

The background of the entire page is a dark blue/black gradient with numerous white snowflakes of various sizes and shapes scattered throughout. The snowflakes are stylized, with some having sharp points and others being more rounded or star-like.

Out of the Cold Toronto

How Seasonal Programs Can Inform
Permanent Solutions to Homelessness

November 2017 - April 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Last winter, the City of Toronto found itself in the midst of a homelessness crisis. With a total of **31 extreme cold weather alerts**, many of which lasted an entire week, homeless men and women in Toronto were in very real danger.

The City's shelter system has been under extreme pressure for a number of years. Heading into the 2017-2018 winter season, the City put a plan in place to address shelter capacity issues and ensure that homeless individuals had a place to sleep during the coldest nights of the year. Unfortunately, due to the unprecedented cold, the planned measures proved insufficient. As the blistering cold raged on, the City had to continuously add more beds to the system to handle the demand.

Throughout the winter, the Out of the Cold program continued to host the city's homeless overnight, while also providing dinner and breakfast, along with client intervention work and other supports.

The Out of the Cold program operated at 101.5% capacity in the 2016-2017 season, with a total of 13, 679 overnight stays.¹

Though overall overnight stays were down 8.6% in the OOTC program with a total of 13, 009 overnight stays during the 2017-2018 season , the program still operated at 92.9% capacity and three Out of the Cold sites extended operation past the scheduled season close, remaining open until May.

While capacity is, and will continue to be, a pressing concern, we must work to better understand the issues that chronically homeless populations struggle with if we hope to one day end homelessness. This past season, OOTC staff continued to work more intensively with clients in order to ensure the program is not just a stop-gap measure but an opportunity to connect men and women experiencing homelessness with the supports they need to find and maintain housing.

By the end of the 2017-2018 season, Dixon Hall's Client Intervention Workers were able to house 30 individuals out of 86 intakes, a 34.8% success rate.

The 2017-2018 Out of the Cold Season operated at 92.9% capacity with 13,009 total stays - and three sites extended operation until May.

¹ The first OOTC report published statistics from November 2016 – March 2017, due to availability of information at publishing date. For direct comparison purposes, November 2017-March 2018 data are provided as an addendum.

This year, through a new pilot project in partnership with Beach United Church and St. Aidan’s Out of the Cold program, 12 out of 24 participants were able to find housing, all of whom were frequent OOTC program users.

Ultimately, temporary measures are just that – temporary. These measures are necessary, and critical to prevent homeless deaths during the winter months, but they must be part of a two-pronged approach: one that also addresses systemic issues that chronically homeless individuals face.

Improving outcomes for people experiencing homelessness will require additional funding for more comprehensive support and innovative projects like the Beach United Pilot Program, along with additional research to understand the homeless population, and to address systemic issues that contribute to poverty.

CITY OF TORONTO WINTER RESPITE SERVICES

Heading into the 2017-2018 winter season, the shelter system was already overwhelmed. The system consistently operates at a 95% occupancy rate; 5% above the City-mandated maximum occupancy rate of 90%.²

In an effort to address the needs of men and women experiencing homelessness during the winter months, the City of Toronto announced significant increases to winter respite services: an **increase in the number of respite sites** from 3 to 5; an increase in **the length of the operating season**, from November 15 – April 15, compared to December 14 – February 28 in 2016-2017; and an increase in **operating hours, to a 24-hour service model.**

The overall **capacity** at the respite sites was **increased from 160 spaces** in 2016-2017 to **239 spaces** at the start of the 2017-2018 season.

Despite the significant increases to the winter respite services, once the extreme cold weather arrived, the city’s homeless were in crisis. The first Extreme Cold Weather Alert (ECWA) was issued on November 9th. Over the course of the winter, there were 31 ECWAs in total, up from 22 last winter. Because of the persistent and lasting extreme cold, the city had to continuously add more beds to the winter respite services, reaching a high of more than 700 beds.

