the numbers will be below 100 people that opt to stay out," he said.

He added that when temperatures drop to these levels, shelter managers are somewhat less strict with the rules.

"Like curfew. Some of these rules they may otherwise enforce, they may set aside."

He said city vans -- which usually patrol the streets just past 1 a.m. to feed and provide blankets to those homeless who refuse to go inside -- were making their rounds until 7 a.m. yesterday. Those who do remain on the street are less visible to patrols, said Robert Russell, a spokesman for the Salvation Army Harbour Light, which has its own patrol van.

"The colder it is, the more people tend to hide away," Mr. Russell said. "They have to find more out-of-the-way places and it makes it hard to find them."

Street patrol groups were busy co-ordinating vans and fielding numerous calls from people asking about shelters and holiday meals.

The Salvation Army was just one of a number of community organizations and hostels throughout the city that offered Christmas turkey dinner and small gifts of clothing.

One community worker at Seaton House, which shelters nearly 500 men a night, said hundreds of people came in for the turkey dinner and gift packs.

Seaton House gives homeless people 24-hour access to their beds during the holidays. Normally, people must be out of the building by 8 a.m

"They have Christmas and today and New Year's Day to catch up on their sleep," said a worker at the shelter.

This is the fifth year the extreme cold weather plan has been in place.

"These alerts are a short-term emergency response to a serious social problem," said Liz Janzen, Regional Director with Toronto Public Health.

"It in no way makes up for the desperate need for long-term solutions to the increasing problem of homelessness in our city."

Black & White Photo: Carlo Allegri, National Post / Daniel Mitchell, right, chef at the Salvation Army kitchen, Jarvis Street, cooks turkey dinner for the yesterday, watched by volunteer co-ordinator Terri Pilch.

Document finp000020010806dwcq0118s

Extreme Cold Weather Alert Called

482 words

24 December 2000

17:36 GMT

Canada NewsWire

CNNW

English

(Copyright Canada NewsWire 2000)

TORONTO, Dec. 24 /CNW/ - Toronto Public Health --- Toronto's Medical Officer of Health has issued an extreme cold weather alert to help get homeless people in from the cold. The alert is effective on the following dates: December 24 and Monday December 25.

An alert goes into effect when Environment Canada:

- predicts a temperature of -15 degrees Celsius or lower, without wind

chill

- issues a wind chill warning for outdoor activity for people in the

Toronto area

- predicts extreme weather conditions, such as a blizzard or ice storm.

Under the alert the following extra services are available to help homeless people:

- additional emergency sleeping spaces in Toronto hostels/shelters

- increased street patrols by Anishnawbe Health Street Patrol to reach

homeless people

- distribution of TTC tickets through 17 drop-in centres and outreach

agencies to help homeless people reach shelters

- provision of emergency transportation through the Canadian Red Cross

for homeless people trying to reach services/shelters.

The STREET Helpline service, 416-392-3777, also operates 24 hours a day to let homeless people and front-line workers know where to find shelter and other services. Members of the public can also call this number if they see a homeless person sleeping outside.

This is the fifth year the extreme cold weather plan has been in place. Last year, alerts were in effect for 12 days. "These alerts are a short term emergency response to a serious social problem," said Liz Janzen, Regional Director with Toronto Public Health.

"It in no way makes up for the desperate need for long term solutions to the increasing problem of homelessness in our city. However, we hope that by co-ordinating our resources and temporarily increasing some services we will avoid the kind of situation in which homeless people can't find space or don't know where to go for help when it is extremely cold."

Ms. Janzen chairs a designated alert team that meets regularly throughout the winter to monitor conditions on the street. Team members include representatives from Public Health and Shelter, Housing and Support Divisions, the Out of the Cold Program, STREET Helpline, Anishnawbe Street Patrol, Youthlink Innerscity, and Toronto Police.

Members of the public and businesses who wish to donate blankets, food and services, or volunteer their time throughout the winter, please call the following numbers:

Money: United Way of Greater Toronto 416-777-2001

Clothing: Chill Out 416-934-1227

Food: Daily Bread Food Bank 416-203-0050

Time: Community Information 416-397-INFO

Toronto, STREET Helpline 416-392-3777

/For further information: Toronto Public Health: Monday to Friday, 8:30-4:30, call Mary Margaret Crapper, 416-392-1494. Weekends and holidays, call 416-690-2142, and ask to page the on-call Communications representative. Hostel Services: John Jagt, Director, Hostel Services, 416-392-5358. After hours, call 416-420-0771./ 12:36 ET

Document cnw000020010805dwco00xcs

NEWS

Advocates slam \$26 million plan for homeless aid --- Government putting more people out on street, agencies say

Theresa Boyle and Andrew Chung

STAFF REPORTERS

575 words

22 December 2000

The Toronto Star

TOR

1

NE07

English

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Rooming house fire remembered, A26

Advocates for the homeless, fatigued by what they see as an unwillingness to strike at the heart of the problem, refused to applaud the provincial government's \$26-million-plus investment in homelessness.

Instead, they struck out in anger yesterday at the money, even going so far as to say it will spill more homeless on to our streets.

"They supposed today we'd all be saying, 'Yay,'" said Beric German of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, which views homelessness as a national disaster. "But we have not seen anything to end homelessness here. It will just make more homelessness."

German and others from agencies around Toronto said that by ignoring the need for more affordable housing, the government is playing a dangerous game of brinkmanship with people's lives as many continue to be forced into the shelters or streets.

"Without a national housing strategy, people will die. We must rage against this," said German, adding Queen's Park will be forced to shell out more money each year to deal with burgeoning numbers of homeless people.

Municipal Affairs Minister Tony Clement and Social Services Minister John Baird held a joint news conference yesterday to announce the plan.

Up to \$20 million will be used to increase the province's share of spending on emergency shelters and for permanent housing and supports for people who are mentally ill.

"Homelessness is a problem that concerns us all, especially when the weather turns cold. . . ," Baird said.

Yesterday, Toronto's medical officer of health issued her first extreme cold weather alert of the winter for today and tomorrow, in an attempt to get the homeless indoors. The temperature is expected to drop below -15C.

"Today's announcement isn't the entire answer to the problem, but it is a major and positive step forward," Baird added.

Funding for emergency shelters is supposed to be cost-shared between the province and municipalities in an 80/20 split.

But the City of Toronto complains that it has been short-changed by the province for years and has been forced to pick up more than 30 per cent of the tab.

'Will make a few more homeless people comfortable but it won't make a single homeless person any less homeless.'

Michael Shapcott

Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada The provincial shortfall translated into \$17 million last year, city officials say, and even with yesterday's announcement, the shortfall still exists and will total \$12 million next year.

The plan brought a flurry of local criticism.

Calling it "totally inadequate," Owen Leach of the Parkdale Tenants' Association wondered: "What are they doing to address the long-term problem? Hostels can only ever be a temporary situation. "

The money "will make a few more homeless people comfortable," said Michael Shapcott of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, "but it won't make a single homeless person any less homeless."

Government critics yesterday said it's high time for the province to get back into the business of constructing affordable housing.

The timing was more about optics and ducking debate, they said.

"The timing of this . . . shows it's a very cynical move," said Liberal critic David Caplan (Don Valley East), noting the Legislature's fall session ended the day before.

Document tor0000020010813dwcm01chg

Toronto News

Ontario shelters to get \$26-million But critics charge province turning blind eye to urgent, growing need for low-income housing

MARGARET PHILP

981 words

22 December 2000

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A18

English

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The first day of winter arrived yesterday with Toronto's public-health department declaring a cold-weather alert for homeless people sleeping outside and the Ontario government pledging \$26-million for shelters.

Roving vans of outreach workers hit the streets last night armed with more stores of blankets and subway tokens than usual, patrolling office-building doorways and bridges for homeless people, doling out soup and sandwiches to a population that prefers deathly cold to the noise and rules of shelters.

It is the first cold-weather alert of the winter, a condition declared by the medical officer of health when temperatures are forecast to dip below --15.

Within hours, Ontario Social Services Minister John Baird and Housing Minister Tony Clement chose the blustery day to promise more money for emergency homeless services. But they had nothing for the province's scarce stock of low-rent housing.

Most of the money will land in Toronto, where growing numbers of homeless people are sleeping outside on heating grates and filling all but a handful of the shelter system's nearly 5,000 beds.

For the first time in eight years, the province will increase its financial share of Toronto's hostel system from \$27.60 to \$30.40 a night per bed, nowhere near the \$45-a-night cost for a hostel bed and considerably less than the 80-per-cent share of the city's burgeoning hostel bill it is supposed to pay under Ontario legislation.

Most of what is left over from the \$26-million will sit in a \$4.1-million fund called Off the Street, Into Shelter for street patrols that roam streets and parks in vans, handing out sandwiches and soup to homeless people who won't go to shelters.

The nearest the province came to housing was to donate to the city a six-hectare piece of contaminated vacant property near the intersection of Eglinton Avenue and Black Creek Drive that could be used for a housing project.

