St. Thomas-Elgin Ends Veteran Homelessness

St. Thomas-Elgin becomes the second community in Canada to achieve Functional Zero Veteran Homelessness

St. Thomas-Elgin, Ontario, Canada – In the midst of a growing homelessness crisis across the country, the community of St. Thomas-Elgin, a Built for Zero Canada community, has reached a significant milestone in the fight against veteran homelessness. Thanks to strong local leadership, collaboration, and determination, St. Thomas-Elgin has achieved Functional Zero Veteran Homelessness.

"The true test of a city's success is how it cares for and elevates its most vulnerable members," said St. Thomas Mayor Joe Preston. "Our council strives to be a city of compassion and one that offers supports to those in need to assist them in achieving stability."

"By becoming a Built for Zero community, and investing in resources like affordable housing, we are working towards a brighter future. We are proud to have reached this milestone that demonstrates our community's capacity to end homelessness," said Preston.

St. Thomas-Elgin achieved this goal in February 2023 and continues to sustain Functional Zero with the aim of working toward absolute zero.

St. Thomas-Elgin has built an operating system that can ensure veteran homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. The community partnered with local homeless-serving organizations, including the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin, Canadian Mental Health Association Thames Valley Addictions and Mental Health Services, West Elgin Community Health Centre, and The Inn, and with local veteran organizations, including the Royal Canadian Legion and Veterans Affairs Canada. These relationships were critical to their success and helped the community identify and verify veteran status, helping more veterans into housing faster.

Working with Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) and its partners, the community developed tools to ensure that veterans experiencing homelessness are quickly identified and matched with the most appropriate housing and services.

Danielle Neilson, Social Housing and Homelessness Prevention Supervisor and Local BFZ-C Lead, said "St. Thomas-Elgin is a compassionate, dedicated and hard-working municipality that shares a vision to achieve housing stability for all."

Veterans are a priority for St. Thomas-Elgin's homelessness efforts. By prioritizing this population, St. Thomas-Elgin is working to ensure that those who have served our country receive the support they need to thrive. In addition, prioritizing veterans gives communities the opportunity to pilot systems and approaches that reduce homelessness with a smaller cohort. These lessons can then be used to build systems that end homelessness for other priority populations.

Shawn, an army veteran who has been housed through the program said, "it's not often that you're recognized for the service that you did. After all the trauma I went through in the army, it's nice to know there are [groups] that are there to help members that are having a tough life. It pretty much saved my life."

"St. Thomas Elgin's success proves that ending homelessness is possible," said Tim Richter, President & CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. "By ending homelessness for veterans, St. Thomas-Elgin becomes a beacon of hope and a pathfinder for communities across the country who are struggling under a wave of new homelessness."

"Not only has St. Thomas-Elgin ended homelessness for veterans, and provided vital national leadership in doing so, they have developed a strong foundation and system for ending homelessness for other populations on the road to ending all homelessness in the community," said Richter.

'Functional Zero' is a rigorous and verifiable measure designed to not only understand the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in a community but also assess the quality of a local homeless system. Achieving Functional Zero Veteran Homelessness means the number of veterans experiencing homelessness is less than or equal to the number of veterans a community has proven it can house in a month, with a baseline of no more than three veterans experiencing homelessness per month. To be assessed as having reached this goal, the community went through a rigorous third-party verification process led by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness.

This achievement would not have been possible without funding from the federal government through Infrastructure Canada's Reaching Home program and Veteran Affairs Canada's Veterans and Family Well-Being Fund.

St. Thomas Elgin's achievement is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the community and serves as an inspiration for others to follow in their footsteps. By continuing to invest in evidence-based solutions and prioritizing the most vulnerable members of society, we can create a future where everyone has access to safe, stable, and affordable housing.

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Quotes:

"Every Canadian deserves a safe and affordable place to call home, especially our most vulnerable. The leadership demonstrated here in St. Thomas-Elgin to have reached Functional Zero Veteran Homelessness is truly commendable. The Government of Canada is investing in our commitment to eliminate chronic homelessness across Canada through programs such as Reaching Home, as well as a new program to support Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness." - The Hon. Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion.

"Congratulations to St. Thomas-Elgin for reaching Functional Zero Veteran Homelessness. I'm proud to have supported the good work of the CAEH through the Veteran Family Well-Being Fund. Every single Veteran deserves a safe place to call home, and this achievement by the folks of St. Thomas-Elgin is a wonderful example for communities across the country to follow as we all work hard to make this a reality nationwide – thank you to everyone involved." - The Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Veterans Affairs.

About Built for Zero Canada and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness:

Built for Zero Canada, led by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, is an ambitious national change effort helping a core group of leading communities end chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness – a first step on the path to eliminating all homelessness in Canada.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness leads a national movement of individuals, organizations and communities working together to end homelessness in Canada. For more information visit, www.caeh.ca.

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