

Housing solutions help people seeking refuge in Toronto's parks – not security patrols



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Homelessness is unacceptable. It puts people experiencing it in great risk of their health and lives, violates their right to housing, costs the City of Toronto only increasingly more resources and is a moral and ethical shame on our society.

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) believes homelessness must be met with workable, people-centered housing and health and support services, and not with additional security patrols. To this end, we are concerned about the City's plans to hire private security guards to monitor our parks for people seeking safety and shelter there and urges City Council and the Emergency Management Office to reconsider this decision.

Security approaches simply do not work in addressing homelessness, or in stopping people from setting up encampments. It traumatizes already vulnerable people, increasing their risks to health and safety. And most people will find another place to go, often a place that is even more precarious.

What does work is stepping up rapid Housing First initiatives and intensive human services interventions. This includes immediate new deep housing allowances, increased staffing of outreach teams in the parks and engaging directly with people in the individual and collective solutions that work for them.

Toronto's *Street to Homes* and community-based agency outreach workers are skilled professionals. They are properly trained to approach and work with people experiencing homelessness to create solutions that lead to permanent housing. Increasing the resources for the City's Shelter, Supports and Housing Administration (SSHA) and community organizations to augment their outreach teams is a better way to address encampments in parks.

The example of doing so is immediately available: from August to December last year, SSHA, *Streets to Homes* and a number of community agencies worked together to pilot a focussed, integrated Housing First model in [Dufferin Grove Park](#). The local Councillor and community were also deeply engaged, and in the end every single person living in the encampment there found a housing solution that worked for them. This took time, but it worked.

This approach in Dufferin Grove must be taken seriously by City Council and invested in immediately so it can be deployed across our parks to actually help people, not scare them, risk criminalizing them, or drive them into even worse situations. This model advances the progressive realization of the right to housing in Toronto, one Council has recognized in the [Housing TO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#) and the [Housing For All](#) charter.

Doing it this way is not to sanction or endorse encampments as appropriate housing or shelter options. They are not a permanent solution. The risks to health and safety of everyone was made clear in Toronto last summer, as they are consistently in other areas as well.

Reinforcing housing solutions in the approach to encampments also leverages the significant new investments made by the City in recent years to create more housing with supports for people experiencing homelessness. The TAEH continues to advocate to the Ontario and federal governments to heed this example and bring more resources to augment these efforts in our city.

In the meantime, we cannot spend more of the City's precious resources on security measures to respond to people experiencing homelessness in parks. They just don't work, and this is wasted money. Therefore, the TAEH believes it is essential that City Council immediately redirect the funds intended for this security plan towards expanding the successful Dufferin Grove model across Toronto.

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) is a collective impact initiative to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in Toronto. Our 100+ partners/participants include most of the city's shelters, housing, and supportive housing providers, as well as people with lived experience, health and research organizations and fellow sector advocates . Our focus is on systems change, creating solutions to make homelessness in Toronto rare, brief and non-recurring.

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