



I WAS THIRSTY

an outreach mission putting safe water
in the hands of vulnerable people

ANNUAL REPORT 2026

OUTREACH MISSION



ONE BOTTLE OF WATER. ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO

Executive Summary

The 2026 season marked the second year of the I WAS THIRSTY outreach mission in Thunder Bay and an important transition from a small pilot project to an established, community-supported operation. The mission remains deliberately straightforward: to bring safe drinking water directly to people experiencing homelessness and living outdoors, particularly where distance, mobility, transportation, storage or service hours can make regular access to drinking water difficult.

During the 2026 reporting period, ending September 4, volunteers completed 78 delivery days and maintained two established routes serving 12 active encampment locations. A total of 1,102 cases of bottled water - 26,448 individual bottles or 13,224 litres - were distributed directly to people where they were living. This represented approximately 33,060 pounds of water physically handled and delivered by volunteers. Mission vehicles travelled 2,764 kilometres, and approximately 250 or more people were served on a typical delivery day. The average purchase cost was approximately 14 cents per bottle, demonstrating that a relatively modest financial investment can provide meaningful direct assistance.

The 2026 season built upon the 2025 pilot, during which 14,784 bottles were delivered. Across the first two years of I WAS THIRSTY, volunteers distributed 41,232 bottles of water, representing 20,616 litres and approximately 51,540 pounds, while travelling a combined 5,233 kilometres. By the end of the second season, 27 volunteers had participated in the mission.

The growth of the mission was made possible through community partnership. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church continued to provide the financial and administrative home for the mission; Walmart #1165 at 1101 West Arthur Street helped ensure that bottled water was consistently available; EcoSuperior supported environmental stewardship through cleanup supplies; and the Cerson Umbrella Foundation joined the mission as a philanthropic partner. Together, these relationships allowed a volunteer-driven initiative with very little formal infrastructure to operate consistently and responsibly.

The year also brought an important opportunity to document the mission. Thunder Bay filmmaker Alan Auld of Imagine Films produced a documentary examining I WAS THIRSTY, water insecurity and the experiences encountered during outreach. The film provides a visual record of the work while helping communicate a larger message: practical barriers to safe drinking water can have real consequences for people living outdoors, and practical community responses can make a difference.

As I WAS THIRSTY looks toward 2027, the emphasis will remain on safety, consistency and sustainability, while continuing to document lessons learned and share the operating model with other communities interested in developing their own locally appropriate water outreach efforts.

The mission remains what it was on the first day: one bottle of water, one person at a time.

Background: How I WAS THIRSTY Began

I WAS THIRSTY began in Thunder Bay in the summer of 2025 in response to a simple observation: although safe drinking water is readily available to most people in the community, access is not equally easy for everyone. People experiencing homelessness and living outdoors may face barriers that include distance from available water sources, limited transportation, mobility challenges, service hours and the practical difficulty of carrying or storing sufficient quantities of water.

The response was intentionally uncomplicated. Rather than creating another location to which people would have to travel, I WAS THIRSTY would take bottled drinking water directly to where people were living. Volunteers identified encampment locations, established two routes and began making regular deliveries using personal vehicles. There was no application process and no requirement for people to demonstrate need. Water was simply offered.

The 2025 pilot demonstrated that direct delivery was both practical and needed. Over more than 60 delivery days, volunteers distributed 616 cases - 14,784 bottles - representing 7,392 litres and approximately 18,480 pounds of water. The mission travelled 2,469 kilometres while serving approximately 12 active encampment locations. Those first months also provided important lessons about volunteer safety, route planning, record keeping, privacy, community relationships and the value of returning consistently.

The experience shaped the 2026 mission. Routes became more structured, volunteers gained experience and community relationships strengthened. Just as importantly, I WAS THIRSTY became clearer about its role. The mission does not provide counselling, case management, medical care or professional social services. Those functions belong to organizations with the training and mandate to provide them. I WAS THIRSTY concentrates on one fundamental need - safe drinking water - while helping connect people with existing community resources when appropriate.

That limited mandate is intentional. The mission works best when it complements, rather than duplicates, the important work already taking place throughout Thunder Bay.

Why Direct Delivery Matters

For most people, access to drinking water is routine. For someone living outdoors, a safe water source may exist somewhere in the community without being practically accessible. Distance, mobility, transportation, hours of operation, geography and the ability to carry and store water can all become barriers. During outreach, volunteers encountered people living in locations where dependable access to safe water could be difficult. The mission therefore focuses on taking water directly to people rather than expecting people to come to the water.

