

When Joe Murphy was last seen, he was living in a wooded area about 200 kilometres east of Winnipeg. His campsite in the bushes was just the latest place he'd found to rest his head. He has also taken **refuge** in shelters, dumpsters, and sheds. That's what his life has been like for two decades.

Mr. Murphy is 50 years old, and homeless.

'I NEED A PLACE TO STAY'

"Here's the truth. I'm sleeping on the ground right here and I'm worried about my health. I am soaking wet and cold. I have a headache. I need a place to stay," he recently told a reporter.

Mr. Murphy is one of about 235,000 Canadians who

experience homelessness each year. But he doesn't fit the **stereotype** many people have of the homeless. The reason: In 1990, Mr. Murphy was a star forward for the Edmonton Oilers. He even helped the team win a Stanley Cup. But a series of concussions, a substance abuse problem, and mental illness sent him spiralling downward.

THE FACE OF HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Murphy's story is unusual because of his former fame. However, the situation he finds himself in is all too common.

The most recent statistics, compiled in 2016, indicate that 35,000 Canadians are homeless on any given night. More

DID YOU KNOW?

People without a fixed address don't get **Census** forms to fill out. So how do we know how many homeless people there are? Using Point-in-Time (PiT) counts.

PiT counts are coordinated by the federal government and participating communities across Canada. Volunteers fan out over a 24-hour-period to survey people living outdoors or accessing homelessness services, such as emergency shelters. The results give a quick picture of homelessness over a specific period of time.

than one-quarter are women. Nearly one in five are young people. Indigenous Peoples,

DEFINITIONS

CENSUS: the official process of counting the number of people in a country, city, or town and collecting information about them

REFUGE: shelter or protection from danger or trouble

STEREOTYPE: an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic



too, are really vulnerable to homelessness. They make up about 30 percent of users of homeless shelters. Yet they account for less than five percent of the general population.

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

The reasons for homelessness are as varied as the people experiencing it. Sometimes, though, there are common factors. For example, mental illness and addiction are often present, although these conditions can be both a cause and a result of having nowhere to live.

Low wages and a lack of affordable housing can play a role, too. So can discrimination, if it prevents people from getting a job or renting. Shifts in the economy can also leave people without jobs and money for rent.

Poor institutional planning is another factor. People leaving hospitals, prisons, foster care, immigration programs, and mental health facilities often have nowhere to go. Personal crises such as a family breakup or domestic violence can also trigger homelessness.

TENT CITIES

Tent cities are large camps of homeless people on public property. These informal, low-income settlements usually lack access to water, power, and sanitation. They have been springing up in major cities across North America over the past ten years or so.

Many homeless people prefer them to shelters and other emergency housing. Residents say tent cities provide a source of community and social connection. In camps, they feel they have more control over their living arrangements and belongings. Also, some residents simply prefer being outside. And for people who struggle with substance abuse, tent cities may be the only housing option. Why? Because drug users are not welcome in some shelters.

Most encampments are organized. Usually, a resident takes charge. “We run smoothly and with our own laws,” says a former resident of a tent city. But nearby homeowners often object to camps in parks, citing safety and health concerns. And most communities have bylaws against squatting on public lands. So tent city residents often must pack up and relocate.

Tent cities don’t solve housing crises. However, they do make it easier for social service agencies to find and help people.

NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

To help address homelessness in Canada, the federal government has created a National Housing Strategy.

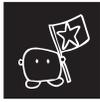
This initiative was launched in January 2018. It will cost \$40-billion, and last ten years. It brings together public, private, and non-profit groups to kick-start affordable housing projects. It aims to build 100,000 new units, fix 300,000 others, and cut homelessness by 50 percent.

In 2020, it will also offer a rent **subsidy** of about \$2500 a year for families that qualify.

“Housing rights are human rights,” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said. “Everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home.” ★

DEFINITIONS

SUBSIDY: money that is paid usually by a government to keep the price of a product or service low or to help a business or organization to continue to function



NATIONAL

NO PLACE TO CALL HOME

ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. Explain what a **Point-in-Time** count is.

