

## Ottawa shelters keeping the homeless warm during city's deep freeze

By [Trevor Greenway](#) Metro

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Trevor Greenway/Metro

Residents try to stay warm at the Ottawa Mission as temperatures are set to dip below -30C this week.

It's close to -20C and Frédéric Allard is having a smoke outside the Ottawa Mission.

His fingers dart out of his jacket sleeve to take a puff before reversing back into their shells, but he isn't cold. He's bundled up in a toque, boots and a warm winter jacket. He doesn't have much, but he's grateful for the few things he does have on this chilly January day.

"I am dressed well here," he says, showing off his new grey toque he recently got from the Mission. "They give you toques made of wool, so it's warm. At the Mission, you can go in and they serve coffee and there is a place to keep warm."

Allard has only been on the streets for about a year, but he knows what it's like to be homeless in the cold. He spent a full night on the streets last year when it was -20C and he said he didn't get much rest.

"Sleeping outside at nighttime it can get to -35C or -40C, so you don't really sleep much," he says. "If it wasn't for this place, I would probably die of the cold."

That's something Ottawa Mission Spokesperson Shirley Roy says she hears all too often.

Her shelter on Waller Street is packed to the brim with all 235 beds taken up and others sleeping on floor mats.

“Nobody is turned away, even if our beds are full,” said Roy, adding the Mission works with the Shepherds of Good Hope and the Salvation Army to ensure nobody has to sleep outside when temperatures drop.

But almost equally important as a warm place to sleep during a chilly spell is getting a hot meal in your belly.

Monday’s lunch was starting to get busy around noon with more and more homeless Ottawans showing up hungry. A quote on the cafeteria wall reads: “You have to eat well to be well,” and Monday’s menu offering of stuffed peppers, mashed potatoes, soup and salad lived up to the motto.

“I think we can all have some empathy with what it feels like to have some warm comfort food on a really cold day,” added Roy. “We always have soup and salad, but the kitchen team always tries to prepare something hearty like Lasagna or mashed potatoes that really helps to sustain somebody on a cold day like today.”

The Mission and other Ottawa shelters are at capacity and have been since before the deep cold hit the city.

But Roy is expecting a challenging week with temperatures set to dip to -31C by Thursday.

The Mission is still seeking winter clothing donations.