The 2026 Outreach Mission

The 2026 season demonstrated what a small volunteer organization can accomplish when its purpose remains focused. Between June and early September, I WAS THIRSTY volunteers completed 78 delivery days and maintained two established routes serving 12 active encampments. During that period, 26,448 bottles of drinking water were distributed, equal to 13,224 litres and approximately 33,060 pounds of water. Volunteers travelled 2,764 kilometres in the process.

The mission continued to serve approximately 250 or more people on a typical delivery day. This should not be interpreted as an unduplicated count of individuals; the population living outdoors is transient and changes throughout the season. It does, however, provide a reasonable indication of the daily scale of the outreach based on regular site observations and information from people living at the locations served.

The financial model remained deliberately lean. Water cost approximately \$3.25 per case, or about 14 cents per bottle. The anticipated water cost of serving one person over a 90-day operating period was approximately \$10.94. The figures show how relatively small contributions can translate into direct, tangible assistance.

Two-Year Progress

Measure	2025 Pilot	2026 Mission	Two-Year Total
Cases / bottles	616 / 14,784	1,102 / 26,448	1,718 / 41,232
Litres / weight	7,392 / 18,480 lb	13,224 / 33,060 lb	20,616 / 51,540 lb
Distance	2,469 km	2,764 km	5,233 km

Across its first two seasons, I WAS THIRSTY developed from a modest pilot into a structured and repeatable outreach mission. The growth is reflected not only in the number of bottles delivered but also in the development of volunteers, established routes, community partnerships and a clearer operating framework.

Financial Stewardship

I WAS THIRSTY operates with a deliberately lean financial model. Monetary contributions are administered through St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. The following summary is based on the bookkeeping extract supplied through September 9, 2026 and is not an audited financial statement.

Simple Financial Summary

The figures below show the total mission funds accounted for in the bookkeeping extract, less recorded mission expenses, with the remaining amount shown as the available balance.

Recorded mission expenses are based on reimbursements for mission costs advanced personally. The extract does not yet assign those costs to detailed categories such as water, fuel or supplies.

Financial summary	Amount
Total mission funds accounted for	\$11,075.27
Less: recorded mission expenses	\$7,731.92
Available balance - September 9, 2026	\$3,343.35

The available balance represents funds remaining for continuing mission work, not profit. Total mission funds accounted for is calculated as recorded mission expenses plus the available balance. Because the source extract does not list the dollar value of each individual contribution, this figure should not be read as an independently verified donation total.

Our Community Partners

The achievements recorded in this report are not the work of one person or one organization. I WAS THIRSTY operates because community partners contribute different resources toward a common purpose. Each relationship strengthens a particular part of the mission while allowing the overall model to remain simple, volunteer-driven and focused on direct service.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church St. Andrew's provides the mission with its financial and administrative home. Monetary donations are received through the church's CanadaHelps account and charitable tax receipts are issued. This relationship gives a grassroots outreach initiative a trusted structure for stewardship, accountability and continuity while preserving the simplicity of the field operation.	Walmart #1165 - 1101 West Arthur Street During the 2026 season, Walmart became the mission's primary water supplier for the remainder of the operating period. Manager Sinthu Shanmuganathan and the store team worked to help ensure that sufficient water was available for pickup. That reliability reduced the time volunteers spent searching for stock and allowed them to concentrate on delivery and outreach.
EcoSuperior EcoSuperior supported the environmental side of the mission by providing cleanup supplies, including bags and gloves. This partnership reinforced an important principle: providing bottled water creates a responsibility to think about litter, cleanup and environmental stewardship as part of the outreach model, not as an afterthought.	Cerson Umbrella Foundation The Cerson Umbrella Foundation joined I WAS THIRSTY as a donor and philanthropic partner in 2026. Its support strengthened the mission's ability to continue direct water outreach and helped broaden the base of community and charitable support needed for long-term sustainability.

These partnerships illustrate one of the central lessons of I WAS THIRSTY: effective community work does not require every organization to do everything. One partner can provide administration, another reliable access to supplies, another environmental support and another philanthropic assistance. Together, those contributions create a practical system that none of the partners would have needed to build alone.

Community Guidance and Accountability

The I WAS THIRSTY Advisory Group

As the mission has grown, community guidance has become increasingly important. The I WAS THIRSTY advisory group brings together community members, representatives from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, outreach volunteers and mission leaders, along with individuals able to contribute knowledge of local conditions and community services. Its purpose is consultative: to provide practical advice, diverse perspectives and an additional level of reflection as the mission develops.

