

Smithers Homeless Count 2023



**DZE L K'ANT
FRIENDSHIP CENTRE SOCIETY**



BACKGROUND

The Annual Provincial Point in Time Homeless Count is conducted by the Homeless Services Association of BC (HSABC) in partnership with BC Housing and local communities. Point in Time (PiT) counts provide a snapshot of community homelessness within a selected 24-hour period.

Homeless counts are now conducted annually in Smithers and in 26 other municipalities across the province. These counts provide critical data on the estimated number of people experiencing homelessness in municipalities across B.C. including information on demographics, barriers, and needs.

The success of the homeless count model is due to its collaborative approach. HSABC provides funding and support to local community not-for-profits to coordinate counts within their communities. This approach ensures that those who have local knowledge and trusted relationships with people who are experiencing homelessness are leading the process.

THE ROLE OF THE DZE L K'ANT FRIENDSHIP CENTRE IN THE 2023 HOMELESS COUNT

In 2023 the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre coordinated the homeless count in Smithers. The intention of our organization was to guide the homeless count through a culturally sensitive approach that recognizes that Indigenous people are overrepresented in homelessness within our community and that Indigenous people have unique experiences of homelessness due to colonial legacies.

We are pleased that the HSABC trusted and supported our organization to take this approach to the homeless count in Smithers in 2023.

A CULTURAL APPROACH TO THE HOMELESS COUNT

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society is an Indigenous organization guided by Aboriginal values. Our approach to the homeless count was grounded in cultural protocols and the understanding that everyone sharing their experiences, situations, and family histories must be appropriately honoured during the process.

The Friendship Centre's team lead Chrissy Scaplen (Lake Babine Nation) coordinated all activities associated with the count with support from our entire team to ensure that those experiencing homelessness within the community who wished to be counted had an opportunity to do so. In order to successfully carry out a culturally safe process our organization invested 364 service hours in the 2023 homeless count.

REDUCING BARRIERS

The Friendship Centre's staff members carried out the following activities aimed at reducing barriers to completing a survey:

Outreach walks: In pairs, and wearing yellow HSABC pins, our team conducted outreach walks within the community, visiting the encampment and various locations.

Drop-in space: We provided muffins and coffee at the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre at 1188 Main Street and provided staff support to assist those who wished to participate.

Phone outreach: Our team reached out to individuals experiencing housing insecurity who did not have access to transportation on the day of the count.

Honorarium: Traditionally it is common practice to offer honorarium whenever individuals share their time and knowledge. Every individual who completed a survey received a small gift with cookies, chocolates, and traditional medicine.



LUNCH GATHERING

Between 12-2pm on April 11th, the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre created a welcoming and safe event at the Friendship Centre Hall for people wishing to participate in the homeless count.

This event was a highlight of the 2023 Homeless Count. With funding from HSABC we were able to host this well-attended event in a manner reflects cultural gathering protocols.

At our event we offered a turkey and ham lunch, complete with all the trimmings along with ceremony, drumming and singing.

Members of our staff served our guests food, offered smudging and led drumming and songs. Other staff members supported guests to complete surveys. All of our guests received a gift bag with traditional wellness medicine as an honorarium.



The event provided a valuable opportunity for community connection and inclusion and a chance to appropriately honour the lived experience of people who are currently unsheltered in our community.

Due to generous donations from a wide range of local businesses we were also able to provide a number of draw prizes.

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A significant number of local businesses donated food and draw prizes for our event. The following businesses supported the homeless count this year through donations and in-kind support: **Riverside Kitchen, Telly's Grill, Two Sisters Cafe, Sullivan Motor Products, Smithers Sausage Factory, Aspen Creek Cookies, Hudson Bay Mountain Ski Hill, Mills Interior Stationary.**

A COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Without the participation of the community, including those experiencing homelessness, we would not be able to carry out the 2023 homeless count in Smithers.

The high level of support we received from our community partners and local businesses demonstrates the growing understanding of the value of quality information and knowledge about homelessness in Smithers in order to ensure evidence based policy-making and adequate resources for people experiencing homelessness.



"DURING THE 2023 HOMLEESS COUNT OUR GOAL WAS TO HONOUR THOSE WHO SHARED THEIR STORIES IN ORDER TO SUPPORT MEANINGFUL CHANGE.

OUR HOPE IS TO TAKE THE LEAD IN THIS COUNT MOVING FORWARD AND SUPPORT OTHER COMMUNITIES WHO WISH TO TAKE A CULTURAL APPROACH."

ANNETTE MORGAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DZE L K'ANT FRIENDSHIP CENTRE SOCIETY

"THE IMPORTANCE OF DZE L K'ANT FRIENDSHIP CENTRE SOCIETY'S CULTURALLY-SAFE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH WAS MEANINGFUL TO THE COUNT. IN THE COMING MONTHS, A COMMUNITY PROFILE FOR SMITHERS WILL BE SHARED BY BC HOUSING."

STEPHEN D'SOUZA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HOMELESSNESS SERVICES ASSOCIATION OF BC

REPORT PREPARED BY:

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Chrissy Scaplen, 2023 homeless Count Coordinator, Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre



CONTACT THE DZE L KANT FRIENDSHIP CENTRE SOCIETY:

IF YOU WISH TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE 2023 HOMELESS COUNT OR
THE SERVICES PROVIDED AT THE DZE L K'ANT FRIENDSHIP CENTRE
PLEASE CONNECT WITH US!

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