

Emuneration count suggests half of Dufferin's homeless are youth

By Jasen Obermeyer

Dufferin County recently released its homelessness enumeration report, which indicated that nearly 50 per cent of its respondents are youth.

Over a two-day period in May, 37 volunteers and staff conducted the count throughout the County.

A total of 44 participants were surveyed, of which 21 were youth, defined as between the ages of 16 and 24.

Four individuals indicated they were completely unsheltered, staying in parks, on the streets, in coffee shops, or in other public spaces, while 19 individuals reported staying at emergency shelters, nine at someone else's place, another nine at a transitional shelter, and three were staying at a motel.

In addition, 45 per cent of those surveyed had been homeless for six months or more.

Half of the respondents were male, 45 per cent were female, while two respondents identified as being gender non-conforming. The average age of males and females were 25.4 and 38.6, respectively.

The survey found that more than half, or 64 per cent of the respondents, reported they had first experienced homelessness as a child under the age of 18, with the most common age being 16 years old.

Also, respondents indicated that they used emergency services an average of 11 times each in the last six months, while the average for youths 12.4 times.

The survey also shows that 70 per cent of respondents say they are suffering from a mental health issue, while 55 per cent are dealing with an addiction, and 48 per cent have a chronic health issue.

The survey also looked into reasons the respondents were homeless. The highest indicated was a conflict with a parent, over 22 per cent. The next highest was 20 per cent due to not having enough income for rent. Other reasons given were abuse by a parent or a spouse, addiction, job loss, or unsafe housing conditions.

County staff are currently cross-referencing the data with details from the Ontario Local Health Integrations Network, Central West Local Health Integration Network, to find out what correlation exists between medical service use and the homeless population.