

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Community and Health Services
April 4, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

I Count, I'm Not Just A Number - A Profile of Homelessness in York Region

1. Recommendations

The Regional Clerk circulate this report to United Way Greater Toronto and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for their information.

2. Summary

York Region is required by the Province of Ontario to count the number of people experiencing homelessness within the Region every two years, beginning in 2018. In [June 2018](#), a communication was presented to Council with some preliminary results from the count. This report highlights detailed findings from the Region's first homeless count which took place from April 17 to 20, 2018. The full report, *I Count, I'm not just a number* (I Count), is available as Attachment 1.

Key Points:

- Homelessness prevention, diversion, housing stability and wrap around programs and services are key to helping residents at-risk of homelessness to remain housed and become permanently housed as quickly as possible
- A homeless count is an opportunity to better understand the scope and nature of homelessness in a community in order to fix it
- In York Region, 389 people were counted as experiencing homelessness, of which 224 people participated in a homeless survey
- 238 citizen volunteers and staff conducted surveys at emergency and transitional housing facilities, outdoor locations, meal programs, public libraries, food banks, and local drop-in centres; and supported field offices across York Region to gather data on people's social, health and housing needs
- I Count data informed York Region's first 'real time' list of people experiencing homelessness and is being used to connect individuals and families with the highest need to the right supports to find and keep housing

- I Count findings will inform investments in program delivery and actions in the update of York Region's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan

3. Background

Homeless counts are required by the Federal and Provincial Governments

In 2016, the Region was mandated by the Province of Ontario under the *Housing Services Act, 2011* to count people experiencing homelessness every two years, starting in 2018.

As the Community Entity for the federal homelessness funding, United Way Greater Toronto (UWGT) is required to conduct a Point-in-Time count every two years (explained below). In 2016, UWGT conducted Count Me In, York Region's first Point-in-Time Count.

The Region partnered with UWGT and prepared the joint report *Understanding the Numbers, Working Together to Prevent, Reduce and End Homelessness in York Region*. The report was presented to Council in [October 2016](#) and included the Region's emergency housing use data and findings from Count Me In, to provide a broader profile of homelessness in the Region.

The Region and UWGT worked together to coordinate provincial and federal requirements for the 2018 homeless counts. UWGT shared their insights, expertise and resources in the planning and implementation of I Count.

York Region successfully led a joint Point-in-Time count and Registry Week from April 17 to 20, 2018

A Point-in-Time count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals over a 24 hour period

A Registry Week uses the same survey questions as the Point-in-Time count and also asks additional questions to measure the level of client need using a Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT). By extending the count over four days, survey teams were able to visit more organizations and locations where homeless people are known to frequent to count as many individuals and families experiencing homelessness as possible.

A benefit of both a Point-in-Time count and Registry Week is the additional data collected. The combined surveys also collected names and contact information of respondents who consented to share this information, in order to connect those most in need with the appropriate supports.

238 trained citizen and staff volunteers completed surveys with individuals and families experiencing homelessness to gather data on their social, health and housing needs

In preparation for the 2018 homeless count, staff partnered with community agencies to identify indoor and outdoor survey locations, recruit survey volunteers and develop strategies to raise awareness of the count and homelessness in the Region.

Surveys were conducted at emergency and transitional housing facilities, outdoor locations, meal programs, public libraries, food banks, local drop-in centres and at the four Violence Against Women shelters. A dedicated telephone line was also set up for residents experiencing homelessness to participate in the survey by phone.

The Region also held two youth magnet events in partnership with 360Kids and The Salvation Army. A magnet event is an engagement strategy used to attract a target group to a specific location. In York Region, magnet events were used during I Count to engage with youth experiencing homelessness and encourage them to complete a survey. The events included food, activities, speaker's corner, resource information and haircuts.

Individuals who completed a survey were given a thank you package which included a toque, socks, toothbrush, granola bar, identification holder, band aids, lip balm, resource information and their choice of a \$10 gift card from Tim Hortons, Presidents Choice or Walmart.

York Region, community partners, agencies, citizen volunteers, people with lived experience of homelessness and staff participating in the homeless count have built new partnerships

As a result of I Count, in addition to strengthening relationships with community organizations such as United Way Greater Toronto, emergency housing providers, homeless serving agencies, and Violence Against Women shelters, new community partnerships have been formed with staff from libraries, conservation authorities and local municipalities. With a better understanding of the available resources, community partners have been reaching out to the Region for advice, support and/or referrals as well as partnership opportunities to help people experiencing homelessness in the community.

The Region also involved people who are or have experienced homelessness in a working group to provide input on the survey questions, potential survey locations, and feedback on communication materials and care package contents. The Lived Experience Working Group provided valuable insight and guidance in the planning and implementation of I Count. The Lived Experience Working Group continues to meet to advise on issues facing people experiencing homelessness.

