

TO's "sheltered" homeless: Up or down?

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Each night, more than 6,500 people fill Toronto's shelters

Are there fewer people in Toronto's homeless shelters? The answer is yes and no, depending on which numbers are used. Municipal shelter officials in Toronto report a 12% drop in the number of homeless people in city shelters from 2003 to 2005 – a decline from 32,742 to 28,837. The same officials report that, on an average night, there are more single adults and youth, more men and just about the same number of mixed men and women, youth and women in the city's shelters in 2006 as compared to 2002. Here are the latest numbers from Toronto officials:

Average beds filled per night in Toronto homeless shelters

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Adult / youth	2882	2934	2989	2997	2892
Men	1483	1503	1614	1590	1543
Adult / co-ed	450	447	400	440	427
Youth	445	478	473	463	420
Women	504	506	502	504	503
Family	1263	1177	970	700	702
Total	7027	7045	6948	6694	6487

Source: Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing

Significant drop in families in shelter system

The numbers show that the one group of sheltered homeless that have experienced a significant drop since 2002 are families. A key reason has been a tightening of federal immigration rules that cut down on the number of newcomers forced into the shelter system. Take away the family numbers, and, overall, the number of people filling beds in Toronto's shelters from 2002 to 2006 is up slightly – from 5,764 to 5,785.

Fewer annually – same nightly: Are people stuck in shelters longer?

One set of numbers from municipal officials notes that the number of individuals using Toronto shelters has dropped from 2003 to 2005. Another set of numbers reports that, except for families, the number of people staying each night in the shelter system is about the same, or up slightly. How is it possible to explain these different sets of numbers? The most obvious explanation is individuals are stuck in the shelter system longer. City officials are attempting to track this information.

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