The advisory group helps the mission consider issues such as volunteer safety, service boundaries, stewardship, community partnerships, outreach practice, sustainability and future direction. Outreach members bring firsthand field experience; representatives from St. Andrew's contribute an organizational and stewardship perspective; and community members help ensure that decisions are informed by viewpoints beyond the immediate delivery team. The group does not replace the responsibilities of established service agencies or the administrative role of St. Andrew's. Instead, it provides a forum in which the mission can test ideas, identify concerns and remain connected to the community it serves.

Imagine Films: Documenting the Mission

An important development in 2026 was the involvement of Thunder Bay filmmaker Alan Auld and his production enterprise, Imagine Films. Auld documented I WAS THIRSTY in the field and produced a short documentary that captures the practical work of delivering water as well as the broader human story surrounding water insecurity and outreach in Thunder Bay.

The documentary does more than promote the mission. It provides a visual record of the people, places and relationships encountered during outreach and helps explain why direct delivery matters in ways that statistics alone cannot. It also supports the longer-term objective of sharing the Thunder Bay experience with other communities. By turning field experience into an accessible story, Imagine Films helped preserve the mission's early history and extend its message beyond the routes on which the work began.

Community guidance, responsible stewardship and honest storytelling are all part of making a small mission sustainable.

What We Learned in 2026

Two seasons of outreach reinforced several lessons. Consistency matters because occasional assistance and dependable assistance are not the same thing. Returning regularly allows people to know that water is coming and helps volunteers understand changing conditions at the locations they serve. The mission also learned that availability and accessibility are not necessarily the same: a service can exist somewhere in the community while still remaining difficult for a particular person to reach because of distance, mobility, transportation, hours of operation or geography.

The experience also reaffirmed that simple responses can have significant value. Water is not complicated, but lack of access to water can be. I WAS THIRSTY works best when it remains focused on the task it was created to perform and when it complements the broader work of established agencies rather than attempting to duplicate professional services.

Accurate records became increasingly important as the mission grew. Tracking cases, bottles, litres, kilometres, delivery days and locations allows the team to understand what it is accomplishing, plan more effectively and communicate results honestly. Good intentions matter, but measurable results provide accountability.

Safety, Dignity and Stewardship

No amount of water delivered is worth compromising the wellbeing of a volunteer or the people served. Regular outreach is therefore conducted using a team approach rather than solo deployment. Established routes, reconnaissance, incident reporting and volunteer wellness practices are used to support safer operations, while volunteers are expected to understand the limits of the mission and when a situation should instead be referred to emergency services, health professionals, police or another appropriate organization.

Dignity is treated as part of the service rather than an optional extra. People are offered water without being required to explain their circumstances, privacy is respected and unnecessary personal information is not collected. The people served by the mission are not promotional material. The objective is to provide practical assistance while preserving the dignity and autonomy of the person receiving it.

Stewardship also extends to the resources entrusted to the mission. Financial donations are administered through St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, route planning is used to make efficient use of vehicles and volunteer time, and operating records are maintained so that the mission can report its activity accurately. A financial snapshot based on the bookkeeping extract through September 9, 2026 appears earlier in this report.

Looking Ahead: 2027 and Beyond

I WAS THIRSTY intends to return in June 2027. Growth for its own sake is not the objective. The priorities will be to make the mission safer, more consistent and more sustainable while continuing to strengthen volunteer leadership, community partnerships, documentation and operational planning.

The mission will also continue developing its replication resources. The goal is not to build one large centralized organization or to insist that other communities reproduce Thunder Bay's approach exactly. Instead, the objective is to document the experience gained here - what worked, what did not, what resources were required and what lessons were learned - so that another community can adapt the underlying model to local circumstances without having to begin entirely from scratch.

If another community ultimately develops a better version of the model, that will be considered a success. The idea has always been simple: identify a real gap, assemble a small team, work safely, go to where people are, offer water without conditions, treat people with dignity, measure the work and keep learning.

Thank You, Thunder Bay

Across 2025 and 2026, 41,232 bottles of water moved from a case, to a vehicle, into the hands of a volunteer and ultimately into the hands of someone who needed them. Behind those bottles are thousands of individual acts of service: donations made, cases lifted, kilometres driven, routes covered, supplies provided, cleanup completed and conversations shared.

We are grateful to our volunteers, donors, advisory members and community partners, and to the many organizations across Thunder Bay whose daily work supports people experiencing homelessness. Most importantly, we are grateful to the people who welcomed I WAS THIRSTY volunteers into the places where they were living and allowed us to return.

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iwasthirsty.ca

Thunder Bay, Ontario

Mission statistics in this report are drawn from I WAS THIRSTY operating records published at iwasthirsty.ca/mission-statistics. 2026 mission statistics reflect reporting to September 4, 2026. Financial figures are based on the bookkeeping extract supplied through September 9, 2026 and are unaudited.