

## The Perils of Experiencing Homelessness in the Winter

*Jessica Gowers, Communications & PR Coordinator*



# Curb Notes

As the days get shorter and the temperature begins to drop, Mission Services of London's direct care teams are preparing for the specific challenges the colder months bring to people experiencing homelessness.

As part of Mission Services of London's outreach initiative, our Streetscape team within our Community Mental Health Programs (CMHP) goes into the London community to meet people experiencing homelessness where they're at, which is often outdoors or in encampments.

"The inability to stay dry is an ongoing challenge during the winter months," says Brianne Demers, Interim Program Supervisor of CMHP. "In an attempt to dry wet clothing and blankets, and to keep warm, people may start small fires. But sometimes, the fire can cause accidental burns or holes in their clothing," explains Brianne.

*"People also struggle with their food and water supply freezing. And, thawing certain items using a heat source becomes challenging because of plastic packaging and other contaminants melting, making it no longer safe to consume."*

*- Kylie Gillis, Community Support Worker (Streetscape, CMHP)*

"Because of the fear of getting wet, individuals may choose to spend days inside their tent without coming out, even if it means going without food," Brianne continues. "Because of this, and because many outdoor resources, such as parks and public spaces, become less accessible, feelings

of isolation and depression increase. The cold weather makes it harder to connect with others. The isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and despair, and may compound existing mental health challenges," Brianne says.

"Sleeping outdoors is not conducive for any human being," says Mary-Jo Hartman, Men's Mission's Program Supervisor. "Every winter, men come to Men's Mission facing the plights you would expect during frigid temperatures, such as hypothermia, frostbite, and exhaustion from trying to keep warm. But, many other complications come with the

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cold weather," explains Mary-Jo. "We frequently see dehydration, pneumonia, chronic lung infections, and chronic fevers. It's also not unusual for illnesses and injuries to go untreated throughout the winter months," Mary-Jo continues. "Receiving medical care can be extra challenging due to compromised transportation methods because of bad weather, and walking long distances in freezing temperatures poses significant risks."

Our Mission Store also serves people experiencing homelessness who are in need of clothing, either through our Emergency Voucher Program, where they can obtain basic necessities at no cost, or by shopping the Store. "It's dangerous not to have proper footwear in the winter," says Lorraine Chwiecko, Manager of our Mission Store. "Of course, boots keep your feet dry and free of trench foot (which we see quite often), but men also come to the Mission Store with only a pair of dress shoes because that's what they could find and it's better than bare or duct-taped feet. Dress shoes barely have any grip on the bottom, and trying to walk on snow, slush, and ice in dress shoes constantly leads to injuries from falls."



### **Each season has its own challenges, but here are some ways you may consider supporting your neighbours in need this winter:**



#### **Putting Together a Care Package:**

If you would like to put together care packages for Mission Services of London or to hand out to your neighbours in need, consider including \$5 gift cards to a local coffee shop, lip balm, tissues, thermal socks, hand warmers, a blanket, a flashlight, a bottle of water, and protein bars or other snacks.



#### **Compassion in Every Interaction:**

People experiencing homelessness can feel invisible. Let them know you see them by making friendly eye contact, saying "hello," or asking them how they're doing. If they request your help, pause and listen. Try to let them lead the interaction. They may be looking for change, a meal or drink, clothing items, or just for conversation. You can decide to offer your support, or politely decline.



#### **Our Most Needed Items:**

Mission Services of London is in constant need of men's running shoes and boots (size 10+) and men's winter coats. Please consider dropping off your new or gently used men's running shoes and/or boots and winter coats at our Mission Store, located at 797 York Street, London, Ontario, open Monday-Saturday.



#### **One Blessing:**

If our Program Supervisors were granted one blessing this winter, they said they would ask for hand and foot warmers. Please consider dropping off hand and foot warmers to our Administration Office, located at 4-797 York Street, London, Ontario, open Monday-Friday, 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM.