4. Analysis

Homelessness prevention and housing stability is key to helping residents in need find and keep stable housing

The Region uses data to inform evidence based programming to help anticipate, prevent and mitigate homelessness, and to avoid challenges faced by other jurisdictions grappling with more severe issues of homelessness.

The results of the homeless count help the Region better understand the needs and barriers faced by individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and create effective pathways and connections to help residents resolve their housing crisis as quickly as possible. Accurate and reliable information is essential to addressing how programs and services are locally planned and delivered to ensure the Region's investments in homelessness prevention and housing stability services are effective.

On April 17, 2018, an estimated 389 people in York Region were homeless

On April 17, 2018, a Point-in-Time count was completed. The Point-in-Time count provides an estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness in York Region over one 24-hour period. This number includes all the people surveyed and observed to be experiencing homelessness during I Count.

The 2016 count by UWGT found 263 experiencing homelessness; compared to 389 residents counted in 2018. The results are not exactly comparable. The 2018 count was able to visit 30 more outdoor locations and 28 more indoor locations. Also, unlike the 2016 count, for 2018 the Region was required by the Province to use strategies to try to connect with residents experiencing hidden homelessness. It is estimated that up to 80 per cent of homelessness is considered "hidden" or provisionally accommodated, which includes people staying with friends, "couch surfing", in unsustainable circumstances and often overcrowded housing to avoid the streets.

Despite best efforts to estimate the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in York Region, 389 residents should be considered a minimum number as it is unknown if the count entirely reflects all of York Region's homeless population.

224 people who were homeless also completed a survey during the combined April 17, 2018 Point in Time Count and April 17 to 20, 2018 Registry Week

In 2016, the homeless count completed 143 surveys. In 2018, 224 people were surveyed. Highlights of the surveys include:

- 34 were unsheltered (living in public spaces such as parks, ravines, cars, behind commercial buildings etc.)
- 96 were sheltered (staying in emergency overnight shelters or in Violence Against Women shelters)

- 94 were provisionally accommodated (staying in transitional housing, living temporarily with others, or in hotel/motel)

From the 224 surveys, we learned that in York Region:

- People are experiencing homelessness for longer periods of time. Of the respondents, 45 per cent were homeless for 6 months or longer. This is a 12 per cent increase from the 2016 count.
- Youth (16 to 24 years of age) continue to be overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. Of the respondents, 26 per cent were youth, while youth make up approximately 13 per cent of the York Region population. This is an 8 per cent decrease in homeless youth from the 2016 count.
- Indigenous Peoples/People with Indigenous ancestry are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. Of the respondents, 17 per cent identified as Indigenous or had Indigenous ancestry. This is a 4 per cent increase from the 2016 count. Indigenous People account for less than 1 per cent of the York Region population.
- Single people are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. Of the respondents 79 per cent were single, a 3 per cent increase from the 2016 count. In York Region, 6 per cent of residents are single (living alone).
- 88 per cent of respondents had an income source such as social assistance (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program), Canada Pension Plan and employment. This is an identical result to the 2016 count.
- 58 per cent of respondents experienced homelessness only once in the past year. This is a 4 per cent decrease from 2016.

25 per cent of people who were homeless said the main reason was because of family conflict

The top five reasons why people in York Region experience homelessness are:

1. Family conflict (25 per cent)
2. Job loss (16 per cent)
3. Illness/medical condition/hospitalization/treatment program (15 per cent)
4. Unable to pay rent/mortgage (14 per cent)
5. Mental health, addiction, substance use, mental health or domestic abuse (13 per cent)

Attachment 1 provides the complete I Count findings.

A lower percentage of York Region’s population is experiencing homelessness compared to other jurisdictions

Despite growing urbanization, York Region’s strategies, programs and investments are helping. Forty-seven Services Managers across Ontario participated in local homeless counts in 2018. Table 1 summarizes findings in a sample from the Greater Toronto, Hamilton and Simcoe Area jurisdictions (see Appendices K and L of Attachment 1 for further information from six out of 47 service managers). Methodologies used to conduct homeless counts vary and are indicated in the table below. Combining a Point-in-Time count with a Registry Week, as York Region did, provides a more in-depth data about the scope of homelessness and why homelessness occurs.