The \$2-million piece of property, formerly used for aggregate extraction and waste disposal, contains unsafe levels of lead. The province has pegged the cost of cleanup as high as \$1-million.

"Today's announcement is not the entire answer to this problem," Mr. Baird told reporters, "but it is a major and positive step forward."

Everyone from municipal politicians to homeless advocates charged yesterday that, however welcome the money for beleaguered hostels and street patrols, the province is turning a blind eye to the urgent and growing need for social housing.

"All that is good stuff, but not a nickel -- not a red nickel -- is for affordable housing," said Dick Stewart, general manager of the people services department for the City of Ottawa. "All of that money I'll use. But at the end of the day, the province has to realize we have a housing crisis."

In Ottawa, where municipal officials have been slower to invest in more shelter beds than their Toronto counterparts, the vacancy rate for rental apartments hovers near zero.

Toronto's vacancy rate sits at just 0.6 per cent. And across the province, since the Harris government relaxed rent controls a few years ago, people are being evicted from their homes in record numbers.

In the five working days between Dec. 14 and 20 alone, landlords filed applications with the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal to evict 1,166 tenants, statistics from the tribunal show.

About 64 per cent of those applications will result in the automatic evictions of tenants who have no idea they have a right to challenge the notices, according to Jennifer Ramsay, co-ordinator with an eviction-prevention program run by the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation.

The rest, she said, will go to a hearing where adjudicators side with the landlord in the vast majority of cases.

Some critics charged that timing of the announcement just before Christmas was cynical from a government that, by ending rent control and killing all new social housing in the province, has only contributed to the problem of homelessness.

"It's like we're celebrating the deadbeat dad who before Christmas comes in and says, 'Oh, I'm finally going to pay almost all the money that I was supposed to pay,'" said Toronto Councillor Jack Layton.

"None of that money is going to go to the homeless. None of that money is going to create any additional beds. It's going to offset the city taxpayer who has been paying the province's share, just like the mom usually has to. It's nothing short of disgusting."

Still, the money will defray the cost of a shelter system that in the short span of five years has swelled from \$48-million to a budget of \$100-million for this coming year as the number of people on the streets has soared.

Most recently, the hostel system has witnessed a surge in homeless single women -- many suffering from mental illnesses.

"They're having a really, really hard time keeping their accommodation," said Shirley Hoy, Toronto's Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services. "Affordable housing is very, very difficult to find in Toronto, and those who have it, if they miss a payment, while in the past the landlord might forgive it, now the landlord knows there's someone else in line."

The money comes at a time, too, when hardly a cheque has been cut of the \$305-million in funding promised a year ago by the federal minister for homelessness, Claudette Bradshaw.

Mr. Stewart said his department is mired in negotiations with officials of her office who are spooked by the controversy that erupted last winter around lax procedures for awarding HRDC grants.

Illustration

Document glob000020010806dwcm01qbo

NEWS

Tent City dwellers get new shelter --- Housing unit is `cozy, beautiful'

Catherine Dunphy

TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR; STAFF REPORTER

528 words

8 December 2000

The Toronto Star

TOR

1

GT01

English

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The blue tarp over the chilled, wind-blasted Tent City shack they've called home for the last eight months ripped a little more last night.

For once, it didn't matter.

Karen Armour, Brian Boyd and dog Chaos spent the night in a new, clean, private place of their own.

"It's cozy, beautiful," said Armour as she stood on the small wooden porch of a one-room, 8 by 12 foot fibreboard housing unit that arrived via flatbed truck yesterday morning at the shantytown that has sprung up on the contaminated port lands, south of Lake Shore Blvd. E., near Cherry St.

"I think maybe something like this might help other people to get housing, too," Boyd said.

Dubbed Disaster House, the unit was sold to the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee for \$1 by its manufacturer, Durakit Shelters. The committee had it delivered to the Tent City site, where up to 30 people sleep in lean-to's, tents and makeshift sheds.

By sundown, Boyd and Armour had moved in their sleeping bags, a couch dropped off by a film crew the night before, a candle and a radio. They then placed their neatly folded clothing on the bottom of the shelving unit.

"This is really neat, and it's going to snow tonight," Armour said.

Under the city's cold weather alert policy, it's not obligated to provide other emergency shelter, such as opening up a facility like the Moss Park Armoury on Queen St. E. for people on the streets, unless the temperature falls below minus 15C, not including wind chill.

The housing unit sells for under \$2,500, according to Walter Dean, chief executive officer with Durakit Shelters. He said the unit should last from 50 to 100 years.

"These units are all over the world," Dean said. "Canada is one of the few places not to have any."

He said his company could give the city 30 units a week immediately.

The provincial environment ministry has ordered Tent City site owner Home Depot to remove residents because the land is contaminated.

Kira Heineck, co-ordinator for the disaster relief committee, said she hopes a new place is found for Tent City residents.

If that happens, the organization will donate the unit to the city, said committee member Beric German.

This unit has neither washroom facilities nor electricity. But German said the city could provide a site for units like this where there is already power, and could build some central communal washing facilities.

"This is not our answer, but we can't leave people long-term in the hostel system," German said.

Homeless activists say the city's existing shelters are full.

Last week, Toronto's community services director Shirley Hoy said the city will open two floors of the old Princess Margaret Hospital site on Sherbourne St. to house 120 homeless people by Dec. 15.

MOVING DAY: Tent City resident Brian Dubourdien congratulates Brian Boyd outside Boyd's new housing unit. Boyd his partner, Karen Armour, moved in yesterday.

Document tor0000020010813dwc801fs5



City of Toronto's extreme cold weather alert plan in place

449 words

24 November 2000

20:10 GMT

Canada NewsWire

CNNW

English

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TORONTO, Nov. 24 /CNW/ - The City of Toronto today announced its extreme cold weather plan for the winter season. This is the fourth year the plan will be in place. Toronto Public Health monitors weather forecasts daily from November 15 to April 15.

A cold weather alert will be called when Environment Canada predicts a temperature of - 15 degrees Celsius or lower, without windchill, issues a windchill warning for outdoor activity for people in Toronto; or predicts extreme weather conditions, such as a blizzard or ice storm.

Under a cold weather alert, extra services are available to help the

homeless:

- Additional emergency sleeping spaces in the City's hostels and shelters
- Increased patrols by Anishnawbe Health Street Patrol to reach homeless people
- Distribution of TTC tickets through 17 drop-in centres and outreach agencies to help homeless people reach shelters
- Provision of emergency transportation through the Canadian Red Cross

for homeless people to reach shelters or services

The STREET Helpline service at 416-392-3777 operates 24 hours a day to let homeless people and front line workers know where to find shelter and other services. The public can also call this number if they see a homeless person sleeping outside.

To address the critical need for additional beds for single women and couples the City is working with the Provincial government to open on an urgent basis 120 beds at the former Princess Margaret Hospital site.

"Extreme cold weather alerts are a short term emergency response to a serious social problem. It in no way makes up for the desperate need for long term solutions to the increasing homelessness problem in Toronto," said Liz Janzen, Regional Director, with Toronto Public Health. "We hope by co-ordinating our resources and temporarily increasing some services we will avoid a situation in which homeless people can't find space or don't know where to go for help when it is extremely cold."

A designated alert team of social service agencies and municipal representatives will meet regularly throughout this winter to co-ordinate the extreme cold alert program.

Members of the public and businesses who want to donate blankets, food, and services or volunteer their time throughout the winter can call the following organizations for more information:

Money: United Way of Greater Toronto 416-777-2001

Clothing: Chill Out 416-934-1227

Food: Daily Bread Food Bank 416-203-0050

Time: Out of the Cold call:

Community Information 416-397-INFO

Toronto STREET Helpline

/For further information: Media contacts: Mary Margaret Crapper, Toronto Public Health, (416) 392-1494, John Jagt, Shelter Housing & Support, (416) 392-5358/ 15:10 ET

Document cnnw000020010805dwbo00vhw

NEWS

Shelters open more beds during city's cold snap --- Homeless won't be forced to sleep on streets, hotline service vows

Peter Small

BORIS SPREMO, CM/TORONTO STAR; STAFF REPORTER

1,034 words

18 January 2000

The Toronto Star

TOR

1

NE19

English

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'I doubt very much that we'll have anyone turned away, but we'll have people sitting up all night. We would find something somewhere where we would squeeze them in. We encourage the public, every time they see someone in distress, to call us.'

Robert Elliott

Street Helpline co-ordinator

As Toronto enters the third day of a cold-weather alert, homeless shelters are virtually full but no one will be forced to sleep outdoors, an emergency phone service co-ordinator says.

Shelter workers are laying out extra mattresses and squeezing people into kitchens and offices to make sure no one is kept out in the cold.

"Staff are doing everything they can to stretch our inadequate resources," said Robert Elliott, co-ordinator of the Street Helpline, an information and referral service for the homeless.

The service, which normally handles 200 phone calls a day, is now fielding as many as 300, he said.

