

## 'It's definitely crunch time': Race is on to house 30 people by Christmas

Emma McPhee | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • Within the first 11 days of the Human Development Council's In From The Cold Campaign, 11 homeless people have been housed out of a goal of 30.

With 11 other moves pending, the race is on to line up housing for eight more people before Christmas.

"We're still about eight or so shy of our goal of 30 people, but I guess it just shows how difficult and challenging this work is," said Cathy Foote, affordable housing specialist with the Human Development Council. "We're still moving forward and trying to stay optimistic that we'll meet that goal."

The Human Development Council had originally been hoping to have 15 people housed by Dec. 1.

The campaign, launched on Nov. 22, aims to find permanent housing with supports for 30 people, with the ultimate goal of freeing up shelter space as the winter months begin.

There are currently 40 available emergency shelter beds in Saint John. The Human Development Council's By Name List – a real-time list of people experiencing homelessness in the city – shows there are 120 homeless people in Saint John, of which 69 have been homeless for at least six months and 40 are "sleeping rough."

According to Foote, people are being prioritized for housing through the campaign based on level of vulnerability. Each person is then matched with supports and services provided by other community organizations as well as a housing unit.

"We make sure that the person that we're moving into the unit has a contact person, a contact agency, that can help them to maintain a successful tenancy," Foote said.

The Human Development Council is currently looking for more landlords to offer units for the program.

Gordon Ferris is one Saint John property owner who's stepped up to help so far.

The owner of 220 units across 30 buildings – most of which are located in the south end – has put six units towards the In From the Cold Campaign.

"I'm from Saint John, I grew up here, you know, fortunately, I've had some units available," Ferris said. "It makes me feel good to give back to the community."

Ferris has been working with the Human Development Council for the last 12 months, but he's been working to help the city's homeless population for the last few years, beginning three years ago with renting some of his units to Outflow.

"By providing housing for them, and with all the support from the government agencies that are there, they can start to get their life together and succeed," Ferris said.

Ferris said landlords shouldn't feel worried renting units to people who've been homeless, since the Human Development Council makes sure tenants have the support they need, and tenants are pre-screened. Rent will also be paid, he said, because of the financial subsidy through NB Housing.

"You're helping others. That's the big thing," Ferris said.

Ferris has also seen firsthand the difference providing a housing unit can make. One young woman was homeless before being matched to one of Ferris's units. After living there for 18 months, she called Ferris to give him her notice to vacate.

"She says, you know, 'The program's helped me a lot. I've saved money, I found a job, and I'm going to go out and rent my own apartment, so that this one can be made available for somebody who really needs it,'" Ferris said.

His message to other landlords: "I think they should give it a try."

The Human Development Council has the tenants, the access to rent supplements and supports in place to help tenants once they get housing. All that's left is finding the housing units, Foote said.

With only a few weeks left before the holidays, Foote said it's "definitely crunch time" to find units for eight more people.

"We're exploring all options at this point," she said. "We're getting there. We've been pretty creative with some different ways of housing people. But we're definitely open to any ideas that folks might have to kind of house the final few.

"Any support from the community, or the public, is welcome for sure."