Table 1
Homeless Count Results from the Greater Toronto, Hamilton and Simcoe Area Jurisdictions

Municipality	Methodology	Population Census 2016	Total Number of Homeless	Percentage of the Total Population
Toronto	Point-in-Time Count	2,731,571	8,715	0.32%
Simcoe County (includes Barrie and Orillia)	Point-in-Time and Registry	479,650	697	0.15%
Hamilton	Point-in-Time Count	536,917	504	0.09%
Peel	Point-in-Time and Registry	1,381,744	875	0.06%
Halton Region	Point-in-Time Count	548,435	271	0.05%
York Region	Point-in-Time and Registry	1,109,909	389	0.04%

I Count findings were used to form York Region’s first By Name List

The surveys from I Count formed the Region’s first By Name List. A By Name List is a real time list of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in a community. Knowing homeless residents in York Region by name, and understanding the most urgent needs, the Region and community partners have taken steps toward helping individuals and families find and keep housing. Understanding needs and the barriers are key components in

connecting residents experiencing homelessness to the right type and level of support and helps move the Region towards the provincial mandate of ending chronic homelessness by 2025.

After the count, individuals and families surveyed were prioritized on the By Name List based on their level of vulnerability (acuity) and length of time homeless. The names of the individuals and families with the highest acuity and length of time being homeless were brought forward to a newly formed Community Collaborative Table. The Community Collaborative Table is comprised of Regional staff and community service providers. The Community Collaborative Table meets regularly to review and match priority clients on the By Name List to appropriate and available program spaces. This includes housing first programs from the Region's new Home Now Program, as presented to Council in [November 2017](#). For example, since the April 2018 Count, 45 residents who have been homeless the longest and have the highest level of need have been housed and the program is continuing to work with an additional 26 individuals or families to obtain housing.

Strategic investments in programs and services for residents at-risk of or experiencing homelessness have helped residents to find and keep permanent housing

The Region continues to develop a “made in York Region” system of homelessness prevention and housing stability services. This is helping homeless and at-risk residents to remain in, or return to stable housing. For example, establishment of a multi-service centre for homeless and at-risk women at Belinda's Place has helped to permanently house over 400 women since 2016. Programs and services have also helped residents keep housing and successfully reintegrate into the community. The Housing Stability Program for example, has helped over 4,700 people to find and keep housing since 2014. In 2018, 96 per cent of residents served remained stably housed for at least 6 months.

These are only two specific examples of how strategies and investments made by the Region have yielded positive results in supporting housing affordability and stability.

The 2019 budget approved an additional Housing Stability Worker and Social Worker to provide intensive case management and wrap around supports to residents with high needs.

5. Financial

In 2018, the Ministry of Housing provided \$13.5 million in funding to the Region under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). This funding comes with criteria requiring the Region in its role as Service Manager to address local priorities and better meet the needs of individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless in York Region.

The total cost of the 2018 York Region Homelessness Count was \$577,537, which was 100 per cent funded by the Province. Service Managers are permitted to spend up to 5 per cent of their CHPI funding on homelessness enumeration costs. York Region used 4.3 per cent.

These costs relate to preparing and planning for the count, including staff time, plus one-time costs such as technology and promotional materials.

6. Local Impact

During I Count, community partners across local municipalities participated by connecting survey teams with residents experiencing homelessness who frequent their sites. I Count teams worked with local municipal libraries and 11 locations across the Region participated in planning and supporting I Count. Posters promoting I Count were put up in local municipal libraries, community centres, emergency and transitional housing, foodbanks, meal programs, and drop-in centres. Partnerships with community agencies, local municipalities and conservation authorities supported residents who were homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless to participate

I Count data will help inform system planning and improve access to services for residents who are homeless or at-risk of housing loss in all nine local municipalities. The data will help the Region and community partners develop strategies and implement solutions based on evidence for more effective service delivery in the community. Determining the needs of residents experiencing homelessness and promoting housing stability can help reduce the cost of expensive emergency or crisis supports in all communities.

In 2018, at the request of local municipalities, training on homelessness supports and services was provided by the Region to help local municipalities support increased requests from residents, and strengthen partnerships amongst service providers, the Region and local municipalities. The Region plans to facilitate education and training to local municipalities.

7. Conclusion

For most residents, York Region is a vibrant and prosperous place to live and work. However, homelessness does exist in York Region. Some York Region residents live outdoors, in emergency housing facilities, seasonal shelters, Violence Against Women shelters or are staying temporarily with family or friends. Others are at-risk of homelessness or precariously housed. We also know from the I Count survey that individuals and families continue to find it increasingly hard to make ends meet and find affordable housing options, putting them more at-risk of homelessness.

York Region's focus is on investing in strategies to prevent homelessness and when necessary, to help people who become homeless find housing as quickly as possible with connections to the right supports to help them stay housed. Under the direction and with the support of Council, the Region's homelessness prevention and housing stability efforts are working as evidenced by an increase in the number of at risk residents served.

I Count is being used to better inform service planning and ensure people are being connected to the right services and supports that assist with their housing stability. The By Names List is helping the Region and community partners to prioritize and coordinate services to help those who are the most vulnerable.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager, Social Services at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 72150. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Katherine Chislett**
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**
Chief Administrative Officer

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Attachment (1)
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