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Camp Hope population shrinks to less than 200 since October

Significant progress being made by local service providers to connect residents with needed services, facilitate housing placements and close the encampment

SPOKANE, WA – A physical point in time count completed the week of Dec. 12, found an estimated 198 people are still living at the Camp Hope homeless encampment. The current estimated resident population is less than half the size it was in October, when 467 individuals completed Needs Assessment forms, were issued ID badges and linked with peer navigation teams charged with connecting individuals to needed services and housing. This latest on-site snapshot was part of a planned larger effort of Washington State Department of Commerce contractor Empire Health Foundation and the Washington State Department of Transportation to reduce the encampment footprint and create a map of the site that associates individual residents with their tents, structures and vehicles.

“The rapid shrinking of Camp Hope is a positive sign and an unsurprising development due to the recent weeks of harsh weather, the critical work of our partners on the ground, and the ongoing enforcement of site rules,” said Empire Health Foundation President Zeke Smith. “This is good news for everyone involved in the work of permanently closing the encampment and reflects the tireless efforts of our service providers partners who are hard at work day and night connecting individuals with needed services and housing options as they become available.”

Many people have left the encampment in recent weeks without notifying the outreach teams and as such their departures were not reflected in recently reported data. This latest tent-by-tent count offers a clearer sense of the estimated number of residents currently living at Camp Hope versus individuals from the original October census count who no longer reside at the site but may still be accessing services.

Last week’s mapping and onsite count involved a physical accounting of each tent, RV, vehicle or other structure in which a badged encampment resident currently lives. Each structure received a site tag with an assigned number. A map of the site was then created which matches the tents with the individual resident. The count identified 27 RVs, five vehicles, 120 tents/structures and 13 sites tagged as abandoned. In conjunction with this effort, WSDOT maintenance crews and operating partner Jewels Helping Hands removed an estimated 40,000 pounds of garbage from inside and around the encampment, making space for rearrangement of the dwellings and resulting in a smaller physical footprint.

The resulting tally of the estimated 198 on-site residents represents only those individuals onsite during the time of the count. Several factors could result in that count fluctuating in the coming weeks such as individuals not being home at the time of the count, or sites labeled as temporarily abandoned. Residents who leave the encampment have up to seven-days to reclaim their temporarily abandoned

site. Additional factors impacting the count include individuals temporarily leaving the site to seek refuge from the harsh weather conditions and the impacts on individuals' sense of security following recent law enforcement engagement at the camp.

"Gaining access to real time data remains difficult due to the nature of working in a complicated environment with individuals who have complex challenges, and the sheer size of the transitory Camp Hope population," said Smith. "We have recently been granted access to the City's database of homeless individuals receiving services, and we are working with our peer navigation teams to get the 467 original Camp residents' Needs Assessment data entered into this system. Once complete, this will offer a more comprehensive and streamlined understanding of the needs and current housing status moving forward. With this recent onsite snapshot, we can further target our engagement with the remaining individuals living at Camp Hope for prioritized housing assignment and more accurately track housing outcomes and placements."

The first full Camp Hope census count was conducted in person in mid-October and required residents to complete a Needs Assessment to capture resident housing or service needs. After signing the encampment's Good Neighbor Agreement, residents were given a numbered badge granting them entry and exit privileges. At that time, the population was capped at 467. Since then, a team of more than 20 peer navigators from Jewels Helping Hands, Compassionate Addiction Treatment, Revive Spokane and Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium have worked one-on-one with these individuals to connect them with needed services and housing options as they become available.

While Camp Hope is now much smaller, supportive services like counseling, behavioral health and medical care, and substance use disorder treatment will continue until the encampment is closed, and the navigation tent adjacent to the camp will provide daily services and resources. Additionally, given that the site remains one of the largest homeless encampments in the state, there is still significant need for operating support.

Former residents who left without notifying the onsite peer navigation teams are still eligible to receive help connecting to care, services and housing, and concurrent efforts to contact and record those unaccounted departures are underway. Empire Health Foundation and its partner service providers is committed to supporting the remaining encampment residents with targeted outreach and service engagement and prioritized placement with better housing options as they become available. The inevitable clean up and removal of Camp Hope will not happen overnight, but it's getting visibly closer.

"We've said from the very beginning Camp Hope was going to close and we are committing to continuing to support all of the individuals who have been connected to this camp," said Julie Garcia, executive director of Jewels Helping Hands. "The only way we will solve homelessness in our community is by putting aside our differences and setting a table where city, state government, local businesses, neighborhoods and service providers can engage collaboratively in building solutions that are centered around the shared belief that no person should have to sleep outside or die on our streets."

Empire Health has a contract with the state Department of Commerce to coordinate outreach at Camp Hope as part of the state's [Right of Way Safety Initiative](#) to close the encampment site and help the people living there find better shelter or long-term or supportive housing. The initiative is a partnership among WSDOT, Commerce and the Washington State Patrol working with local partners to address homelessness on state highway rights of way.