

2017-2018 Out of the Cold Program Prepares for Launch Amid Growing Concerns Surrounding Capacity

TORONTO (November 1, 2017) – As the weather turns colder, faith-based groups across the city are preparing to open their doors to the city’s homeless for another season of the Out of the Cold Program (OOTC). The program will officially launch on November 1 at Yorkminster Park Baptist Church and will remain open until the end of April. Although the program started as an emergency response to keep homeless people from freezing to death in the winter, the OOTC program now operates as a de facto addition to the city’s shelter system, a system that has been at capacity for far too long.

In a report released by Dixon Hall in April 2017 titled “*Out of the Cold – 30 Years Later – A Growing Crisis*”, data analysis from the 2016-2017 season showed a 9% increase in overnight stays year over year, with a total of 13,199 stays throughout the season. The report noted that overall program occupancy was 96%, despite an increase of 6% in available spaces. Findings in the report also identified a lack of correlation between extreme cold weather alerts issued by the City of Toronto and the number of people accessing the OOTC program.

“The Out of the Cold program was founded to keep the homeless protected during the extreme cold of the winter,” said David Reycraft, Dixon Hall’s Director of Housing Services. “We now know that it doesn’t matter how cold it is outside – thousands of people access this program every year. We are closer to capacity than ever. Affordable housing is still completely out of reach for far too many Torontonians. The Out of the Cold program was intended as a short-term solution, and is already strained beyond its capacity. When the program reaches complete capacity, where will the homeless go?”

People who seek refuge at an OOTC site are able to connect with a client intervention worker, which significantly increases their chances of moving into permanent housing and receiving continued support to maintain housing. Individuals accessing the OOTC program who work with one of Dixon Hall’s client intervention workers have a 42.5% chance of moving into permanent housing solutions, based on data from the 2016-2017 OOTC season. Client intervention workers can also refer homeless men and women to programs and services including Ontario Works, education and skills training, and health resources. Data clearly indicates that many more people could be helped with the addition of client intervention workers. At this time, funding is lacking to fill more roles.

Founded in 1987, the OOTC program was intended as a short-term solution to prevent unnecessary homeless deaths during the winter months. 30 years later, it has become a staple service for Toronto’s homeless. Without addressing the underlying issues of poverty, wage inequality, food insecurity, and affordable housing in Toronto, demand has and will continue to rise and Toronto’s most vulnerable will be left without the supports they so desperately need.

Please visit <http://bit.ly/OOTC2017> to read *Out of the Cold – 30 Years Later – A Growing Crisis* which provides all statistics surrounding usage and demographics of the program users.



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The 2017-2018 OOTC Program schedule is available at:
www.dixonhall.org/housingservices/ootc

About Dixon Hall

Dixon Hall is a multi-service agency located in east downtown Toronto. For more than 85 years, Dixon Hall has offered over 45 supportive programs and services to seniors, youth, homeless men and women, the unemployed, and other vulnerable populations in Toronto.

About Out of the Cold

The OOTC program is run by volunteers who open their places of worship to Toronto's homeless. Dixon Hall works with 16 faith-based organizations, providing support in ensuring certain shelter standards are met and case management is delivered in order to provide program users with an opportunity of long-term housing solutions.

OOTC program users are provided a safe and warm place to stay and two hot and nutritious meals. In addition, some sites provide additional supports including clothing, nursing care, and laundry facilities. Each site provides shelter once a week from November – April annually.

Since 2003, Dixon Hall, supported by the City of Toronto, has provided management and operations support to the faith groups who operate the Out of the Cold program.

