

Editorial ? Homelessness is not acceptable

At their last meeting, Peel Regional councillors heard from a delegation representing Our Place Peel.

The group found a sympathetic council, as they called for support for youth-specific housing services, including emergency shelters.

They also called for a region-wide collaborative approach to end youth homelessness in Peel.

This is a perfectly laudable goal, as the delegates pointed out youth homelessness is currently a crisis in Peel.

The problem is the issue goes deeper than some young people finding shelter. There are also adults and families in the same situation.

That was spelled out over the weekend by various officials who took part in the United Way of Peel Region's second annual Longest Night event. Mayor Allan Thompson and Councillors Jennifer Innis and Annette Groves parked their respective vehicles at Town Hall Friday night, and spent the night inside them, trying to get a decent night's sleep. Not surprisingly, they weren't terribly successful.

But what they were really trying to do is point out that homelessness does exist, with some people being forced to sleep in cars because they have no other choice.

And we have to remember Friday's demonstration was put on by adults on their own. The kids were home in bed. What if the children were obliged to accompany them?

And since they were at Town Hall, they were able to get access to washrooms. Is that the case with everyone obliged to sleep in their car. There were some complaints voiced years ago from some residents in Toronto, angry because so many homeless people tended to hang around City Hall. There was a very good reason for that. Nathan Phillips Square has washrooms that are accessible to the public 24-7.

What's more, everyone taking part in Friday night's event knew it was just going to last for a couple of hours. Once they were done, they knew that had a home to go to, with comfortable sleeping accommodations and a bathroom.

Reality is sometimes not nearly as nice.

We Canadians like to think our country does a pretty good job when dealing with social issues and the needs of people. Moreover, we are well into the 21st century. Yet there are people who have trouble finding a roof to get under, even to this day in this society and culture.

It's true that a lot of these cases are the result of emotional or mental health issues, that might be a little tricky to deal with. But there are cases in which people are just having bad luck.

United Way reports there are more than 200,000 residents living in poverty, and the possibility of being homeless has got to be part of their reality.

Almost 20 years ago, Anne Golden chaired the Toronto Homelessness Action Task Force, and the work of this group drew considerable attention in its day. One point they made was a lot of families and individuals were very close to being able to put a roof over their heads, falling maybe just a few dollars short.

We suspect that might be the case in many instances today.

That might be worth looking into. Some of these problems might turn out to be rather easy to solve.

Actions like those that took place Friday night help spread the word about the problem. So what are we going to do about it?