



Office of the Commissioner
Community and Health Services

Memorandum

To: Committee of the Whole

From: Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Date: June 7, 2018

Re: **Update on York Region's First Homeless Count, April 17 to 20, 2018**

This memo provides an update on York Region's Homeless Count: *I Count. I'm not just a number (I Count)* and is a follow up to the March 2018 report to Council on [York Region's Homeless Count, April 17-20, 2018](#).

From April 17 to 20, 2018, The Regional Municipality of York took part in an Ontario wide effort to better understand homelessness

Ontario is the first province/territory in Canada to mandate local service managers to conduct homeless counts every two years, starting in 2018. As the Service Manager, the Region is required to enumerate people who are living in sheltered and unsheltered settings, as well as hidden homelessness (e.g. couch surfing/staying with a friend because they have nowhere else to go).

The goals of the homeless count were to:

- Better understand the scope of homelessness in our community
- Help connect people to the right services and supports
- Help those with the highest need get the supports they need

The results of the count will help us to better understand reflect the needs and barriers facing homeless and at-risk of homelessness residents in all nine local municipalities. Accurate and reliable information on homelessness is essential to addressing how we will plan and deliver services to prevent, reduce and end homelessness.

Volunteers, community partners, local municipalities and internal staff were engaged in implementing *I Count*

A comprehensive communication plan was developed to encourage people experiencing homelessness to participate in the count, solicit volunteers to help with *I Count* and to build awareness of homelessness in York Region. Videos, based on actual scenarios of residents experiencing homelessness, were viewed over 116,000 times. The videos and the volunteer work have raised awareness about homelessness in York Region.

York Region worked closely with United Way Greater Toronto to gain insights from their 2016 count. United Way Greater Toronto staff partnered in planning and implementing the count, and played a key role in supporting field offices during the count.

Participants included local agencies that provide services to people experiencing homelessness or where they may frequent, such as food banks, libraries, emergency and transitional housing, Violence Against Women shelters, meal programs, drop-in programs and mental health agencies. Contact was also made with local municipalities, police, paramedics and many more partners, all of whom worked together to make the count a successful community event.

88 Regional staff and 150 citizen volunteers successfully connected with homeless residents

During the week of *I Count*, trained teams led by York Region staff and community volunteers, completed surveys with homeless individuals. Information gathered included health, housing, social needs, duration of and reasons for homelessness. Extending the count over a few days increased the probability of reaching more people who are homeless in the community including the hidden homeless population.

Survey teams visited 44 outdoor locations and over 45 indoor community locations across the region where homeless individuals are known to frequent. In addition, a dedicated telephone line was set up to help encourage hidden homeless individuals to call-in to complete the survey.

An appreciation event will be held to thank volunteers for their support during *I Count*.

Staff will report on the *I Count* results in 2019

Early results show that 226 individuals agreed to be surveyed during *I Count*. Those who chose not to complete the survey were still counted and will be included in the analysis.

Data collected will be going through extensive analysis, including engagement with key community partners and considering solutions to get people the right supports at the right time. In addition, we will be connecting with other Ontario Service Managers, especially in the GTA, to assess our findings relative to the results of their homelessness counts.

Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health
Services

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