Temperatures fell to a low of minus 22C yesterday at 8 a.m. at Pearson International Airport, accompanied by a biting northerly wind with a speed of 24 km/h, causing frostbite to occur in 2 1/2 minutes.

The record low for yesterday is minus 25.6C, set in 1976.

The city has set minus 15C as the temperature at which it can issue a cold-weather alert, but the medical officer of health can use discretion and act before that point to take wind chill into account.

Temperatures are expected to ease only slightly tomorrow.

"For us, it is a worrisome time. It looks like a long stretch of constant cold," said Denise Toulouse, program co-ordinator of Anishnawbe Health Street Patrol, which provides roving vans and workers on bikes.

One bright spot was that there seemed to be fewer people out on the streets in the bitter cold, Toulouse said. "I think they went inside."

The cold-weather alert, which was to end tomorrow at noon, will likely be extended to Saturday, said Liz Janzen, a regional director with Toronto Public Health.

"I will re-evaluate it Wednesday and, based on present weather patterns, will likely extend it," she said.

Even if no bed can be found in the system for homeless people, they can find a place to sit up all night at a "warming centre" or, unofficially, even in shelter offices, Elliott said.

"I doubt very much that we'll have anyone turned away, but we'll have people sitting up all night. We would find something somewhere where we would squeeze them in," he said.

"We would encourage the public, every time they see someone in distress, to call us. . . . That person will be checked on," Elliott said. The number is (416) 392-3777.

As part of its cold-weather alert, the city authorizes more than 100 additional shelter beds.

Bob Duff, facility manager of 60 Richmond, a downtown drop-in and emergency shelter, said the city gave the go-ahead for an increase to 85 from 70 people there.

"We don't have much excess space," he said. "It just means we double up and squeeze in as many folks as we can."

Attendance at the shelter is up 20 per cent during this cold weather, Duff said.

An affiliated overnight shelter at Metropolitan United Church, on Queen St. E. at Church St., has been authorized to increase sleeping places to 50 from 40, he said.

As an emergency measure, Native Men's Residence on Vaughan Rd. near St. Clair Ave. W. has set up an extra eight cots in its kitchen, in addition to the 38 beds it provides for its residents, said executive director Randi Sokolsky.

The Good Shepherd Refuge, on Queen St. E. near Parliament St., has increased its capacity to 91 from 86, executive director Don Krauskopf said.

The Fred Victor Centre, which normally shelters 38 homeless women on Lombard St., has increased its capacity to 42 during the snap. The centre had a quite a large group waiting outside one of its drop-ins yesterday morning, said executive director Pam Joliffe. "It's a bit more desperate this morning," she said.

Covenant House, a youth shelter, had as many as 20 per cent more young people using its drop-in centre yesterday, said spokesperson Rose Cino.

Project Warmth, which collects, coats, blankets and sleeping bags for the homeless, is getting more calls from agencies asking for help, said spokesperson Lorne Simon. He urged people to drop off donations at any of seven Coat Club clothing stores in Greater Toronto.

There are about 4,500 shelter beds in the Toronto system. They include seven major shelters for men, nine major ones for women, one for couples, 10 youth shelters, family residences and several temporary rotating shelters in the Out of the Cold program, Elliott said.

Still, there are some people who feel unsafe in shelters and prefer to stay outdoors in even the most bitter weather, he said, adding that some are very well hidden.

Yesterday morning, homeless advocates demonstrated outside the Fort York Armoury, demanding that it be turned over as a shelter and, eventually, permanent housing.

About 35 demonstrators, organized by Toronto Action for Social Change, chanted, sang and used chalk to write slogans on the brown brick sides of the large, low building east of the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. It is used by the Canadian Forces for training and storage.

Toronto police kept a relaxed eye on the group.

At one point, four protesters walked into the armoury through an unlocked door and were ejected by military police.

"We need a massive national housing strategy," said Matthew Behrens, one of those ejected from the interior.

"It will cost about \$2 billion a year. We think it's a very small amount of money considering the military spends \$10 billion on weapons."

FROZEN IN HER TRACKS: School crossing guard Lucy Swalies does her best to keep warm at Baldwin Beverley Sts. during yesterday's bone-chilling . Less frigid temperatures are expected today.

Document tor000020010813dw1i0023a

Toronto News

City tries to get homeless out of deadly cold Extra mattresses, bus tickets given out, but still some street people insist on staying outside

LILA SARICK

The Globe and Mail, With a report from Caroline Alphonso

502 words

18 January 2000

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A22

English

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Toronto -- Shelters for the homeless crammed in extra mattresses and distributed bus tickets yesterday in an effort to prevent people from freezing to death on one of the coldest nights of the year.

The second cold-weather alert of the season was called by the city's medical officer of health Sunday and is expected to last until tomorrow night.

During an alert, declared when the temperature dips below --15, the city's shelters add 78 extra beds to their usual 4,500 and are encouraged to open earlier in the evening, said John Jagt, director of the city's hostel services.

Outreach workers who patrol the city's parks and sidewalks deploy every available van and worker to encourage those who sleep outside to seek shelter.

But even on the coldest nights, a couple of hundred people still prefer to sleep outside in the downtown area, said Denise Toulouse, co-ordinator of Anishnawbe Health's Street Patrol.

During a cold-weather alert, the street patrol sends out all three of its vans and two people on bicycles to distribute blankets and warn those who insist on remaining outside that "it's more than just a regular winter night."

Sunday night, one van saw 98 people who were remaining outside, down just slightly from the 120 to 130 visited on an evening. The bike patrol checked 28 people who find shelter in less accessible places such as ravines.

The cold weather -- the temperature dipped to --22 yesterday -- continues to strain the city's hostel system. On Sunday night, just 48 beds out of 1,200 were available for men, Mr. Jagt said. More beds were available for young men and for women; a new shelter for 60 women opened on Queen Street West last night.

The hostel division continues to open shelter beds at a furious rate, trying to keep ahead of the unceasing demand. Since mid-December, when the city's lease at Fort York Armoury expired, 240 beds have been added to replace the 100 that had been used at the armoury, Mr. Jagt said.

The building has become a symbol for protesters frustrated with the inability of all levels of government to address the city's growing homelessness problem. Yesterday, about 30 people marked Martin Luther King Day, a U.S. holiday, with an attempt to take over the armoury and use it for housing.

About half a dozen people entered the building but were evicted by military police. No arrests were made.

Under the watchful eye of about a dozen Toronto police officers, protesters from Toronto Action for Social Change and a group called Homes not Bombs chalked apartment numbers on the outside brick walls of the building and read aloud from the late civil-rights leader's writings.

Illustration

Document glob000020010806dw1i003an

Toronto News

Homeless enlist grates, experience to do battle with winter's coldest night Medical health officer issues cold-weather warning; street workers on alert

The Globe and Mail

430 words

17 January 2000

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A14

English

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Toronto -- On the coldest night of the winter so far, Dean Howey, a lanky, 30-year-old Albertan, abandoned his steam grate near Roy Thomson Hall in favour of a warm supper and a foam mat in a church-hall basement. But only because it was Sunday, he said.

As the temperature headed for --19, Toronto's medical officer of health declared an extreme cold weather alert lasting through tomorrow night and street workers launched special efforts to try to keep homeless people from freezing to death.

Mr. Howey, who described himself a former Edmonton factory worker who fell prey to drugs, said the cold doesn't worry him after nearly 12 years on the street.

It was his custom to spend Sunday nights at St. Patrick's, a Roman Catholic church near the Art Gallery of Ontario where there is sleeping space for 150 people one night a week all winter. It's part of a rotating program involving dozens of churches and synagogues.

Because he has friends in the big, open room, his claustrophobia doesn't bother him as much as it does elsewhere, he said. "I'm so used to being in the outdoors now, I can't stand having walls around."

He will be back at King and Simcoe Streets tonight, he said. As he saw it, freezing to death is a risk faced mainly by those too drunk or disturbed to take care of themselves.

"Basically, the majority of the street people have the smarts either to be on a grate themselves or be in a shelter or a doorway or something," he said.

There was a time when he had an apartment, a common-law wife, a child and a job as a bagger in a plant that made the sort of insulation you have blown into your attic, he said. Heroin and cocaine ended that, but he is off drugs now, he said. "I don't see myself on the street until the day I die."

If history is a guide, however, a few of the homeless will die on the streets this winter. The health department offered the following numbers for those who wish to help.

-- Cash donations: United Way of Greater Toronto, (416) 777-2001

-- Sleeping bags and blankets: Project Warmth, 233-3030

-- Clothing: Chill Out, 934-1227

-- Food: Daily Bread Food Bank, 203-0050

-- Volunteer work: Street Helpline, 392-3777

Illustration

Document glob000020010806dw1h002rb

NEWS

Shelters add spaces for cold weather alert --- People on street offered extra help to fend off chill

Nicolaas van Rijn
STAFF REPORTER

578 words

14 January 2000

The Toronto Star

TOR

1

GT03

English

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It may be a dusting of snow for the rest of us, but for Toronto's homeless the snow and cold that triggered the city's first cold weather alert of the year can be a virtual death sentence.

