

New Bedford to conduct annual Point-in-Time Count for 2018

The City of New Bedford will be conducting its annual Point-in-Time Count of persons experiencing homelessness for the year 2018 tomorrow, Wednesday, January 24, from 2:00 p.m. until Thursday, January 25 at 2:00 p.m., a 24-hour count. The Point-in-Time Count is required annually by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and is conducted nationwide during the last 10 days of the January.

The National “Let’s Make Everyone Count” will include dozens of teams of volunteers and community members that will gather with city officials to launch the 2018 homeless census efforts on Wednesday, January 24 at 12:00pm on the front steps of New Bedford’s Main Library.

“The Point-in-Time Count is an important part of ensuring that all homeless individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness are counted in a respectful manner,” said Mayor Jon Mitchell. “We also use this census-taking event as an important way to raise awareness around the issue of homelessness in our community.”

The Point-in-Time Count (PIT) is conducted in New Bedford through the efforts of the New Bedford Homeless Continuum of Care, known as the Homeless Service Providers Network (HSPN). The HSPN is convened and staffed by the City’s Department of Planning, Housing and Community Development.

The New Bedford PIT Homeless Count helps identify vulnerable groups by conducting surveys that provide demographics characteristics, homeless history, homeless experiences and other vital information. The census counts both sheltered and unsheltered individuals and families experiencing homelessness on a given night. The information collected through the PIT

Count is used to help measure New Bedford's progress towards ending homelessness and to help strategically focus future planning efforts toward that end. Typically the data collected through these efforts provides a reliable snapshot of both sheltered and unsheltered individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Immediately following the city's kick-off, volunteers and members of the community will reconvene at this year's Point-in-Time Coordination Center located at Positive Action Against Chemical Addiction (PAACA) building at 360 Coggeshall Street. At 2:00pm, teams of volunteers will begin the 24 hour count and disperse throughout the city to survey individuals and families currently residing on the streets and in other locations not meant for human habitation within the city.

Building off the success and lessons learned from previous counts, the HSPN's PIT Committee is holding a resource event for those experiencing homelessness at PAACA on January 24 from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Point-In-Time Count and Resource Fair is an opportunity for both those within the homeless community and volunteers to interact. The PIT Resource Fair is a multi-faceted event that includes a variety of resources, food provided by the Sister Rose Shelter, health services by the Wellness Van, foot care, haircuts, music and more. The PIT Resource Fair is more than an opportunity for free services but should be viewed as an awareness campaign and opportunity to build bridges between both communities.

The PIT Committee continues to partner with both Mobile, Loaves & Fishes and Catholic Social Services' Sister Rose Shelter in order to spread the word among those within the homeless community as to the importance of the count and when it will take place. Instead of only looking for persons experiencing homelessness, both groups have already begun encouraging those whom they serve to participate in the count, directing them to the PIT Coordination Center and other locations throughout the city where volunteers will be

stationed. It is anticipated that this approach, coupled with traditional community engagement, will produce the most accurate and robust data.

Both the successful count in 2017 and the anticipated success of this year's PIT is attributed to extensive planning, volunteer training, and the receipt of donations from the community. In preparation for the Count, the PIT Committee has held weekly planning work sessions since November to plan the overall logistics of the count, identify "hot spots", gather donation items, and recruit volunteers. As a result of these efforts, the PIT Committee has successfully recruited and trained over 60+ dedicated volunteers for the homeless count. In addition, numerous local business and organizations have graciously donated gift cards, clothing, backpacks, and other essential supplies that will either be placed in backpacks to be donated to those being counted or handed out during the course of the count.

Patrick J. Sullivan, Director of Planning, Housing and Community Development, notes that "the Point-in-Time Count provides an important one day snapshot of those experiencing homelessness in New Bedford' in a way that helps us understand both general demographics of those being counted as well as specific characteristics of those individuals and families in these situations so that we may strategically act to reduce those numbers and eventually end homelessness in our city."

For more information about the count, please contact Joseph Maia at (508) 979-1500 or at jose.maia@newbedford-ma.gov; for more information about what the city's HSPN is doing about homelessness, please go to www.nbhspn.com.