***Please refer to Appendix A for a complete timeline.**

² It’s worth noting that occupancy in some sectors far exceeds this; for example, men’s shelters frequently see 99% occupancy rates. Toronto’s shelter system consists of more than 6,590 emergency and transitional beds located in 63 different properties, including motels and hotels. Approximately 2,100 people using Toronto’s shelter system are living in motels and hotels, with costs covered by the city.

THE OUT OF THE COLD PROGRAM: 2017-2018 USAGE

During the 2016-2017 OOTC season, there were 13,679 stays, representing a capacity rate of 101.5%.³ Heading into the 2017-18 season, there was a growing concern that the Out of the Cold sites would be over capacity.

Table 1: OOTC Overnight Service Usage: (November to end of April)

Counts	Previous Season	Current Season	Year-over-Year change	
	OOTC 2016-17	OOTC 2017-18	#	%
Overnight stays	13, 679	13, 009	-670	-4.9%
Dinners*	29, 637	27, 150	-2487	-8.4%
Breakfasts*	11, 714	12, 077	363	3.1%
Tokens**	13, 536	12, 779	-757	-5.6%
Health visits* (nurse & doctor combined)	1, 623	1, 515	-108	-6.7%
Capacity	13, 475***	14,003	528	4%
Occupancy rate	101.5%	92.9%		-8.6%

**Token counts include tokens provided by Dixon Hall to 14 out 16 OOTC sites.

***Capacity numbers for 2016/17 season have been revised to make them comparable to current data counts (based on number of site mats).

During the 2017-2018 season, overall usage numbers were down slightly in the OOTC program. However, given the significant capacity increases to the winter respite services, we would have expected to see far greater drop-off in usage of the OOTC program. The lack of significant decrease in usage of the OOTC sites is a troubling indicator.

By the end of the winter season, the City of Toronto had increased capacity in winter respite sites by over 500 spaces per night. Though capacity fluctuated depending on Extreme Cold Weather Alerts, it peaked at over 700. The OOTC program saw a decrease in overnight stays overall, but the decrease was nowhere near in line with the increases in respite services.

The Out of the Cold program saw a decrease of 670 overnight stays over the entire season; a decrease of less than 4 individuals per night. If the City had not significantly increased the winter respite services, the impact on the OOTC program would have been severe. Occupancy would have hit 100% and the people turned away would have had nowhere else to go.

Stays in the OOTC program decreased by less than 4 individuals nightly, despite significant increases to 24-hour respite sites

³ Dixon Hall’s 2016-2017 Out of the Cold Report, published in April 2017, provided usage numbers until end of March as full season data was not available at time of publication.

The continued high OOTC occupancy rate, despite the additional respite services provided by the City, is a troubling indicator regarding the number of homeless people relying on temporary service measures in Toronto.

Table 2: Client Intervention Worker Intakes: Outcome Updates

OOTC Season	CIW Intakes	Referrals	Housed
January 2016 – October 2016	57	148	28
November 2016 – April 2017	80	130	34
November 2017 – May 2018	86	161	30
Totals	223	439	92

Client Intervention Work continues to be an integral part of the support provided by the OOTC program. Despite a slight decrease in overall program usage, the number of intakes and referrals completed by Client Intervention Workers increased.

As a result of funding received from ESDC, Dixon Hall was able to hire an additional CIW. With two CIWs working to support OOTC guests, 30 individuals were successfully housed.

CIWs housed 30 individuals and increased intakes and referrals year-over-year

THE BEACH PILOT PROJECT: WORKING MORE INTENSIVELY WITH FREQUENT OOTC GUESTS

Earlier this year, St. Aidan’s Out of the Cold and Beach United Church in partnership with Dixon Hall, launched a pilot project to deepen the level of supports offered to OOTC guests. The project launched in January 2018 and ran for 16 weeks, finishing at the end of April.

Participants were invited to take part in the program.