The alert, which went into effect yesterday, puts Toronto's social agencies and volunteer networks on an emergency footing as they struggle to provide the city's homeless - an estimated 5,000 people - with warm clothing and overnight shelter.

The extra help may not be much, advocates for the homeless agree, but they argue it's the best they can do with the meagre resources available.

The cold weather alert "is a short-term emergency response to a serious social problem," said Liz Janzen, who chairs a Toronto Public Health alert team that meets regularly to assess conditions on city streets.

"It in no way makes up for the desperate need for long-term solutions to the increasing problem of homelessness in our city," she added.

"However, we hope that, by co-ordinating our resources and temporarily increasing some services, we will avoid the kind of situation in which homeless people can't find space or don't know where to go for help when it is extremely cold."

Denise Toulouse, co-ordinator of the Anishnawbe Health street patrol, agreed that any measure - no matter how short-term - is better than no action at all.

The cold weather alert, she said, "may be enough to encourage someone - someone who might otherwise spend the night outdoors - to come in and take shelter."

The alert, issued by Dr. Sheela Basrur, the city's medical officer of health, authorizes a series of special measures to help street people and the homeless avoid the bone-chilling cold.

They include:

The provision of extra emergency sleeping spaces in the city's hostels and shelters.

Increased street patrols by Anishnawbe, which last night added a couple of bicycle patrols to beef up its regular operations.

Distributing TTC tickets to allow the homeless to more easily reach public shelters.

Providing additional transportation for street people through the Canadian Red Cross.

While the 78 extra sleeping spaces created by the alert are basic and uncomfortable, concedes Don Taylor of Metro Hostel Services, they are at least indoors, out of the cold.

"In some cases the additional sleeping spaces are mats on the floor," Taylor said, "and in other cases, they bring out rollaways."

The city's hostel services provides some 4,400 beds every night for Toronto's homeless, Taylor said, "and they've been pretty close to full all winter.

"Earlier this week," he added, "we were at 96 per cent capacity for the whole system."

Still, no homeless person will be turned away during a cold weather alert, Taylor vowed. But no matter what they do, homeless advocates admit, there will always be people who refuse to come in out of the cold.

"The push is on going inside," said Toulouse, "but since there will always be some who refuse, they can expect a sleeping bag, warm clothing and the assurance that someone will check on them throughout the night."

Anishnawbe, still struggling to cope with the aftermath of a fire earlier this month that destroyed its Gerrard St. E. quarters, is in need of sleeping bags, warm clothing and winter coats.

Document tor0000020010813dw1e000u0

NEWS

Metro Hall approved as winter shelter --- Emergency use given okay by council committee

Jack Lakey

CITY HALL BUREAU

550 words

2 December 1999

The Toronto Star

TOR

1

English

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Metro Hall could become a temporary warming centre this winter despite Mayor Mel Lastman's insistence that sheltering homeless people in it could affect its selling price.

The city's community services committee has approved measures that include using Metro Hall as a place where street people can escape the cold on nights when hostels are more than 90 per cent full.

Metro Hall was first used as a shelter in the spring, when a plan to open new hostel beds fell apart at the last minute and city staff scrambled to find a temporary replacement.

About 50 people spent nights in a ground floor room for several weeks until hostel staff made other arrangements.

'There will be a few who will stay out' But when the idea of using Metro Hall as a cooling centre was raised during hot weather last July, Lastman blew his stack, saying it was unsuitable for homeless people.

"Metro Hall is not set for this stuff," Lastman told reporters at the time. "Metro Hall does not have the toilets, does not have the facilities, does not have anything."

Part of a city plan to consolidate real estate holdings includes selling Metro Hall and leasing back some of the office space in the 30-storey tower from the buyer. The mayor said he didn't want the building to get a reputation as a homeless shelter because it could turn off potential buyers and adversely affect the selling price.

Lastman could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The community services committee agreed with Kira Heineck of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, who asked members to ensure the city keep its commitment to provide extra space for homeless people - including temporary warming centres - when hostel occupancy rates exceed 90 per cent.

John Jagt, Toronto's manager of hostel services, said the current hostel occupancy rate is about 96 per cent, but insisted that staff will add more permanent beds by the end of the year. He said at least 250 new hostel beds will be made available, but 100 spaces now in use at the Fort York Armoury are due to be closed, leaving the total new spaces at 150.

"We need 2,958 beds to meet our goal of keeping occupancy below 90 per cent," he said, adding that long-term spaces have taken priority over temporary warming centres.

Cathy Crowe, a street nurse who works with the homeless, said that with the weather turning cold, warming centres are needed for people who won't stay in hostels. She said hostel services staff "keep saying we're fine, and we have 20 beds here or there, but it never translates into reality for people who are out there at night.

"We know if they opened, say, Metro Hall and one other building, people would come in," Crowe continued. "This line about mental illness and that people want to stay on the (heating) grates is just so false.

"There will be a few who will stay out no matter what, but hundreds will come in. It's incredible that hostel staff push this line that, on paper, they have so many beds, when it's not true."

TORONTO LIVE

News

Doors open to homeless

Compiled by Gay Abbate

81 words

14 January 1999

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A8

English

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Toronto's medical officer of health has extended the extreme-weather alert issued Jan. 10 to tomorrow.

The city uses the alert to help get homeless people out of the cold and into shelters. When an alert is issued, hostels and shelters open additional emergency beds, the city increases the number of street patrols to reach homeless people and extra assistance is provided to help get the homeless to shelters.

Document glob000020010827dv1e001y5

News

Stay indoors, authorities warn, as storm approaches Snow, high winds, possible freezing rain to hit Southern Ontario starting today

COLIN FREEZE

The Globe and Mail, Reuter News Agency

780 words

2 January 1999

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A1

English

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Ontario is bracing for a powerful winter storm in which 20 to 40 centimetres of snow could fall over the weekend.

Authorities were warning people to stay off the roads and check flight schedules while the severe storm blows through, with high winds possibly also bringing freezing rain and ice pellets.

Environment Canada said the storm, expected to arrive in Windsor by this afternoon and in Toronto late tonight, could last up to 30 hours. Temperatures in the Toronto area will range between --3 and --13.

"Stay off the roads. We strongly suggest people stay at home," Constable Jacqueline Dowhaniuk of the Ontario Provincial Police in Toronto said yesterday.

The severe weather had already affected parts of the United States yesterday. Southern Ontario is expected to be the worst-hit area of the province and in the Hamilton and Niagara regions up to half a metre of snow is possible, said Ron Miller, a meteorologist at Environment Canada.

The worst part of the storm is expected to hit Toronto late this evening and sweep on through Eastern Ontario and Quebec tomorrow as it heads toward the Maritimes.

The northernmost part of Ontario will miss the brunt of the storm, but Sudbury, Timmins and North Bay will be affected.

Constable Dowhaniuk suggested people may want to consider staying home from work tomorrow. The storm "means a high rate of collisions, obviously," she said.

Air travellers are also being warned. "Anyone flying [today] should check ahead and see what's happening," said Bruce Reid, spokesman for the authority that runs Pearson International Airport.

The severe weather also prompted the latest in a series of formal cold-weather warnings to be issued in Toronto yesterday. The alert, which extends into today, helps authorities step up measures to shepherd the homeless indoors.

"It's a medical-health danger to be exposed to weather that's like this," said Briar Ames of the Street Helpline, an organization that has been making extra efforts to provide indoor shelter for much of this week.

Environment Canada traces the storm's origins to the U.S. Southwest. Moisture-laden air from the Gulf of Mexico is travelling northward and hitting a cold air mass sitting over much of North America, Mr. Miller said. Atlantic Ocean moisture is also a factor. These conditions are "perfect ingredients" for a severe snowstorm, Mr. Miller said, adding that the storm had begun to cause alarm in the United States.

One forecaster in Chicago said the snowstorm had the potential to bring the area's biggest snowfall in 20 years. Hundreds of cots were prepared for an expected army of stranded travellers at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

United Airlines, which has a hub there, suggested that people planning to travel today and tomorrow try to make other arrangements. Sandbags were piled along vulnerable sections of Chicago's Lake Michigan shoreline to try to prevent wind-driven waves from flooding a highway.

Less concern was evident in Toronto yesterday, and authorities were taking more of a wait-and-see approach.

Pearson airport's Mr. Reid said that while there were no plans to provide cots there, "we know it's coming and we'll have all of our snow-cleaning equipment in place . . . and extra staff to come in if we need them."

Winston Williams of Toronto's public-works department said the city will call in more snow-plovers than usual, if necessary, and that standard eight-hour shifts may balloon into 16-hour shifts.

Constable Dowhaniuk had several suggestions for motorists travelling on highways:

- If you must pull over, be sure to drive as far onto the shoulder as possible and keep hazard lights on.
- Use city roads, not highways, if possible. Slower speeds mean that the consequences of any accidents are less severe.
- Take along items such as cellphones and blankets in case of a breakdown. Candles can provide heat in a broken-down car. Over the past few days, Environment Canada computer models have forecast the storm's arrival with every 12-hour update, allowing accurate predictions, said Toronto meteorologist Wade Szilagyi.

