



Pilot Count of Rough Sleepers Undertaken Across Cape Town

Several organisations serving the people experiencing homelessness conducted a pilot point-in-time count of individuals experiencing rough sleeping on the night of November 13, 2024. This initiative, organized by U-turn, Streetscapes, MES, New Hope SA, the Haven, and VRCID, marks the beginning of regular counts aimed at understanding and ultimately reducing homelessness in the city.

The count was carried out by more than 200 volunteers who included people with current and lived experience of homelessness, staff members of the different organisations involved, City of Cape Town Street People's Unit Outreach Workers and members of the public who had signed up to assist. The areas covered in this pilot included the CBD and surrounds, the Southern Suburbs (Rondebosch, Newlands, Claremont, and Kenilworth), the Deep South (Muizenberg, Fish Hoek and Simons Town), and the Northern Suburbs (Parow, Bellville, and Durbanville).

The primary goal of this count was to gather accurate data on the number of people sleeping rough in Cape Town. Additionally, a sample of rough sleepers were asked additional questions on the length of time they had been homeless, reasons for homeless, the services they are currently accessing and additional support required. This data will be used to measure the effectiveness of current interventions, understand service needs, and to track trends over time, with the ultimate aim of making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring within the City. Anonymised data will be shared with stakeholders – including the people experiencing homelessness – to enhance the planning and provision of homelessness services.

Volunteers met at local hubs for training before being assigned to specific areas to conduct the count. The count was conducted in accordance with research ethics, and consent was sought for any survey data collected. Each team included at least one person with lived experience of homelessness and the diversity of the count teams was something the volunteers particularly appreciated.

A volunteer who joined the count in Muizenberg, shared their experience: "The experience was overall great, it was heart-breaking to hear some of the stories but a feeling of contributing positively to the problem of access to services."

Janessa Stockhall, a community member and Durbanville JOC chairperson, said: "The organisation of this event was superb. I will definitely be doing this again!"

Lisle Swarts, a Safe Space Caretaker, said: "It was so amazing engaging with the homeless on the streets. They were so welcoming and open to chat to us! I just realised how important it is to do this regularly. At no point in time did I feel unsafe. Everyone should join us next time!"

Regular point-in-time counts are a recognized method for estimating the number of people experiencing homelessness. This pilot count built upon international best practices and is the first step in a planned series of counts to be conducted every six months. The areas covered will be expanded in future counts to provide a more comprehensive picture of homelessness in Cape Town.

Enrique Hermanus, Parow Centre of Hope Manager, said: "This is history in the making! We are solving homelessness and this, right here, is the first step in doing so!"



It is hoped the data collected will inform the City of Cape Town's strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively, and services are tailored to meet the needs of the homeless population.

Jon Hopkins from U-turn who coordinated the overall count said: "There is no way we can tell if rough sleeping is getting worse or better within Cape Town without conducting regular point in time counts. The highlight of the experience for me was the joint collaboration between organisations working with people experiencing homelessness in Cape Town to do this together along with a both housed and unhoused members of the neighbourhoods we were counting in."

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