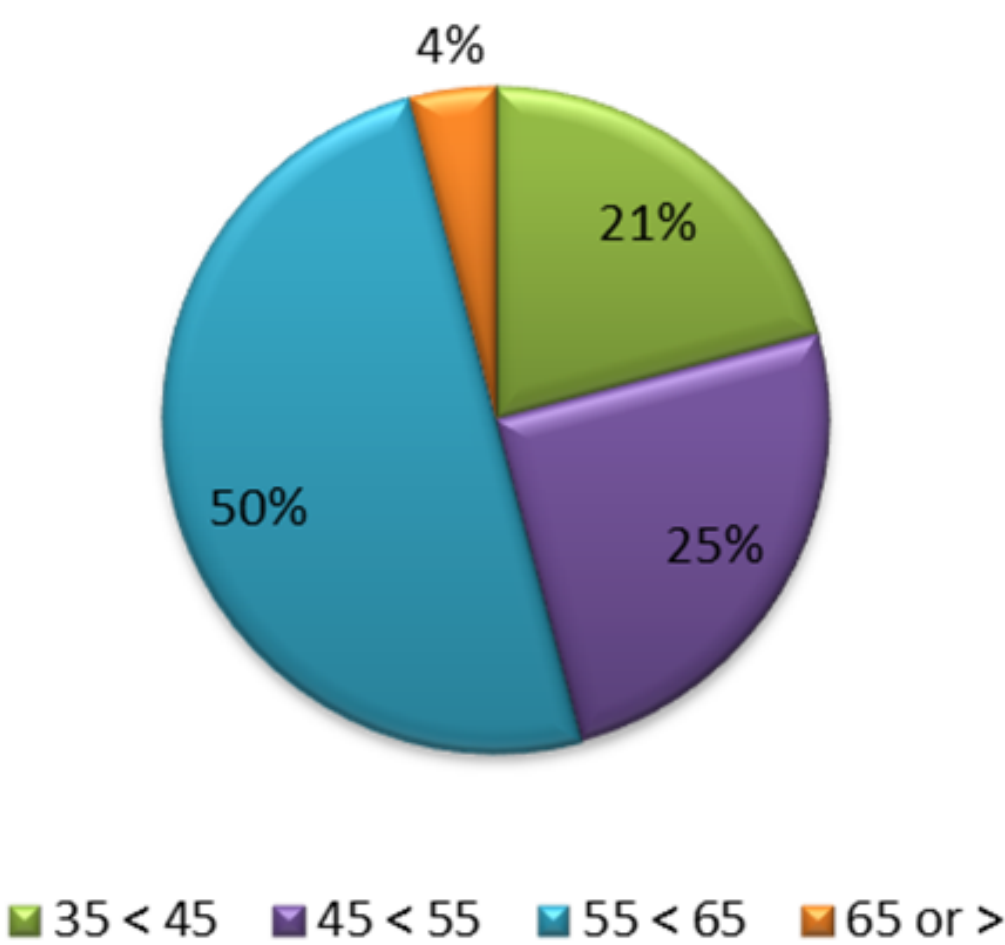
- Selection criteria used to identify participants included:
- Frequency of use of the OOTC program
 - An expressed desire to move into housing
 - Eligible for housing allowance programs
 - Currently working with a Dixon Hall Client Intervention Worker

The selection of guests also focused on ensuring the group was representative of the broader OOTC population in terms of gender, race and age. Staff made every effort to ensure the group was inclusive, and to encourage a positive, safe group dynamic.

Through this project, CIWs had the opportunity to work with OOTC program users in a more intensive manner to better understand their unique challenges, and introduce additional support systems aimed at not only finding, but also maintaining housing.