"There's no stopping it. Every time [the computer] goes through a new run it has consistently indicated the storm to come right over us."

Nevertheless, Constable Andy Fairweather of the Toronto Police traffic department hoped the weather would instead mimic his surname.

"We're just keeping our fingers crossed that it won't be [stormy]. But so far it looks like it will," he said.

Map

Document glob000020010827dv12000sa

NEWS

Added beds keep homeless warm City's 4,277 spaces almost at capacity as temperatures drop

By Jack Lakey Toronto Star

341 words

31 December 1998

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

C8

English

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Toronto's emergency measures to help the homeless on frigid nights have begun to pay off by keeping people from freezing to death, says Councillor Jack Layton.

"I thought for sure we were going to have somebody dead," said Layton (Don River), of the brutally cold weather and high winds that blew in Tuesday night.

"We can really be thankful that there are lots of new (hostel) beds out there available, and so many people volunteering and working to help people who don't have anywhere to go.

The city's health department issued an extreme cold weather alert yesterday morning, which triggered a series of emergency responses to get street people out of the cold, and extra help for those who won't come inside.

A cold weather warning wasn't issued Tuesday night because the forecast did not call for temperatures below minus 15C - the starting point for an alert.

But in hostels operated or subsidized by the city, a total of 4,277 beds were available Tuesday night, plus beds provided by volunteer groups through the Out of the Cold program.

All but 120 of the city beds were filled, but the remainder provided enough flexibility in the system to allow for people who might have shown up late at night, said Anne Longair of the city's hostel services department.

Another 76 beds were opened last night at seven locations as part of the cold weather alert, Longair said, to ensure that nobody in need of shelter would be turned away.

After Toronto City Council passed a resolution calling homelessness a national disaster, a renewed political push - led by Layton - was undertaken to find solutions.

One of the obvious answers was more temporary hostel beds. About 350 new beds have been added since last winter, in addition to those opened during a cold weather alert, which have eased the strain on the system, Layton said.

Document tor0000020011206ducv01cwt

TORONTO LIVE

News

City hustles to shelter homeless

Colin Freeze

140 words

24 December 1998

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A11

English

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The weather forecast for Toronto last night left the city one degree away from issuing a formal cold-weather alert for the homeless, but emergency workers stepped up efforts to get them indoors all the same.

Ambulance attendants, police and volunteer outreach workers were urging people to find shelter, and the Red Cross was planning to use its vehicles to drive homeless people to shelters, Councillor Jack Layton said.

The temperature was expected to drop to --14. For formal emergency measures to be activated, the temperature, excluding wind chill, has to drop to at least --15.

About 300 new beds have been added in recent weeks, giving the city enough to make it through the Christmas holidays comfortably, Mr. Layton said. The weather is expected to improve by the weekend.

Document glob000020011205duco01t49



NEWS

Weather alerts altered to aid homeless New criteria likely to increase them

By Rebecca Bragg TORONTO STAR

334 words

10 December 1998

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

D3

English

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As many as 50 per cent more emergency weather alerts could be called this winter in a bid to get homeless people into shelters during extreme conditions.

Toronto's board of health put in place new criteria this week that will likely increase the number of winter alerts.

The standards will be based on calculations issued daily by Environment Canada, Liz Janzen of Toronto's public health department told the board at a meeting in Metro Hall.

Two years ago, an alert to prevent people from freezing to death was put into effect if temperatures dropped below minus 15C, with or without a contributing wind chill factor.

Now, Environment Canada has come up with a more complex formula that takes into consideration additional factors, including sunlight and humidity, to estimate cold weather's potential harm to human health, Janzen said.

And regardless of the temperature, if a blizzard or ice storm is forecast, emergency alerts may also be launched.

Once an alert is called, beds are added at hostels, house rules are temporarily relaxed, street patrols are increased and TTC tokens are distributed, medical officer of health Dr. Sheela Basrur wrote in a report submitted to the board.

If necessary, armouries may also be opened on short notice.

Since the winter of 1991-92, temperatures have dipped below minus 10C an average of 22 times each winter, and below minus 15C an average of seven times, the public health department confirmed.

About 350 more beds have been added to the hostel system this year, and the volunteer Out of the Cold program has added about 200 to 300 others, John Jagt, Toronto's director of hostel services, told the board.

Nonetheless, the city is still scrambling to keep up with the largest homeless population in recent years, Jagt said. Throughout winter, 1,800 to 2,000 people sleep outdoors each night in the area, he said.

Document tor0000020011206duca019g9

Science

Toronto scrambles to shelter the homeless

GAY ABBATE

The Globe and Mail

397 words

11 November 1998

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A13

English

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Toronto -- Concern about how Toronto's homeless would fare with the fierce winds and heavy rains forecast for last night prompted the city to take the unprecedented move yesterday of declaring a bad-weather alert.

Sheela Basrur, the city's Medical Officer of Health, declared the alert late in the afternoon on orders from the Toronto Board of Health after it was bombarded with pleas for emergency measures by almost two dozen homeless people and community-outreach workers.

The alert program encouraged street people to take refuge in hostels last night by having shelters provide 100 additional beds and extend curfews. And the TTC planned to distribute tokens to homeless people at drop-in centres, to enable them to take public transit to shelters.

These are some of the same measures that are also activated when an extreme-cold-weather alert is issued.

Last night's weather conditions did not meet the city's criteria for that kind of alert, and no steps had been taken to help the homeless find shelter.

The cold-weather-alert plan, which was adopted in 1996 after three homeless people died of exposure on city streets, was put into place for the first time last January. To activate that plan, the temperature, excluding wind chill, has to drop to a minimum of -15 C.

The board directed Dr. Basrur to review the -15 C policy, arguing that there are other factors which should be considered, such as rain and wind.

Dr. Basrur called the alert program a Band-Aid solution, because the capacity to create the housing that would solve the homeless problem lies with other levels of government.

After the meeting, she expressed concern that the city was setting a precedent by veering from its own criteria for an alert and possibly institutionalizing such weather alerts. She said the same thing happened with food banks, which were originally intended as an emergency measure, but which still exist many years later.

Cathy Crowe, a community nurse who deals with street people, had asked the board to open up Moss Park Armoury last night to accommodate the overflow from shelters. The board also wanted the armoury opened, but Dr. Basrur said the Department of National Defence requires 24 hours notice, and it was too late in the day.

Illustration

Document glob000020011205dubb01il1

Science

City scrambles to help homeless Board of Health issues unprecedented bad-weather alert; shelters add 100 beds

GAY ABBATE and COLIN FREEZE

The Globe and Mail

848 words

11 November 1998

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A13

English

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Toronto -- Concern about how Toronto's homeless would fare with the fierce winds and heavy rains forecast for last night prompted the city to take the unprecedented move yesterday of declaring a bad-weather alert.

Sheela Basrur, the city's Medical Officer of Health, declared the alert late in the afternoon on orders from the Toronto Board of Health after it was bombarded with pleas for emergency measures by almost two dozen homeless people and community-outreach workers.

The alert program encouraged street people to take refuge in hostels last night by having shelters provide 100 additional beds and extend curfews. And the TTC planned to distribute tokens to homeless people at drop-in centres, to enable them to take public transit to shelters.

These are some of the same measures that are also activated when an extreme-cold-weather alert is issued.

The weather was expected to become increasingly bitter by this morning. Environment Canada meteorologist Bryan Misanchuk said winds in the city were expected to pick up overnight and periodically reach gusts approaching 100 kilometres an hour.

For many of the homeless subjects of the alert, it made no difference whether a warning was in place or not, or even whether the night would turn into a tempest: They would spend it on the streets.

Just before the heavy winds arrived, many vacated familiar corners of downtown Toronto. Others did not.

"They haven't told me anything yet, so I don't know anything. It's nothing unusual to me. I've been here in minus-40-degree weather," said Todd, a man in his mid-30s who lives in a two-metre metal cabinet on the corner of Russell Street and Spadina Avenue.

Huddled under a pile of blankets, Todd explained that he had once been married and employed. But he said he has spent almost six years on the streets, the last year in the cabinet.

"I've been trying to get to somewhere else, but none of the officials will let me get there," he said, citing a broad conspiracy against him that included corporations, psychiatrists, "the mob," and a radio-operated computer implanted inside his head.

Others had different means of insulating themselves. Outside a Salvation Army building on Dundas Street, two men sat under a ledge, a bottle of malt liquor between them. They were waiting for rooms in the shelter, which they said were available only after 11 p.m.

Gilbert Beauchamp, 60, explained that long shelter waiting lists have kept him homeless for a couple of years, "off and on." Beside him sat his friend Craig, 45, who took comfort in lambasting the Harris government for its cutbacks.

"They cater to the rich," he said, then launched into a rendition of Bob Dylan's A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall.