2. How many Canadians are estimated to be homeless on a daily basis?

3. List at least three factors that can contribute to homelessness.

4. Explain what a **tent city** is.

5. List at least one reason why some homeless people choose to live in tent cities.

6. What strategy did the federal government announce last January to address homelessness?

7. How much does the government plan to spend on this new program?

8. Describe at least three key details of this new strategy.



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BETWEEN THE LINES

An *inference* is a conclusion drawn from evidence. A *plausible inference* is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.

What inference(s) can you draw from the fact that 35,000 Canadians are homeless on any given night?

JUST TALK ABOUT IT

- What is your understanding of the term ‘homeless’? Explain.
 - What are the causes of, and what are some solutions to, the problem of homelessness in Canada?
- What reasons can you suggest to explain why it might be important to have an accurate count of the number of homeless people in each Canadian community? Explain.
 - As you see it, why do tent cities form? For what reasons are tent cities often controversial? Explain.
 - If you were the mayor of your town or city, how would you handle the issue of tent cities? Give reasons to support your response.
- What evidence of homelessness is there in your community? Explain.
 - All three levels of government, plus many charities and non-governmental organizations, are taking action to address homelessness in Canada. Individuals, too, can play a role. What actions could you take to help the homeless in your community? Explain.

ONLINE

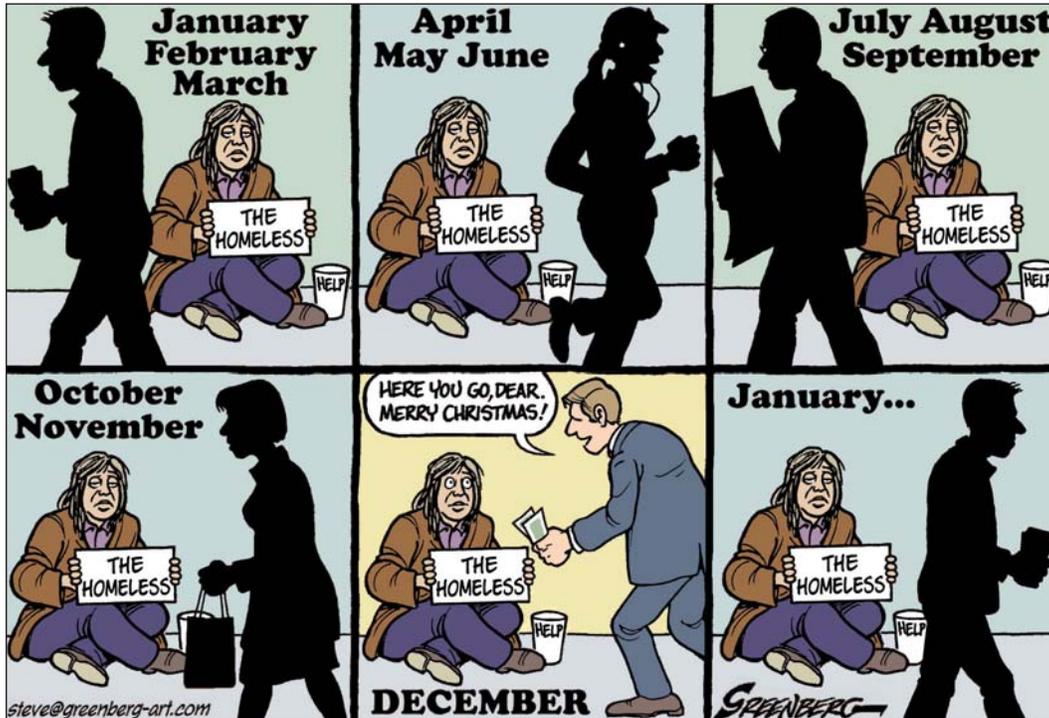
Note: The links below are listed at www.lesplan.com/en/links for easy access.

- Find out more about homelessness in Canada at the Homeless Hub:
<https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101>
- Explore ‘Understanding Homelessness and the Strategy’ to find out how the federal government is tackling homelessness in Canada at <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/understanding.html>
- Read more about tent cities – what they are, their benefits, and their drawbacks, at:
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/tent-city-1.4685435>. ★



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YOUR TASK:

Examine the editorial cartoon, then answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper:

1. What do you already know about homelessness in Canada?
2. Describe what you see and read in the cartoon.
3. As you see it, what might the cartoonist be saying about homelessness? Explain.
4. For what reasons do you agree with the cartoonist's perspective? For what reasons do you disagree? ★