Graph 1: Demographics of Beach United Church Pilot Project Participants

Age of BUC OOTC Participants (n=24)



- **Of 24 participants, 6 were female (25%), and 18 (75%) were male**
- **Female participants were part of couples – a growing trend in guests accessing OOTC services**
- Age ranged from 36 – 71 years; median age was 56 years
- Five (5) participants were between 35 – 44 (21%), 6 were between the ages of 45 and 54 (25%); **the remaining 13 participants were 55 or older (54%)**

An important component of the Beach Pilot Program was making efforts to engage with clients who were frequent users of the OOTC program. Of the 24 participants;

Fifteen participants (62%) were long-term guests of the OOTC program, where long-term is defined as guests for 3 or more seasons

62% of participants were guests of the OOTC program for 3 or more seasons

At the conclusion of the project, **eight (8) of 24 participants had been housed, a 33% success rate.**

Following the conclusion of the project, four (4) more participants were housed, bringing the success rate up to 50%.

Four (4) other participants continue to work with a CIW on a housing plan and housing readiness and one (1) is reviewing a TCHC unit as a potential home.

Types of Housing

- Private market apartments with rent supports (TTHAP) - 3
- Private market rooms without rent supports - 2
- Shared private market apartments without rent supports - 3
- Rent-geared-to-income (RGI)room - 1
- RGI apartment - 3

The success of this project demonstrates what can be accomplished when a support team is able to work intensively with a small group of homeless individuals.

Working more intensively with a smaller group allowed for trust and relationships to form, for individual needs to be better understood, and for CIWs to work with participants more closely. These factors all led to greater commitment and follow-through from participants.

Unfortunately, funding for this type of intensive support is rare.

12 out of 24 participants were housed, demonstrating the success that is possible when working intensively with small groups of homeless individuals

LOOKING AHEAD: CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT WITH OOTC USERS

The unrelenting strain on the Out of the Cold program in past seasons led Dixon Hall to develop a new research project, generously funded by Employment and Social Development Canada.

The project, Innovation and Technology in Data Collection: Connecting with the Homeless, aims to engage with frequent users of the OOTC program to further understand their complex needs.

These guests do not use the emergency shelter system, and little is known about their experiences of housing and homelessness.

There is also limited information as to what food programs, primary and mental health resources, harm reduction or addictions supports, income or housing supports, or other programs these individuals are accessing.

LOOKING AHEAD: CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT WITH OOTC USERS

The Innovation and Technology in Data Collection project aims to:

- Engage with OOTC users, specifically guests who are long-standing and/or frequent users of the program, and/or guests who do not use the shelter system.
- Define characteristics of this population by understanding guest preference for, and/or attachment to, the OOTC or respite services.
- Explore the role cellphones can play in improving outcomes for homeless individuals. Phones have been distributed to study participants and are being used for weekly contact. Freedom Mobile donated phones and covered the cost of phone plans for program participants. Basic cell phone service will be provided for up to one year. The device will remain the property of the participant after the study ends.
- Collect standardized, measurable data regarding individual personal histories (employment, education, health, social); experiences of housing and homelessness (last time housed, housing history, pathway to homelessness, duration of homelessness, current status and seasonal movement); and resource use, access, and needs.
- Compare data collected from this group to data collected from participants at Heyworth House (one of Dixon Hall’s emergency shelters), in order to understand demographic trends, and similarities and differences in terms of systemic barriers to housing between the two groups.
- The project is currently in progress, and is expected to conclude in early 2019.

CONCLUSION

The 2017-2018 winter season was one of the worst in recent memory for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Though the city worked hard to prevent a crisis situation through significant increases to winter respite services, the measures ultimately fell short.

Though overall numbers were down slightly in the Out of the Cold program, the decrease was clearly not in line with the increases elsewhere in the system.

Without the increases to winter respite services, the OOTC program would have reached 100% capacity and would have had to turn people away. **The OOTC program continues to operate at above 90% capacity, a figure that is unlikely to decrease any time soon.**

The Out of the Cold program has long served as a critical resource for homeless individuals during the winter, but reliance on volunteers and faith-based groups as a solution is not sustainable.

Client Intervention Workers employed by Dixon Hall have made great strides in housing approximately 110 individuals over the last two years, but their caseloads are far too large. As evidenced by the Beach United Pilot Project, working more intensively with homeless individuals in smaller groups can have dramatic impact. The project’s 50% success rate reflects what is possible with intensive case management opportunities.

