

## **News Release (updated)**

January 3, 2018

### **City of Toronto moving to expand winter respite and shelter capacity**

The City of Toronto is expanding winter respite capacity at the Better Living Centre (BLC) site from 110 beds to 150 to accommodate increased demand. The facility on the Exhibition Grounds was opened on December 21 as one of six winter respite sites across the city, with an original capacity of 100 beds.

As part of the City-led efforts to increase capacity within the shelter system, the new 60-bed Salvation Army Hope shelter is expected to open in the next 10 days as part of 291 additional shelter beds to be opened in 2018.

And as cold temperatures continue, City staff now recommend a seventh 24/7 winter respite service be opened at the armouries or another suitable location. Based on that advice, Mayor John Tory asked the federal government Wednesday to work with City staff to confirm the Moss Park armoury can be made available as a 24-hour respite centre for up to 100 beds until April 15.

"I am deeply concerned for the health and safety of residents experiencing homelessness and I am pleased City staff have moved quickly to open additional beds at the Better Living Centre and throughout the system," said Mayor John Tory, who made the announcement at City Hall this morning. "It is important that we increase the capacity to provide low-barrier services to ensure that people have safe, warm places to go, and we are working to ensure this happens as quickly as possible."

The Mayor was joined by Councillor James Pasternak (Ward 10 York Centre), Chair of the City's Community Development and Recreation Committee, Councillor Ana Bailão (Ward 18 Davenport), Chair of the City's Affordable Housing Committee, Councillor Joe Mihevc (Ward 21 St. Paul's), the City's Poverty Reduction Advocate, and Paul Raftis, General Manager of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration.

The additional cots will be within the existing footprint of the program at the BLC and will be operated by the City in partnership with Fred Victor.

Demand for winter respite services continues to rise. Despite more than doubling the number of spaces this winter, and keeping them open throughout the winter months, there are signs of strain on the winter respite system.

Demand for shelter services in the permanent system has risen more than 30 per cent in a year. The City's longer-term goal is to expand the permanent shelter system with appropriate services that help people reconnect to community and to housing.

"The City of Toronto needs to continue to work with developers, non-profit organizations and other levels of government to address the issue of affordable housing in Toronto," said

Councillor Bailão. "We hope that an increase in affordable housing units in the future will offset the pressure on the City's shelter system."

"The current challenges we are experiencing highlight again the importance of the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy which was approved by Council last year," said Councillor Mihevc. "It is vital that we ensure that homelessness and housing support services meet the diverse needs of low-income Torontonians."

"I want to recognize the hard work of our City staff and community partners which has made it possible to quickly increase the capacity of our shelter system in a short period of time," said Councillor Pasternak. "City staff have been working around the clock to find space for those experiencing homelessness."

At its December meeting, City Council directed staff to provide 400 additional spaces as soon as practically possible and authorized the spending of \$10.6 million for this purpose. Half of those spaces are open now and the remaining spaces will be opened in the coming weeks.

On top of the additional 400 spaces and beds, more than 290 shelter beds will be opened in 2018 as part of five new shelter programs serving men, seniors, youth and LGBTQ2S youth. Council also voted last month to direct City staff to expedite the opening of three additional new shelters in 2018.

Occupancy levels change and fluctuate throughout any 24-hour period and for consistency, occupancy is reported daily at 4 a.m. for overnight services including shelters and winter respite. City of Toronto staff continue to actively monitor and respond to the need for homelessness services across the city.

Extreme Cold Weather Alerts activate additional services that focus on getting and keeping vulnerable residents inside. These include additional shelter beds, notification to community agencies to relax any service restrictions, availability of transit tokens in some drop-ins, and overnight street outreach and transportation to services. Winter respite services are available continuously until April 15 at six winter respite drop-in locations across the city, operating 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Call 311 for locations or check the web app at <http://www.toronto.ca/homelesshelp>.

A map that shows the location of winter respite services plus 24-hour women drop-ins is available at <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/housing-shelter/homeless-help/#winter>.

Broadcast media interested in a walk-through of the Better Living Centre later today can contact Pat Anderson, who is identified below as the media contact.

Toronto is Canada's largest city, the fourth largest in North America, and home to a diverse population of about 2.8 million people. It is a global centre for business, finance, arts and culture and is consistently ranked one of the world's most livable cities. For information on non-emergency City services and programs, Toronto residents,

businesses and visitors can visit <http://www.toronto.ca>, call 311, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or follow us on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/TorontoComms> and on Instagram at <http://www.instagram.com/cityofto>.

- 30 -

**Media contact:** Pat Anderson, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, 416-397-4328, [Patricia.Anderson@toronto.ca](mailto:Patricia.Anderson@toronto.ca)