Last night's bad-weather alert is essentially a scaled-down version of its cold-weather alert, a system adopted in 1996 after three homeless people died of exposure on city streets. It was put into place for the first time last January. To activate that plan, the temperature, excluding wind chill, has to drop to a minimum of -15 C.

The Board of Health directed Dr. Basrur to review the -15 C policy, arguing that there are other factors which should be considered, such as rain and wind.

Dr. Basrur called the alert program a Band-Aid solution, because the capacity to create the housing that would solve the homeless problem lies with other levels of government.

After the meeting, she expressed concern that the city was setting a precedent by veering from its own criteria for an alert and possibly institutionalizing such weather alerts. She said the same thing happened with food banks, which were originally intended as an emergency measure, but which still exist many years later.

Cathy Crowe, a community nurse who deals with street people, had asked the board to open up Moss Park Armoury last night to accommodate the overflow from shelters. The board also wanted the armoury opened, but Dr. Basrur said the Department of National Defence requires 24 hours notice, and it was too late in the day.

One homeless man told the board: "I'm pleading with you, don't just sit there, do something." Dennis Flarity spoke about how difficult it is to get health care. "Hospitals turn us away because we're homeless," he said, going on to describe how he lost an eye living on the street and how his wife got sick.

After hearing from the delegations, Councillor Irene Jones said she wanted to scream.

"I feel a sense of frustration. . . . I feel totally abandoned by the provincial and federal governments. We've been telling them for years about the homeless problem."

Councillor Michael Prue said the homeless problem "is the direct result of government policies" and of the public's hardening of attitude towards street people.

Illustration

Document glob000020011205dubb01iky

NEWS

Shelters on alert as weather turns ugly Medical officer worries about the homeless, calls for extra beds

by Jennifer Quinn and Catherine Dunphy TORONTO STAR

943 words

11 November 1998

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

A1

English

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City shelters declared an emergency, extra beds were squeezed into all available spaces, and police on patrol watched out for the homeless in the first weather alert of the season.

The emergency was declared yesterday after forecasters warned of high winds and lashing rain that would make conditions on the street intolerable for those without a home or a warm place to sleep.

"We have alerted all the shelters - and there's about 30 of them - to take extra measures and to put up extra space for those that do come, to go above their normal limits if need be, and to set aside some of their curfews and other rules that might normally apply," said John Jagt, director of Toronto's hostel services division.

The emergency was precipitated by a combination of bad weather and lack of shelter spaces in the city's facilities, Jagt said.

On Monday night, 99 per cent of the city's shelter beds were full, he said.

Jagt hopes new shelter spaces will be opened in the next few weeks to help alleviate another crisis when the cold weather hits.

At a meeting of Toronto's board of health, medical officer of health Dr. Sheela Basrur agreed to call an emergency weather alert, which allowed the shelters to set up cots in common areas and relax curfews.

Toronto police posted notices and officers on patrol were asked to look out for homeless people who might be in trouble.

At drop-in centres, TTC tickets were handed out to the homeless so they could get to emergency shelters. The extra measures made room for another 100 or so people in the city's shelters.

Normally, weather emergencies are declared when the temperature drops below minus 15 Celsius.

"Anything we do today is a Band-Aid solution," Basrur said.

Mel Lastman, at a party to celebrate his first year as mayor of a unified Toronto, said it was imperative that more hostel beds be opened.

"We just have to help people get off the street who don't want to be out there. On nights when the wind is really high like this, it's dangerous," he said.

At yesterday's board of health meeting, Councillor Joan King (Seneca Heights) asked the city to open up either the Moss Park Armoury or Metro Hall to accommodate people without shelter.

"We're hearing that cars are going to be blown off the roads," she said.

Captain Tim Lourie, public affairs officer with the Canadian Forces 32nd Canadian Brigade Group, which uses the Moss Park Armoury, said the city telephoned the armoury yesterday to inquire about the feasibility of opening it as a shelter.

But he said they hadn't received a formal request, which is required before they can open the facility. But he added that the Canadian Forces would make the space available as quickly as possible if one was received.

The Out of the Cold program, in which local churches open their doors and provide meals and beds, was a little busier than normal, but still had plenty of room.

Knox/First Nations Gospel's Out of the Cold program, at Harbord St. and Spadina Ave., is usually aimed at young people, but was accepting adults last night for a dinner of roast beef and hot soup, along with a bed for the night.

"We're doing fine, but we do have more people than usual," Vicki Wood, co-ordinator of the church's program, said yesterday evening. "But we're not full by any means."

At the meeting, Basrur promised to review the emergency weather program and the recommendation the city set up an infirmary for the homeless, more detoxification centres and smaller hostels for specific segments of the homeless population, such as people who are HIV positive.

"I know we sit here looking like we don't care," said Councillor Anne Johnston (North Toronto). "But we have no money."

About 30 members of the homeless community attended the meeting. More than half of them made deputations to the board about the health and safety dangers of living on the street.

Community health nurse Cathy Crowe begged the board to activate more emergency measures than just last night's weather alert.

She wanted the board to ask the emergency planning committee to enact the emergency resources bylaw.

"Until they enact the emergency bylaw, the medical officer of health has no power to deal with this as an emergency," she said.

"That bylaw would enable the armoury to open in hours."

She said there are 200 people living in the Don Valley, 100 under the Gardiner Expressway, 200 in squats throughout the city, and 20 to 30 who sleep in High Park.

Toronto Hospital emergency room physician Dr. Joel Lexchin said many homeless people use the hospital's emergency departments as hostels.

"They come with trivial complaints, but when the weather is minus 10 degrees, we don't throw them out. They have nowhere else to go," he said.

He said homeless people suffer from hypothermia, not only because of cold weather but also because of how wet they are, how hungry they are, what kind of clothing they have on and what kind of medicine they may be taking. Street Health outreach worker Beric German wanted the board to keep the Moss Park Armoury open until there are other facilities for the homeless. He called for a bigger budget to deal with the crisis and bylaw changes to allow mobile homes.

Document tor0000020011206dubb016pr

NEWS

Homeless fixes in the works City's task force to report soon on extra spaces

By Nicolaas van Rijn Toronto Star

482 words

13 October 1998

The Toronto Star

TOR

MET

B1

English

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Toronto's task force on homelessness is expected to report within a week on measures to come up with hundreds of extra spaces for the city's down and out before winter's cold sets in, Anne Golden says.

Golden, appointed by Mayor Mel Lastman to find long-term solutions to the problem, said she's been forced to look for short-term answers because of winter's rapidly approaching cold.

"We're going to be 600 to 700 beds short, so it's important that we identify other space that can be pressed into use" for homeless shelters or temporary hostels, Golden said yesterday.

"The immediate objective for this winter is to ensure that there's shelter for families," Golden said, "and we're hoping to have some short-term steps to recommend (next) Monday or Tuesday.

"We're looking now at other alternatives for emergency shelters, such as the use of armouries," she added. "I think there are some things that can be done."

"My mandate is to look into the long-term solution," Golden said, "but because winter is such a short time away, we've been asked to make some recommendations in the short term."

Golden's staff has been consulting with the city's real estate department in a quest for the extra space, she noted.

Despite the urgency, Golden is confident steps can be taken to keep Toronto's homeless out of the cold.

"I think there are some things that can be done," Golden said. "It's not satisfactory, in that it is an emergency, but there is a winter alert program that includes extended hours for drop-ins and other centres.

"There is a program that they use when the temperature drops to a certain point, and that shows that you can, in fact, have procedures that will operate effectively in a time of need."

Under a program revised last January, Toronto's health department issues an extreme cold weather alert whenever the overnight temperature is forecast to dip to minus 15 Celsius or lower.

When that happens, 110 additional spaces are provided in 10 shelters, and city officials can also contact the Moss Park and Fort York armouries for temporary extra space.

Drop-in centres also extend their normal operating hours.

During the alert, police and street patrols by social workers are increased, and outdoor places where the homeless are known to seek shelter are checked regularly.

Toronto's Out of the Cold program, which sees some 40 churches and other community organizations banding together to provide meals and overnight shelter, also swings into action next month.

Each night, up to 4,700 people are homeless in the city, with about 4,200 filling emergency shelters, and the rest sleeping outside.

Document tor000020011206duad0149n

News

Cold drives city's homeless to shelters Emergency measures introduced New Year's Eve to bring Toronto's destitute inside

BY ISABEL VINCENT

The Globe and Mail

699 words

2 January 1998

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A6

English

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TORONTO -- With a report from Estanislao Oziewicz. Social workers launched emergency procedures New Year's Eve when bitterly low temperatures forced many of the city's homeless to seek refuge in shelters and missions.

Officials at shelters across the city added extra mats and beds to meet the influx of destitute people trying to escape the cold. Temperatures dipped to --15 Wednesday night.

"We were full last night," said Brother John, director of ministry at the Good Shepherd Centre, a shelter for the homeless that can accommodate 75 people in downtown Toronto. "People just didn't want to stay outside it was so cold."

