



**Semi-Annual Count of People Sleeping Outside in Halifax
August 25, 2021**

**This report was written by
Eric Jonsson, Program Coordinator
Navigator Street Outreach Program**

Introduction

Starting at 6:30 am on August 25, 2021, a group of 11 people, from seven different homeless-serving agencies, went out and spoke with people who have been sleeping outside due to a lack of appropriate housing. This is the third time we have done this, the previous two counts occurred in March 2021 and August 2020. Our goal is to connect with people who may not be currently served by the existing social services, and to highlight the number of people sleeping outside, and any issues they may be facing.

This report shines a light on some of the things that the team found that day.

Acknowledgements

This survey took place on unceded Mi'kmaw territory. Indigenous people are overrepresented among the homeless population, as is documented by our survey. We are all Treaty people, and we need to do better in serving people of Indigenous ancestry. This survey was made possible because of the good will of folks who have been struggling with poverty and homelessness, and the willing cooperation of community agencies including Welcome Housing and Support Services, YWCA, the North End and Downtown Dartmouth Street Navigator, ARK Youth Outreach, Out of the Cold Community Association, Phoenix Youth Programs and the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre. A special thank-you goes out to Darcy Gillis, Martha Mutale, Shawn Parker, Gus Richardson, Sam Krawec, Melissa Dillman, Bailee Lawton, Leigh Maclean, and Dorothy Patterson.

Editorial

We surveyed 45 people on August 25, 2021, and found a few notable results. Firstly, and unexpectedly, Indigenous people were grossly overrepresented in the unsheltered homeless population. Thirteen of the 45 surveyed self-identified as having Indigenous ancestry. This equates to about 29 per cent, wherein, of the greater population, only about 4 per cent of people in HRM identifies as Indigenous. Colonization, residential schools, and the "Sixties Scoop*" all have a part to play in this stark discrepancy.

Secondly, 19 people were either displaced from their former encampments, or had their belongings confiscated from them when HRM staff cleared out the tents and shelters on August 18, 2021. These people remained homeless and were not offered any alternative accommodations throughout the process.

Finally, one out of every five participants identified as being part of the LGBTQ2S community. Halifax does not have enough supports for members of this community, and this statistic highlights that.

Highlight: Fewer people this year identified as having no income, and I think this is partially due to the introduction of the "Street Allowance" by Department of Community Services, which allows homeless people to get the living allowance while living on the streets.

** Sixties Scoop: The large-scale removal or "scooping" of Indigenous children from their homes, communities, and families of birth through the 1960s, and their subsequent adoption into predominantly non-Indigenous, middle-class families across the United States and Canada.*

Methodology

August 25, 2021, was a hot day with periodic rain showers in the afternoon. Cheque day was two days away so there were a few people out and about. Five teams of two spread out across the urban core, covering areas where there would be a higher probability of finding homeless people. The teams started at around 6:30 am and finished at about 5:00 pm. All surveys occurred in peninsular Halifax and downtown Dartmouth. Participants were given \$20 cash in return for answering the survey questions. Only people who were sleeping outside, in their cars, or other places unfit for human habitation were surveyed.

Originally, the survey had 16 questions to see how people have been experiencing homelessness over the past six months. However, HRM had decided to forcibly evict people from encampments the week prior to the survey, so a 17th question was added, “Were you impacted by the city’s clearing out of encampments last week? In what way?”

The teams spoke with 45 people on the day of the survey. There was also another 36 people, that were known to be living outside (including 10 youth), who the teams did not connect with on the day. Therefore, there are 81 people, at a minimum, currently living outside in HRM. We need to do better in connecting with these folks, and we need to start housing them. Housing is the only solution to homelessness.

Findings

- The average age of respondents was 40. We spoke with 6 people who were younger than 25, and eight people who were older than 55.
- 10 people identified as female, 34 male, and 1 person as non-binary.
- 13 people identified as Indigenous.
- 7 identified as African Nova Scotia or of African descent.
- 9 identified as being a part of the LGBTQ2S community.
- 4 people said they slept in a sleeping bag last night, 7 people said a bench, 1 person said a car, 2 people said a crisis shelter, 1 person said a graveyard, 5 people said outside, 2 people said stairwell, and 21 people said in a tent.
- 19 people said they were either moved or had their stuff taken away as a result of the encampments sweeps.
- These are the reasons people listed that led them to becoming homeless: abuse, addiction, bullshit, child welfare, COVID-19, employment issues, evicted, evicted, evicted, eviction, family breakdown, family breakdown, family breakdown, family breakdown, family breakdown, friends, hanging, incarceration, incarceration, justice issues, justice issues, kicked out at 15, kicked out of Shelter, loss of job, mental health, neighbour conflict, number of things, parents kicked out, parents kicked out, parents kicked out, relationship breakdown, relationship breakdown, renovicted from 252 Victoria, renoviction, renoviction, rent arrears, rent arrears, rent arrears, rental arrears, series of unfortunate events
- The average length of time homeless was 4 years.
- 19 people would go to a shelter if they were allowed or if there were room, 26 would not go at all.
- 23 self-identified as having a disability.

Appendix: Survey Questions

Hello, we are currently doing a survey of people sleeping outside in the HRM. We will give you \$20.00 and a cigarette if you answer these questions. Completed surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet by Eric Jonsson, the Street Navigator (cell: 902-209-6517), and then destroyed once we have compiled the data anonymously.

Client Name _____ Location of Survey _____

1. What is your age?
2. What gender do you most identify with?
3. Are you Native? Mik'maw, Metis, Inuit, Cree, etc.?
4. Are you Black and/or a person of African descent?
5. Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ2S community?
6. What is your current sleeping situation? (Circle one: tent, sleeping bag, park bench, ATM or stairwell, abandoned buildings, parking garage, car.)
7. Were you impacted by the city's clearing out of encampments last week? In what way?
8. What is/are your source(s) of income? Income Assistance/Welfare, CPP Old Age, CPP Disability, bottling/scraping, panning, or job?
9. Have you been offered a subsidy? How long ago? Did you use it?
10. Did you collect CERB/CRB? If yes, did it cause any issues? (e.g., stop your Pharmacare, make you behind on rent, or get you evicted?)
11. Where were you born?
12. Where do you call home?
13. What led to you being homeless?
14. How long have you been homeless?
15. Can you or would you go to a shelter? What is your experience in shelters?
16. Do you have an illness or disability? E.g., are stairs okay, is noise okay, etc.
17. Do you have anything you'd like to add?

Signature upon receipt of \$20.00 _____

Do you want to be connected with housing support or any other supports? If yes, someone will follow up with you at a later time. What is the best way to contact you?