As Dixon Hall forges ahead with a new research project focused specifically on chronically homeless OOTC guests who avoid using the shelter system, we expect to gain a better understanding of this group.

As we move toward a deeper understanding of the complex needs of frequent OOTC users and the barriers to housing they experience, insights emerge in terms of how to work with this group to help them move into sustainable housing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank the numerous parties that come together and make the OOTC program possible every year.

Firstly, we'd like to thank the faith-based organizations and volunteers who provide a shelter experience revered for its warmth and compassion.

We'd also like to thank the City of Toronto for providing funding which we're able to use to offer a continuum of services to OOTC guests and support to OOTC partners.

We also extend our gratitude to Employment and Social Development Canada for graciously funding our Innovation and Technology in Data Collection: Connecting with the Homeless project. We look forward to sharing results from this research project.

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APPENDIX A: TIMELINE

November 1 – OOTC program opens

November 9 – City issues first Extreme Cold Weather Alert

November 15 – Winter respite services begin at 4 locations.

1. 21 Park Road (Yonge/Bloor)
2. 323 Dundas St. E
3. 25 Augusta Ave
4. 705 Progress Ave (Scarborough)

Total respite centre capacity: 239

December 12 – December 16 – Extreme Cold Weather Alert

December 20 – 201 Cowan Ave (Parkdale Women Only) respite centre opens

Total respite centre capacity: 260

December 21 – Better Living Centre opens as a new winter respite centre, with a capacity of 110. High demand and increased pressure on the system leads to an announcement re: increased capacity in 2018, along with some immediate additions to beds.

Total respite centre capacity: 370

December 25 – December 31 – Extreme Cold Weather Alert

January 1 – January 7 – Extreme Cold Weather Alert

January 3 – Better Living Centre site capacity expanded from 110 to 150. City announces they're working with the federal government to open the Moss Park armoury as an additional 24-hour respite centre with 100 beds.

Total respite centre capacity: 410

January 4 – Two additional warming centres are opened at Metro Hall and the Regent Park Community Centre. Capacity at Regent Park Community Centre is 100, Metro Hall does not have beds.

Total respite centre capacity: 510

January 5 – Announcement of Moss Park Armoury opening as a temporary respite centre beginning January 8th for a two week period, with capacity of 100.

January 6 – Moss Park Armoury opens early in response to continued ECWA. Capacity at Regent Park Community Centre increases to 180. Capacity at the Better Living Centre is increased to 200. Wellesley Community Centre is opened as an emergency measure overnight to accommodate people as necessary. City outreach teams continue to patrol the streets and respond to citizen calls, offering shelter to anyone who is still outside.

Total respite centre capacity: 740

January 7 – Wellesley Community Centre closes. Warming centres at Regent Park Community Centre and Metro Hall are still open. Moss Park Armoury is still open, as the provincial government seeks an additional location for a respite centre.

January 8 – Metro Hall warming centre closes, Regent Park Community Centre warming centre remains open. For the remainder of the season, Metro Hall opens and closes dependant on if an ECWA is issued.

January 12 – 14 – Extreme Cold Weather Alert

January 12 – Metro Hall warming centre re-opens

January 15 – Regent Park Community Centre capacity is reduced to 75

Total respite centre capacity: 635

January 25 – Continuously increasing demand results in the announcement of two new respite sites.

1. 348 Davenport Road – opening January 27 - April 15. Planned to close for renovations and re-open as a new shelter by the end of 2018, reflecting a new shelter model with wrap-around supports. Capacity: 100

2. 354 George St. – will serve as a 24-hour winter respite site beginning January 28 – April 15. Capacity: 100

January 27 – 354 George St. opens

Total respite centre capacity: 735

January 28 – 348 Davenport Road opens, Moss Park Armoury Closes.
Transportation is provided for existing clients to Davenport Rd and George St locations.

Total respite centre capacity: 735

January 31 – Regent Park Community Centre warming centre closes.