Officials monitoring the Street Help Line, a service for homeless people seeking emergency shelter, said they received double the number of calls New Year's Eve that they usually get. However, they refused to specify the exact number. Many of the calls came from people reporting homeless people who were sleeping outdoors.

"We have been ready for an emergency alert since mid-November," said Sandra Seaborn, co-ordinator of the Street Help Line, which has been funded by both the old City of Toronto and what was formerly Metro Toronto. Ms. Seaborn said the service tries to find emergency accommodation for homeless callers at hostels and shelters throughout the city.

In addition to providing extra emergency spaces at hostels and shelters, municipal workers increased street-patrolling efforts, dispatching personnel on mountain bikes and in a van to search for homeless people sleeping outside and encourage them to go to shelters. They also issued extra public-transit tickets for community and drop-in centres to help the homeless seek accommodation at shelters throughout the city.

Some homeless people who live outdoors lost one of their shelters under the Gardiner Expressway in Toronto yesterday. About a dozen firefighters put out a blaze that destroyed mattresses, a shopping cart, a children's wagon and other accoutrements of the homeless under a downward ramp of the expressway exiting at Spadina Avenue.

Beneath the ramp, a barricade of debris had been built to provide some privacy and protection from biting winds. The fire was fanned by strong winds coming off Lake Ontario and badly scorched a 30-metre section underneath the ramp.

A can of camping fuel, which may have been the source of the fire, was found at the site. By the time firefighters and other emergency crews had arrived, whoever lived at the site had disappeared.

Toronto's emergency procedures went into effect Wednesday morning after the city's medical officer of health issued an extreme-cold-weather alert, which was lifted yesterday morning.

"It is a short-term emergency response to a serious social problem," Dr. David McKeown said in a news release Wednesday. "[We] hope that by co-ordinating our resources and temporarily increasing some services we will

avoid the kind of situation in which homeless people can't find space or don't know where to go for help when it is extremely cold."

The emergency-weather-alert system was created last year in a bid to prevent homeless people from freezing to death. The number of homeless in Toronto was estimated in a recent United Way report at 168,000. The report, issued in November, defined homeless people as those with no permanent shelter and those who are "precariously housed" or have inadequate shelter.

Last year, before the emergency procedures were in place, a homeless man froze to death in Toronto. On Wednesday, Fredericton police found a frozen body in a downtown alley. The body of the unidentified man was covered with snow and found in an area that police say is frequented by alcoholics.

Although most social workers say the emergency procedures are helpful, many believe they should be put into effect at higher temperatures.

"We think it [the cold-weather alert] should go into effect at --5 or --10 degrees," said Cathy Crowe, a street nurse with the Queen West Community Health Centre. "By the time it's --15, people can already develop hypothermia."

Document glob000020011205du12000ny

News

City amends cold alert in wake of death

BY MICHAEL GRANGE

The Globe and Mail

355 words

28 January 1997

The Globe and Mail

GLOB

Metro

A5

English

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TORONTO -- Toronto has changed its cold-weather emergency policy after a homeless man was found dead Sunday in a parking garage.

The criteria used by the city's medical officer of health to declare an extreme-cold-weather alert, a plan designed to get homeless people off the streets and into shelters, have been broadened and more services may be added, Jackie Smith, a spokeswoman for the public health department, said yesterday.

The body of Garland Sheppard, 33, was found by ambulance attendants on the top floor of a condemned parking garage.

"We don't know if anything extra would have helped this man, but we want to try to avoid something like this happening," Ms. Smith said.

An autopsy performed yesterday failed to determine if Mr. Sheppard froze to death or died of other causes, the investigating coroner, Dr. Murray Naiberg, said. He said the cause of death will not be known until tests for alcohol and other drugs have been completed.

Until yesterday, a cold weather alert -- which calls for more hostel beds to be added, extended street patrol hours and the provision of transit fares so street people can get to shelters -- was called only in the case of sustained temperatures of below -15 with no forecast of warming.

However, after yesterday's emergency meeting of the City's Cold WeatherAlert Team, made up of health officials and representatives of groups that work with the homeless, an alert will now be called when the temperature drops below -15.

The amended policy also calls on hostel operators to ask residents if they know of anyone else who should be brought in on nights when the weather alert is in effect.

The hostel operators will then be required to contact a hotline number so that a street patrol can be sent out to find people remaining outside.

Meanwhile, Metro Toronto Police said yesterday that Mr. Sheppard, who was born in Newfoundland, was wanted by the RCMP in Gander, Nfld., in connection with a sexual assault in 1991.

Document glob000020011007dt1s009yz

NEWS

Drifter found dead in parking garage

By Kenny Yum and Henry Stancu TORONTO STAR

287 words

27 January 1997

The Toronto Star

TOR

A6

English

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A homeless man, known on the street as "Newf," was found dead in a downtown parking garage yesterday morning.

The man, about 50 years old, had been drinking with friends on Saturday night in the third floor of the run-down complex on Adelaide St. W. at Simcoe St., police said.

The man, who was believed to be from Newfoundland, was discovered by a friend who had left about nine hours earlier to panhandle, police said.

"When he came back he found his friend dead," said Metro police Staff Sergeant Lance Naismith of 52 Division.

Naismith said the cause of death was probably a mixture of alcohol and exposure.

The body was fully clothed but was not covered by blankets or sleeping bags, police said.

Overnight, temperatures dipped to minus 17C with a wind chill of minus 26C.

Only the first two floors of the windowless, five-storey, open-air parking garage are used for vehicles. The third floor is strewn with empty liquor bottles, sleeping bags and garbage.

Another man, who made a nearby street corner heat grate his home, was found dead on the same floor less than a month ago.

Metro Councillor Jack Layton (Toronto-Don River) and Cathy Crowe, a nurse with the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness, yesterday called for an additional 200- to 300-bed hostel to prevent such deaths.

But John Jagt, director of Metro's hostels, said there were beds available at five of nine facilities Saturday.

Layton also said the cold weather alert in which the medical officer of health calls for emergency housing, should be set at minus 5C, instead of minus 15C.

Document TOR0000020080121dt1r00fde

NEWS

New weather alert program working Homeless coming in out of the cold

By Lynda Hurst TORONTO STAR

782 words

20 January 1997

The Toronto Star

TOR

A3

English

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The last few nights in Metro could have been a repeat of the past.

Frigid temperatures, bitter winds . . . and somewhere in an underpass or a bus shelter, somebody quietly freezes to death.

But it didn't happen.

Blind luck?

Or the fact that Toronto's week-old Cold Weather Alert plan is actually reaching some of the people it has been set up to help - the estimated 150 hard-core homeless who normally refuse to come in out of the cold?

"We could easily have lost someone this weekend," Metro hostels director John Jagt said. "The fact that we didn't is very heartening."

The cold-weather emergency plan kicks in when the temperature drops below minus 15C - which it has on seven of the last nine days. On Saturday night, it felt like minus 40C with the wind chill.

Under the plan, 110 additional beds are shoehorned in at 10 existing hostels, street patrols run by the Anishnawbe Health Toronto service and others extend their hours, a referral hotline for the homeless operates 24 hours a day (392-3777) and transit tickets are given out by drop-in centres to get people to shelters.

This is on top of the ongoing homeless programs at 34 Metro hostels and the Out of the Cold program operated by 33 churches, synagogues and hospitals, which were all at full capacity in the last week.

While all the extra beds haven't yet been filled - 59 were used Friday night, 50 Saturday night - hostel workers say the people who came were exactly those they were hoping to reach.

David Kilpatrick, intake worker at the Salvation Army's Maxwell Meighen hostel on Sherbourne St., said its regular 320 beds, plus the 25 cold-weather extras, have all been full on recent nights.

"It has to be really cold for some of them to come in. They have mental health problems, or they're afraid because they've been beaten up in a shelter in the past," he said.

"We're just trying to make it easier for them to come in, and they are. We don't ask a lot of questions."

Toronto's medical officer of health, Dr. David McKeown, who chairs the cold weather committee and activates the plan when the temperature dips, said the program is being assessed daily, but early reports are positive.

"Some people who wouldn't normally come into a hostel have been coming in. And the feedback from people on the streets is that they really appreciate the message we're trying to get out. And that, simply, is to take precautions, seek shelter."

Councillor David Hutcheon, who chaired the City of Toronto task force on homelessness last summer that led to the formation of the \$70,000 annual emergency plan, said this weekend was a trial by fire.

"Or rather, trial by freezing temperatures. My sense is that it's working. Word of mouth is getting around."

Last winter, after three men died from exposure, everything was crisis and emergency, he said.

"This year, all the pre-planning is making a difference. You don't need someone to die to know there's a need for this. This isn't the solution to homelessness, just an aid for weather extremes."

At the 70-bed Good Shepherd Refuge on Queen St. E., all 16 emergency beds were occupied Friday night, and about half of them were filled the rest of the weekend.

The refuge's Brother John , 1 director of ministries, said several people were brought in by street patrols, and one was sent by a hospital.