**Thank you for your interest and consideration of supporting your vulnerable neighbours. *Your generosity makes a difference.***

## Scan Away Hunger™: Help Cover the Cost of a Meal for Only \$3.99

Mission Services of London's annual campaign to raise funds for our Men's Mission, Rotholme Family Shelter, and Quintin Warner House kitchens begins again on November 1, and runs until December 20!



*Caring for your neighbours in need at*

Extending care is often the first step in establishing trust and fostering hope that a different future is possible, and the participant's first meals with us are pivotal in that process.

"We may not know what someone's day held before they arrived at the dining room, and we may not know what comes after," says Len Devost, Food Services Supervisor (Shelters), "But at least we know that they can relax and enjoy a healthy and delicious meal, which I truly believe can positively change the day's narrative," explains Len. "The kitchen staff do our best to give the participants we're blessed to serve something to look forward to because enjoying good food can help people feel better. Perhaps a nutritious meal can even help build new relationships," reflects Len. "Food has a special way of bringing people together from all walks of life."



*Len Devost*

Harry Soedarmasto, Mission Services of London's Chaplain, agrees that meal times are an opportunity to connect. "I use that time to sit with whoever God directs me toward. Oftentimes, it's someone who I've seen sit alone. I ask them if I can eat with them, and if they feel up to talking, I'll ask them questions about how they're feeling and I try to get to know them. I want to make them feel heard, and I want them to know I care," explains Harry.



*Harry Soedarmasto*

"Another goal we have is to keep food out of landfills by limiting our waste and making our food go as far as we can," says Len. "That means that we get to be creative in the kitchen, and we do not go off a set menu. Our menus are created daily based on what the community graciously donates to us," Len explains. "I am truly blessed to have an incredibly talented and innovative team with me. I always love to hear new ideas bouncing off one another," Len concludes.

As we enter the colder months, donating \$3.99 (or multiples thereof) to Scan Away Hunger™ to help cover the costs of hot, nutritious meals for local men, women, and children in need is one way of blessing your vulnerable neighbours.

**To make a donation and to learn more, please visit [missionservices.ca](http://missionservices.ca).**

### Participating Locations:



## Impacting LIVES through sites and programs:

### Men's Mission

459 York Street  
519-672-8500

### Rotholme Family Shelter

42 Stanley Street  
519-673-4114

### Quintin Warner House

457 York Street  
519-434-8041

### Community Mental Health Programs

4-797 York Street  
519-439-7700 (Streetscape)

### Mission Store

4-797 York Street  
519-438-3056

### Mission Services of London Foundation

4-797 York Street  
519-433-2807

### Administration Office

4-797 York Street  
519-433-2807

Visit [missionservices.ca](http://missionservices.ca)

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[jgowers@missionservices.ca](mailto:jgowers@missionservices.ca)

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government funders:



LONDON  
CANADA

## Coldest Night of the Year: February 22, 2025 SAVE THE DATE: Get Ready!

It's time to start thinking about getting your Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) team together again to walk in support of our vulnerable neighbours experiencing homelessness this winter.



With the colder weather setting in, we are reminded of the struggles faced by those experiencing homelessness. We invite you to SAVE THE DATE for CNOY, our annual fundraising campaign to raise awareness and collect donations for our neighbours in need over the colder months.

### Why Walk?

CNOY is a powerful way to come alongside Mission Services of London with solidarity and compassion. With each step you take, you are bringing visibility to the issue of homelessness and showing your commitment to a better tomorrow.

### How You Can Get Involved:

- **Register:** Register as a walker or as a team on December 1, 2024, at: [cnoy.ca/london](http://cnoy.ca/london)
- **Donate:** Donate to a walker or a team at: [cnoy.ca/london](http://cnoy.ca/london)
- **Spread the Word:** Share our CNOY posts on social media closer to February 22, and talk about it in your workplace and with your networks. The more, the merrier!

Join us Saturday, February 22, 2024. Registration for walkers and teams open on December 1, 2024, at: [cnoy.ca/london](http://cnoy.ca/london)

Gather your friends, family, and colleagues for an evening of community, compassion, and purpose. Dress warmly, wear your walking boots, and get ready to make a difference. *Thank you!*



CNOY 2024