

Housing blitz campaign to find 30 homes for the homeless in time for the holidays



A housing blitz campaign by the Human Development Council aims to house 30 people experiencing homelessness by Christmas ahead of the chilly winter months.
Photo: Telegraph-Journal Archive

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120

Actively Homeless

40

Are Rough Sleeping

Emma McPhee | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • The Saint John Human Development Council wants to house 30 people dealing with homelessness before Christmas.

The In From the Cold housing blitz campaign, launched on Monday, aims to find permanent housing with supports for 30 people to help free up shelter space.

According to Michael MacKenzie, system planner with the Saint John Human Development Council, the city is seeing a concerning trend with a rising homeless population in recent months – to the point emergency shelters have had to turn people away.

As temperatures drop with winter coming, the need for more housing becomes ever-more important.

"Every winter as the temperature starts to drop, we hear conversations straight across the country about the possibility of opening an additional shelter, which certainly makes sense as an emergency response," MacKenzie said.

"There's nothing inherently wrong with that, and often it is the best response if necessary," he continued. "But it is a temporary solution. And for us, given the numbers that we see in terms of rough sleeping, our community partners would prefer to invest in long-term solutions."

The human development council has a By Name List that offers a real-time list of people experiencing homelessness in the city.

Currently, according to the available data from the By Name List, there are approximately 120 homeless people in Saint John, of which 69 are chronically so – meaning they have been homeless for at least six months.

There are 40 beds available in the city's emergency shelters, and no standalone shelter for families.

A further breakdown of the numbers shows that 41 per cent identify as female, 58 per cent as male and one per cent as transgender. In age, 14 per cent are 24 and younger, 65 per cent are between the ages of 25 and 54, and 19 per cent are 55 and older.

As for sleeping locations, 20 per cent are currently couch-surfing, 31 per cent are sleeping rough and 42 per cent are using shelters.

Chris Gorman, also a system planner with the human development council, said the 69 people experiencing chronic homelessness are the target of the In From the Cold campaign.

"It's those individuals that really need intensive support in order to solve their own homelessness," Gorman said. Unlike those who are chronically homeless, others facing homelessness in the city are able to "self-resolve" and find housing on their own, Gorman added.

"Our first step is to house 30 by Christmas," Gorman said. "This is not an overwhelming large number, so we're fairly confident through our approach that this 120, or 69 chronically homeless individuals, is not an unsolvable problem."

For the campaign, the Saint John Human Development Council already has 12 provincial rent supplements at its disposal, with up to five available units at the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saint John. Part of the campaign will also involve engaging with local landlords to find new housing opportunities using the City of Saint John's communication platforms.

So far, Cathy Boyce, affordable housing specialist with the human development council, said the organization has 15 to 20 moves already in motion, with the hope of moving at least 15 people into housing by Dec. 1.

"That's both through matching people to housing as well as matching people to support," Boyce said.

Although the In From the Cold campaign targets the winter months, Greg Bishop, the human development council's director of strategic initiatives, said the organization is currently working with the province in the development of a multi-year plan to end chronic homelessness.

"This is just the beginning," Bishop said.