

2020-2021 Community Homeless Winter Emergency Response Summary Report

Purpose

This report summarizes and reflects on the *2020-2021 Community Homeless Winter Emergency Response*.

Background

For the second year, community stakeholders worked collaboratively to plan and implement a Community Winter Emergency Response within Spruce Grove (WER). The response is intended to mitigate risk for individuals that are vulnerable to serious, critical, or potentially fatal health impacts as a result of extreme cold weather exposure. Risk of exposure is due to several factors, but in particular this response focused on unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness. The response ran from November 1, 2020 – April 1, 2021.

Planning

The Winter Emergency Response Committee began planning the 2020-2021 response in spring of 2020. The committee completed a gap analysis that identified the lack of evenings and weekend spaces during extreme cold weather. The focus of the 2020-2021 response was to address the after-hours gap in a way that was in adherence with current COVID-19 health procedures. The Committee reached out to Alberta Health Services to ensure proper compliance with public health guidelines.

For 2020-2021, the Committee was able to develop a relationship with a local taxi company to provide rides to the Late Night Café from anywhere in the Tri Region, and a ride to a designated location when the Late Night Café closed in the morning.

Financial resource acquisition was a goal to enable the Committee to hire a Coordinator for WER during the 2020/2021 season. The WER committee was successful at receiving a grant through the Edmonton Community Foundation. Additionally, the need for a suitable and central community space was identified. The Committee was able to create a relationship with the Congregational Christian Fellowship Church (on King Street) who approved the use of the facility for the purpose of the Late Night Café. As such, the Congregational Christian Fellowship Church appointed a representative to become a member of the Winter Emergency Response Committee.

People were able to volunteer through the Spruce Grove Community Church or the Congregational Christian Fellowship Church. Volunteers had to attend an orientation session to be prepared to volunteer at the Late Night Café. This session included safety information, COVID-19 procedures, and other operational information for volunteers.

2020-2021 Response Summary

The 2020-2021 response included a Late Night Café located at the Congregational Christian Fellowship Church, transportation, and cold weather supplies. The cold weather threshold, monitored daily, was set at -25 including wind-chill for a 24 hour period from November 1, 2020 until April 1, 2021. The

determined operating hours were 7 days a week between 11pm and 5am when the response is activated. These hours were expanded and adjusted throughout the season to accommodate changing public health restrictions and availability of day-time community spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This hiring of a Late Night Café Coordinator provided consistency, stability, and expertise within the Late Night Café structure. The Coordinator was contracted through the Spruce Grove Community Church. A warm meal was served at 11pm and a table with cold weather supplies was made available for guests to take items they needed. Transportation to the Late Night Café was available from anywhere in the Tri Region. Transportation from the Late Night Café was to designated locations.

2020-2021 WER Response by the numbers

- The Late Night Café was open for **21 nights and 7 days** during the months of December, January, and February.
- There were **125 individuals** that used the Late Night Café with many of the individuals as repeat users.
- **18 unique individuals** used the Late Night Café.
- There was an average of **5** guests using the Late Night Café when open.
- **20 trained volunteers** on the roster completing shifts at the Late Night Café. Each time the Late Night Café was open, there was an average of **4 volunteers** that were managed by the Late Night Café Coordinator through the Spruce Grove Community Church and the Congregational Christian Fellowship Church.
- **One individual** who attended the Late Night Café tested positive for COVID-19 on Sunday December 13, 2020. The COVID Response Plan was followed and anyone impacted was notified quickly.
- There were **39 taxi trips** in the 2020-2021 season. The majority of the trips were used in February 2021.

Analysis of 2021 -2022 WER Response

After each season, the WER committee debriefs on the past season. The committee identified:

The strengths of the response:

- Were able to increase service level between the 2019/20 response and the 2020/21 response
- Increased level of trust between collaborating organizations
- Ability to adjust the response as the needs changed
- Acquiring resources and identifying future resource needs

The areas for growth of the response:

- Increased role clarity between committee and operational roles.
- Addressing volunteer and coordinator burnout. 2 weeks of cold weather in February is difficult with just one paid Coordinator.
- Intention to develop a shared use agreement with the location of the Late Night Café.

- Balance between consistency (hours and alerts) and flexibility (being responsive to needs)

Socks and underwear were the most popular items for guests from the supplies offered. Guests commented that they were thankful for the Café. One area the guests would like to see is the opportunity to lay down.

Overall, the Late Night Café model worked well for the needs in our community this season and was able to continue to provide service with COVID-19 health measures in place.

Looking Forward: 2021-2022 Winter Emergency Response

The committee is now planning for the 2021-2022 season.

With COVID-19 continuing to impact the community, the committee will need to update the COVID-19 Response Plan and build in flexibility to ensure the response can adapt to changing public health restrictions.

For the past two years, there has been an extended cold period in February. The committee found the extended period difficult with one paid coordinator because it was difficult to have a night off during the two week period. Moving forward the committee will look at solutions for this including the possibility of two paid coordinators for the response.

The Winter Emergency Response Committee continues to develop and strives for continual improvement of the response to serve the community. In looking to the 2021-2022, the committee will continue to build trusting relationships and focus on communication and clarity around roles. The committee will also be formalizing the agreement between the location of the Late Night Café and the Winter Emergency Response Committee to support clear communication and outline commitments each party has. Listening to the guest's feedback, the Committee will be exploring the possibility of a mat program this year to provide an opportunity to sleep at the Late Night Café.

The Committee were successful in receiving the Community Initiatives Program (CIP) grant from the Government of Alberta in the amount of \$14,950 to support WER for the next 18 months. This funding will help support two paid coordinators, volunteer training and orientation, sanitary and cleaning supplies, and transportation.

Appendix 1 – Committee Membership

City of Spruce Grove (Community Social Development and Protective Services)

Engage Church

Spruce Grove Community Church

Congregational Christian Fellowship Church

Tri Region Pay Forward Kindness Society (PFK)

TransAlta Tri-Leisure Centre

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)

Spruce Grove Public Library

Spruce Grove Rotary Club