

Helping the Homeless: A Sustainable Switch Guide

February 25, 2021

Purpose

The aim of this guide is to provide City of Toronto residents with safe, but significant ways that they can contribute to the local homeless community during the pandemic. This guide will include direction for those Torontonians who are interested in helping those more vulnerable in a time when it is needed the most.

Sources

The information in this guide comes from the following pages:

- [Judge Dismisses Suspension Application for Encampment Ban](#)
- [Homeless Hub](#)
- [COVID-19 & People Experiencing Homelessness: Challenges & Mitigation Strategies](#)
- [How Canadians Started Community Fridges In Their Cities](#)
- [Record Number of People Will Have Visited Toronto Food Banks in 2020](#)

Local Homelessness & The Pandemic

Across Canada, many of the country's most vulnerable populations are facing their own unique challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, including those experiencing homelessness. Those living on the street or in shelters are at much greater a risk of contracting the virus, as:

- They have limited access to washroom facilities
- There are barriers to self-isolation & challenges to maintaining social or physical distance
- The closure of regular services may be preventing access to help for safe substance use or sexual violence
- They are unable to stock up on necessities such as food, water, or medication

Homelessness in the City of Toronto has been a significant problem for a long time. The pandemic did not by any means create the local homelessness problem, but it definitely exacerbated it. According to the Homeless Hub, in 2018, the City of Toronto alone had 533 people living outdoors. In October 2020, the City estimated there were approximately 400-500 people living outdoors, but local homeless advocates state the real number is likely over 1,000. This is highly probable, as the City also stated in October 2020 that they had moved about 950 people out of encampments since the pandemic began.

It's important to remember that homelessness does not only refer to those living outdoors, but also those living in shelters, temporary homes or facilities, respite centres and/or 24-hour drop-in centres. However, with the outbreak of the pandemic, many of Toronto's homeless feel unsafe staying inside shelters, and have chosen to remain outdoors throughout the winter months. While the City continues in its efforts to disband encampments and re-situate our homeless - leasing more than 30 buildings and hotels since the spring of 2020 in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19 among the homeless.

Local Homelessness: What Can You Do?

Please Note: Any & all actions that require you to leave your home or interact with others should be done while wearing an appropriate face covering . If you are considered 'at-risk' please try & help the community from home.

Food for thought

Community Fridges

With local food insecurity increasing due to the pandemic, community fridges have popped up all over the City. While most of these fridges are not connected, they all speak to the spirit of Torontonians and their desire to provide aid in a time of crisis. One organization, **Community Fridges Toronto** hosts 5 fridges across the City, & another one, **Road to Zero Waste**, hosts an additional 5 fridges throughout the Greater Toronto Area. Do your part by adding to your local community fridge today! Whether it's 1 item or 10, your contribution will be utilized and appreciated.



Food Banks

There are a number of food banks scattered throughout most neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto. According to the Daily Bread Food Bank, in September 2020 alone, 104,000 clients visited Toronto food banks. Food banks could always use community assistance, but this has never been more true than it has been since the outbreak of the pandemic. These donations can either come in the form of money, or it can come in the form of food and other crucial items such as toilet paper or baby formula. The best thing you can do for food banks right now is to contact them and ask what they could use most. They will be very appreciative!



Local organization, **Fred Victor**, accepts clean and gently used clothing in good repair for Toronto's homeless community. During the winter months they are particularly in need of warm winter coats, long pants, boots, sweaters, hats and mittens. If you are able to do so, contact the organization and you can organize a drop-off. As well, most local shelters accept clothing donations for those utilizing their services.

In partnership with the local group, **Encampment Support Network**, Capital Espresso is accepting boot donations. They will accept new and gently used boots, and are particularly in need of Men's boots, sizes 10-13. Drop off times are Monday-Friday from 7am - 2pm, and weekends from 8am - 4pm.

Keeping Warm Clothing & Blankets



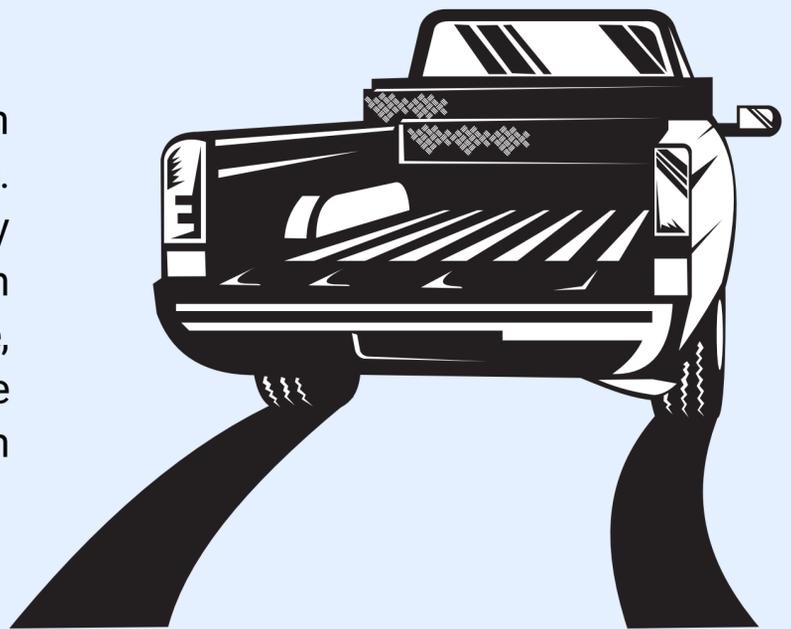
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A Helping Hand

Offer your vehicle

Encampment Support Network (ESN), provides information on their Instagram account, including how locals can help. One of their recent posts stated their need for community members with trucks to help with a number of things such as dump and supply runs or heavy lifting. If you are able, email report.on.toronto@gmail.com with the subject like "Dump Run Winter Edition". Make sure to follow the **ESN** on Instagram to keep up with their needs.



Volunteering

At present, **ESN** has a number of volunteer roles available, including:

- Sign painting for encampments
- Encampment aid collection
- Run your own fundraiser
- Relief driver
- On-call graphic designers & video editors
- Transcribers
- Dump run drivers

If interested in any of the above positions, please email ESN.

The Seeds of Hope Foundation has a program called "Phones of Hope," working to get modern phones into the hands of those who need them the most. Doing this allows Toronto's homeless community members to have access to information and digital resources, and to download the COVID-19 Alert App.

This program allows people to receive a phone and their first month of a data plan. The individuals are then responsible for carrying on the monthly costs, which range from \$25-\$45.

Keep Informed

Cell phone donation



Interested in learning more?

Please visit The Sustainable Switch's
Community Resources page on our
[website](#).

Want to connect?

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