"If someone knocks on the door in the middle of the night you don't have to turn them away. In the past, we've had to start calling around to try and find them a place, give them (transit) tickets and send them out into the night again."

At the Native Men's Residence at St. Clair Ave. W. and Bathurst St., eight emergency beds are added to the 26 regular ones when the plan is in effect, and most have been full since last week.

"Some of the men are hard-core homeless," counsellor Patrick Wabegijig said. "It would be great if we could get them to look at their situation more deeply while they're here.

"But basically, we just want them to know there is a place they can go when it gets too cold."

Star color photo (McConnell) SKATER'S PARADISE: Sunshine galore continued low temperatures keep a skater moving on Grenadier Pond in 's High Park yesterday.

Document TOR0000020080121dt1k00egy

NEWS

'Margin of safety is thin' for homeless in big chill Hostels work to ensure street people stay warm

By Desmond Bill and Cal Millar Toronto Star

717 words

18 January 1997

The Toronto Star

TOR

A7

English

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Three homeless people froze to death last winter and a Metro official is afraid "more could die" during this cold snap.

"Their margin of safety is very thin with the temperatures we've got this week," said Metro hostels director John Jagt.

"We've had no deaths so far this winter but the possibility is very distinct in this bitter wind and cold."

It was expected to drop to about minus 23C last night with a wind chill of minus 42C.

Jagt estimated there are about 250 homeless people in Metro who won't go to a hostel and who spend the night on the street.

Many of them are mentally ill - often because of schizophrenia - or have serious drinking problems.

An extreme weather alert issued by Toronto's medical officer of health, Dr. David McKeown, remains in effect this weekend.

McKeown asked people yesterday to report any homeless person who seems at risk by calling 392-37791. The Anishnawbe Street Patrol, or other patrols formed by such agencies as the Salvation Army, will check if the person needs help.

EXTRA-HEARTY BREAKFAST

A windchill warning was issued yesterday for all of southern Ontario.

Jagt said hostels have relaxed their curfew, so that no one is turned away.

Even people who are intoxicated are being allowed in for the night, he said, "and we're putting on an extra-heartly breakfast and checking that people have proper footwear."

Jagt estimated that between 1,500 and 2,000 homeless people stay outside on a summer night "but only a very few, maybe 250, will try to stay out in the winter."

He said: "Most of that hardy remnant will stay out regardless of the temperature. They survive because they are acclimatized. They're hardened to the cold.

"They have sleeping bags and some rig up a semblance of shelter. The street patrols bring them blankets and hot food. They lie on hot-air vents. They manage to survive somehow."

"Even some of the hard core" are coming in to Metro hostels this week, he said. Metro has opened an extra 110 beds in 10 hostels and half of them were filled Thursday night.

George Barnhardt, assistant supervisor at Central Neighborhood House on Parliament St., said: "Our door will always be open. We'll do what we can."

Barnhardt said plunging temperatures had people flocking to the centre yesterday.

The centre normally operates from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m., but Barnhardt opened the doors early when temperatures plunged.

"We got the soup on and began passing out coffee," he said.

'TWICE AS BUSY' He said the drop-in centre gets quite busy when the weather turns cold, but they can't accommodate anyone overnight.

Barnhardt said they hand out Toronto Transit Commission tokens to make sure people can get to hostels, out-of-the-cold programs or to homes of their friends.

Tanya Gabriel, a floor co-ordinator at the All Saints Church Friendship Club at Dundas and Sherbourne Sts., agrees things have been much busier since the weather turned colder.

"It's twice as busy," she said. "We're getting 400 to 500 people a day. We've had a lot of homeless and a lot of elderly coming in."

Gabriel said the club, which operates from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., provides people with meals, clothing and a place to sit and watch television programs or videos.

Dave Noganosh, the administrative assistant at the Council Fire on Parliament St., said the number of people who visit the centre has increased a bit because of the cold weather.

"We're open 365 days a year and average 100 or so a night," he said. "We don't turn anybody away. We try to accommodate as many as possible."

Peter Duraisami, controller of the Scott Mission, said apart from serving meals to 300 to 400 people a day, they've had more than 100 people spending time during the evening at the coffee shop.

Star Photo (BORIS SPREMO): FACE OF METRO'S OUTDOOR WORKERS: Gloved hooded Alex Hajikonstantinou surveys chilly construction site at Metro Convention Centre yesterday.

Document TOR0000020080121dt1i00e8h



NEWS

Cold weather alert program set to return

183 words

16 January 1997

The Toronto Star

TOR

A5

English

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Toronto's cold weather alert program to help homeless people is taking a break but may be re-activated this weekend due to the expected return of colder temperatures.

And city officials say there's a desperate need for warm adult winter clothing, sleeping bags and blankets, which people can drop off at Toronto fire halls.

The first alert of the year was set in motion Saturday under a program that calls for the opening of more hostel beds, stepped-up street patrols and other measures to offer shelter.

The alert was extended Monday and called off yesterday with warmer temperatures. The program kicks into action whenever forecasters predict temperatures of minus 15C or colder.

Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's medical officer of health, said the program succeeded in its goal of getting people out of the cold.

McKeown said people can donate supplies and cash donations earmarked for the homeless. Cash donations can be sent to the United Way of Greater Toronto and perishable food items to the Daily Bread Food Bank, he said.

Document TOR0000020080121dt1g00dyh

NEWS

Volunteers bring homeless in from the cold Patrols offer help as city emergency program kicks in

By Stan Josey TORONTO STAR

463 words

12 January 1997

The Toronto Star

TOR

A5

English

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With only a few thin blankets shielding him from last night's biting wind, Vern Crow was losing the fight to keep warm over a tiny heat vent at Dundas and Simcoe Sts.

Then a guardian angel arrived in the form of an emergency street patrol from the Anishnawbe health centre.

"It's too damned cold," Vern told volunteer Victor Lock. "I want to go in."

Within minutes, the street patrollers had a warm cup of soup and a sandwich in his hands.

Within five minutes, Vern - who at 43 has spent years living over downtown heat vents - was in another van and on his way to one of several emergency beds set up in response to the first declaration of Toronto's cold weather alert program.

Similar stories were repeated many times last night as Toronto's homeless heeded the warnings of city medical officials and headed for shelter.

And at the forefront of the campaign to get the homeless indoors were the Anishnawbe volunteers, including some homeless people.

Area residents were doing their part, too, by emptying their closets and their wallets to help the homeless during the winter's first major cold snap.

Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's medical officer of health, called the alert, which kicked in yesterday at noon, to aid homeless people who may be at risk.

The program is designed to prevent a repeat of the tragic events last winter, when three homeless people died from exposure on downtown streets.

More than 100 new hostel beds were opened up to help the homeless last night as the temperature dipped to -12C.

But even with the extra beds and extra volunteers patrolling the streets, many homeless people chose to keep the sky as their ceiling and bundle up against the cold.

For these people, Anishnawbe volunteers were out providing hot food, extra blankets and clothing.

And the extra funding from the cold weather program meant they could provide 24-hour patrols for the first time, said co-ordinator James Froh.

Back at the Anishnawbe centre on Queen St. E. near Sherbourne St., the phone rang almost constantly with people offering the homeless clothing, blankets, money - or a warm bed for the night.

"I am amazed at the generosity being shown by Toronto residents," said staffer Angela Whitebird.

"For the first time people appear to be offering help without being judgmental," she said.

Page A1 - STAR COLOR PHOTO (Eglinton): Angels' with warm hearts Anishnawbe health centre volunteers Robert Keshane, left, Victor Lock attend to Vern Crow last night at Dundas Simcoe Sts. as a city emergency program kicks in. Many, like Crow, took shelter.

Document TOR0000020080121dt1c00di1



NEWS

Homeless face lethal chill Alert sounded as temperatures dip

By Peter Krivel Toronto Star

245 words

11 January 1997

The Toronto Star

TOR

A2

English

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Toronto's Cold Weather Alert plan for homeless people gets its first test this weekend with temperatures expected to dip to a wind chill equivalent of -26C.

Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's medical officer of health called the alert, effective noon today, to provide extra services to the homeless who may be at particular risk of exposure.

"This is the first time we've called the alert," said McKeown.

The plan was formulated after three homeless people died of exposure on the streets of Toronto last winter, he said.

Under the plan, 110 additional beds have been added to the current complement of 2,054 and hostels will have more flexible admittance policies.

As well, the Street Hotline, which provides a referral service for homeless, will operate 24 hours a day and The Anishnawbe Street Patrol will extend its hours.

Overnight temperatures are expected to drop to -12C tonight and -16C tomorrow with wind chill equivalents of -20C and -26C, according to Environment Canada.

There is no way to force a person into a hostel, McKeown said.

"What we'll try to do is encourage people to get inside," he said.

"But if people do decide to stay on the streets, then we'll provide them with the resources to reduce the risk such as warm food, blankets and sleeping bags."

The alert will be re-assessed Monday, McKeown said.

Document TOR0000020080121dt1b00dby

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