

Autos Careers Classifieds Homes



Solemn memorial for the homeless

By JEFF CUMMINGS, EDMONTON SUN

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Fifty-seven candles were lit on a sombre memorial ceremony at the Boyle Street Community Services Centre Saturday to remember those who died as a result of being homeless in 2010.

The 57 deaths last year is the highest the death toll has climbed since population counts on the city's homeless began in 1999, says the Edmonton Coalition On Housing and Homelessness.

It's up from the 47 people who died from being homeless in 2009, said John Acheson, a committee member for the annual memorial at the centre.

Acheson said the numbers are "a paradox," since figures from the latest count in 2010 show the city's homeless population dropping by 21% — the first ever decrease since the count began in 1999.

"It's sad to see these beautiful people dying on the street," said Acheson.

"For me, this epitomizes the challenges that the homeless are facing."

Keith Harding, a chairman for the coalition, says 2010 was the most "poignant and painful" for volunteers who help the city's homeless, as well as those living in the city's streets.

It's a reason why more work needs to be done to end homelessness in Edmonton, he says.

"If this was a disease that was killing these people, there would be such an outcry and there would be a dire need for a cure," said Harding.

"And because this is about homelessness, and this is such a disenfranchised group, somehow, the trend has become socially acceptable.

"We have somehow sat back and watched this happen."

Clayton Kiddle, a 41-year-old who has lived in Edmonton's streets for two years up until June 2010, says he knew a few of the people who died last year.

It's a reason why he makes an effort to attend the annual memorial every year, he says.

"During a night last winter I stayed in a warehouse, and that was a pretty cold night," said Kiddle.

"All I had were a few blankets, and when I woke up, I was pretty cold. I could have been one of those homeless people who died."

Kiddle said he now works full-time at the centre and he's also a part-time cook every weekend.

He now lives in a home after being helped by the coalition.

According to figures from Homeward Trust Edmonton, the local homeless population in Edmonton is on average between the ages of 31 and 54.

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