

GETTING THINGS DONE

By Mayor Tom Mrakas

Regional Council was recently presented with a report from the Office of Social Services on York Region's homeless population, titled, "Update on "I Count, I'm Not Just a Number."

It was a sobering report.

Right now in York Region there are almost 400 people who are homeless. That's 400 people who have no permanent place to live. It's clear that homelessness isn't just a "big city" problem. It is right here in our communities.

While I found the numbers to be staggering, it was the reason why people were homeless that I found the most significant. Family conflict accounted for fully a quarter of the people who were homeless, 16% was due to job loss, 14% was due to simply being unable to pay rent or a mortgage. 26% of the homeless population were youth just 16 - 24 years old and 45% were chronically homeless.

These numbers show the stark truth about homelessness.

They are people who come from all walks of life but have suffered a significant life event - lost their job, suffered a critical illness - and have either lost their home or can no longer afford to rent one.

The report makes clear though that alongside those that are currently homeless there are many more in a financially precarious position. In a time of ever-increasing prices, lack of affordable housing options and people living paycheck to paycheck all it could take is missing one payment, losing a job, or caring for a sick family member or elderly parent to trigger a chain of events that could lead to homelessness.

York Region has developed a strategy that focuses on prevention.

With the lowest homelessness rate in the GTA, the Regional strategy has been successful. However, as there are still hundreds of people homeless in our communities, more needs to be done.

The Region's strategy is to focus on building awareness of the issue and work towards implementing several

preventative measures that will help people before they become homeless and provide support to those that are homeless so that they can break the cycle.

A key feature of the regional strategy is to provide Council with the information and data necessary to make informed choices about how to invest in homeless prevention and housing stability programs; give people the support they need and access the services they require so that we can ?prevent, reduce and eventually end homelessness in York Region.?

To quote the report, ?York Region is doing more than managing homelessness and has moved away from expensive crisis intervention to making targeted investments in prevention, diversion and housing stability.?

I support this important Regional initiative to assist those most in need of support. Aurora is a community that prides itself on its vibrancy, its community spirit and in particular its inclusivity.

We recognize that every member of our community ?counts?. We need to use the tools we have available to us to work with our Regional partners to end homelessness in our communities. Ending homelessness in York Region can be achieved if we work together to get it done.

Well, that is all for this week. As always, if you would like to get into contact with me please feel free to contact me anytime by phone 905-727-3123 ext. 4746 or by email tmrakas@aurora.ca and if you would like to sign up for more newsletters and council updates then please visit Mrakas.ca/contact to join the growing list of Aurorans that are staying informed.