Total respite centre capacity: 660

February 1 – 7 – Extreme Cold Weather Alert

February 8 – Extreme Cold Weather Alert

February 12 – Extreme Cold Weather Alert

February 13 – Metro Hall Warming Centre closes for the season

March 20— Three Out of the Cold sites announce extended operation.

1. Evangel Hall – Open until April 24
2. First Interfaith – Open until April 26
3. East Minster United – Open until April 27

April 11 – Two new 24-hour respite sites open in response to demand in the shelter system and in response to the closure of winter services.

1. 4100 Dundas St. W – opening May 7, guests at the Better Living Centre will be transitioned to this location. Capacity: 100
2. 1030 Don Mills Rd – opening May 21. Capacity: 100

348 Davenport Rd 24-hour respite site closes, as does the Better Living Centre.

348 Davenport will undergo renovations and re-open as a women's shelter.

Remaining 24-hour respite sites open are:

1. 354 George St.
2. 201 Cowan Ave.
3. 705 Progress Ave.
4. 21 Park Rd.
5. 25 Augusta Ave.
6. 323 Dundas St. E.
7. 4100 Dundas St. W
8. 1030 Don Mills Rd

APPENDIX B – DIRECT DATA COMPARISON, NOVEMBER 2016- MARCH 2017, VS. NOVEMBER 2017 – MARCH 2018

OOTC November to end March *Indicates that any missing data replaced with category average				
	2016/17	2017/18	# change	% change
Overnight stays	13, 199	12, 207	-992	-7.5%
Dinners*	28, 538	25, 560	-2, 978	-10.4%
Breakfasts*	11, 220	11, 282	62	0.6%
Tokens**	13, 029	11, 919	-1, 110	-8.5%
Health visits* (nurse & doctor combined)	1, 562	1, 442	-120	-7.7%
Capacity	***13, 310	13, 023	-287	-2.2%
Occupancy rate	99.2%	93.7%		-5.4%

**Token counts include tokens provided by Dixon Hall to 14 out of 16 OOTC sites.

***Capacity numbers for 2016/17 season have been revised to make them comparable to current data counts (based on number of site mats).

Appendix C: Methodology and Definitions

Data was collected and recorded by Dixon Hall OOTC staff on site with the support of site coordinators between November 1, 2017 and April 27, 2018. Missing data was replaced with average values based on all recorded data for the same variable at the same site

All data was compiled and analyzed by the Dixon Hall OOTC Data Coordinator.

Capacity numbers for the 2017/18 are based on site capacity as published on the OOTC season schedule and capacity numbers for the 2016/17 season have been adapted to reflect site capacity as stated by site coordinators and number of program nights in that time period.

Definitions:

Overnight guest: Any individual who completes the intake process for overnight accommodation at an OOTC site.

Dinner guest: Any individual who visits an operating OOTC site for a meal. These individuals do not complete an intake form through Dixon Hall.

Overnight guest mats: This includes all OOTC mats slept in over the stated time frame.

Unique guests: List of discrete population of individuals that have been overnight guests at an OOTC site.

Client Intervention Worker(CIW) Intakes: Interview and information collection completed when an OOTC guest begins the process of accessing supports and services (housing, educational, health, income) through the Dixon Hall OOTC client intervention worker.

CIW Referrals: This indicates referrals made by the CIW to external supports and services (to tax clinics or mental health services, for example).

Site full referrals: These are referrals made by Dixon Hall OOTC staff on site to incoming overnight guests to other shelters, Central Intake, or SHARC when they cannot be accommodated at the OOTC location. It is important to note that each site culture is different and where one site may make exceptions to capacity guidelines, another site may begin making referrals before a site is full. As such, these numbers are calculated on a weekly basis.

Available mats/Capacity: Total number of allocated overnight spaces.

Occupancy rate: Number of overnight guests relative to the number of available beds at a given site or over a specified period of time. For example, if 60 individuals complete an intake for overnight accommodation at a site with 65 available beds, the occupancy rate is 60/65 or about 92%.