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edmonton

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## **Winter Emergency Response Plan (WER)**

**October 2009**

**Prepared by Homeward Trust Edmonton**

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## Overview

The Winter Emergency Committee was initiated several years ago by Homeward Trust Edmonton (formerly Edmonton Housing Trust Fund - EHTF and the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing EJPCOH) to lead a community planning process to develop a functional and feasible Winter Emergency Response Plan. It has involved representatives of Homeward Trust, the three orders of government and community service agencies.

Repeatedly over the winter years, it is clear that the need for a coordinated response to the needs of the homeless population during the difficult winter months continues to be important and is depended upon by both the homeless and the agencies delivering the services.

Using the experience gained over the past years, the knowledge can be used to anticipate the winter needs in Edmonton. The information in this report is based on previous years' events and the anticipated amounts are approximate. With the Edmonton population increasing and the migrants' shifting demographics, the needs might change during the course of the winter season, and therefore, some of the planned responses might be adjusted to react to those changes.

There are a few factors which contribute to the challenge of arriving at a comfortable prediction of how many additional shelter mats and other services that might be required over the winter months. The number of people camping in the river valley and city parklands has decreased, largely due to stringent enforcement, whereas the numbers in urban areas has increased. Additionally, shelter usage has gone down over the last several months. During the last year's WER program, the overflow mat facility has been consistently underutilized. A reduced contingency is planned for the 2009/10 winter emergency response.

It is important to understand that the costs associated with providing shelter/overnight mats differ from those associated with providing drop in/warming centre, transportation and other support services to the homeless. The overnight mat service is calculated based on individual clients served, whereas, the warming centers and other services are able serve numerous and repeated clients throughout their operating hours. The costs have risen over the years as facility and staffing overhead has escalated.

In comparison to the 2008/09 WER Plan, this Plan anticipates lower shelter numbers but increased need for drop in availability.

## **The Need**

The overall number of clients accessing the services provided by the winter emergency projects during 2008/09 show an increase over the previous years. Reasonable assumptions for this continual need are a high influx of temporary foreign workers and migrants into Edmonton, affordable housing, better coordination of the winter emergency program affording greater knowledge of available services and access by more homeless people in the community, relationships built over the previous winter programs fostering client trust and willingness to seek assistance.

## **What we are Doing**

Homeward Trust has been working with social service agencies in Edmonton to address some of the more complex issues faced by the homeless population in Edmonton. 2009 saw a fundamental change in our approach to homelessness; for example, implementing the “*Housing First*” model in November 2008 to house people and keep them housed with the help of coordinated outreach support services.

Further examples include the *Housing Support Services HUB*, a multi-agency partnership funded by Homeward Trust that works with clients facing more complex issues preventing them from obtaining and/or maintaining housing. Another project currently under way by Boyle Street Community Services, titled *Parklands*, works with clients living in the river valley parklands, camps in public parks and other vagrant sites in the city to obtain and maintain appropriate housing, places clients in housing with the provision of appropriate support services and case management once clients are housed.

In 2009 Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre continues an initiative whose primary objective is to house as many people as possible who are living in tents in urban non-park areas in Edmonton and/or vacant lots. The staff continues to take calls from the Edmonton Police Service when campers’ tents get dismantled, and when possible housing is offered and services of a support team to establish and keep each client housed.

The “rapid exit” program continues at Hope Mission. Clients utilizing the shelter system are offered a placement into permanent housing using the housing first model to provide the necessary wrap around services. The Rapid Exit program is thriving.

These programs focus on offering people a permanent home and the support services they need to stay there, without pre-requisites such as successful addictions treatment. It is anticipated that the results of these projects could reduce the number of homeless individuals accessing the emergency shelter, drop-in/warming centres and other social service agencies during the winter and throughout the year.

## **Service Delivery**

As reported by previous years' agencies delivering winter emergency services, it is necessary to have several shelter options, drop in centers and other service alternatives open to the homeless clients, depending on their various needs and demographics. This includes serving clients in numerous locations by diverse delivery agents. It is important to note that since the 2008-09 plan, George Spady has reduced their available shelter mats from 85 to 60 and converted the space to add an additional eight detox beds. In past years, they have consistently been at capacity.

There are sub-populations that continue to face specific challenges including women, couples, large families, and families with adult children, youth, as well as those with disabilities or other limiting conditions. Although a number of solutions, partnerships, etc. have been developed and implemented over the last few winters, these sub-populations still face obstacles during the winter months.

Drop-in centers played a key role in the success over the past year. The need for drop in agencies remains high as the statistics indicate an unprecedented number of clients served in the 2008/09 response. In December of 2008, the Bissell Centre was forced to change their staff to client ratio to 1:20 in response to staff safety issues. As well, Boyle Street Community Services usage at extended hours was twice what it has been in prior years, frequently seeing over 400 individuals in drop in. There are very few options available to the homeless when service agencies and overnight shelters are closed. Exposure to the harsh winter elements and the fear for personal safety, many count on these services as a warm refuge and a place to rest. There is a need to offer the drop-in space again this year.

The intent of the Winter Emergency Response Plan is to identify services and housing requirements that would mitigate the obstacles and dangers encountered by people who are homeless during the winter months.

**The key components recommended for the 2009-10 Plan are as follows:**

#### **Winter Shelter**

The main provider of emergency shelter mats will continue to be Hope Mission. Upon review of last year's statistics, no additional funding for mats will be requested for the Winter Emergency Plan for 2009/10. However, we do recommend funding for an additional 2 FTE's for security because of increased stress and protection of staff. Hope Mission will provide security.

**Winter Shelter Budget \$100,000**

#### **Services & Special Needs**

Special Needs & Services address several requirements of unique client groups such as the chronically homeless, those with health, mental health and physical disabilities, secondary migrants, and families. The need for drop-in services on Edmonton's south side is an ongoing issue; we are currently attempting to obtain the use of the Salvation Army mobile canteen to serve homeless individuals hot meals on Whyte Avenue. Boyle McCauley Health Centre has expressed the need for an additional full time nurse to give basic medical care to those individuals accessing the Drop Ins and Shelters. A full time position was added two years ago, however the demand remains high. Homeward Trust will fund this additional position.

**Services & Special Needs Budget \$200,000**

#### **Transportation**

We are proposing a continuation of the current transportation plan, which includes the operation of the Boyle Street Community Services Winter Warming Outreach program. This program consists of two vehicles, a large 12-passenger bus, which operates, from 2pm to 10pm and a smaller van that operates from 10pm until the early morning hours depending on weather conditions. The transport bus picks up clients from several Edmonton locations (in coordination with the other winter emergency programs) and brings them to the downtown shelter system. The van is used to reach the areas where the bus cannot (back alleys, etc) and operates after hours to provide outreach to those individuals who have chosen to stay in the elements. This program not only provides transportation, but also is staffed with outreach workers to establish relationships with the individuals who are utilizing this service.

**Transportation Budget \$250,000**

### **Drop In/Warming**

Most of the proposed services include the extension of operating hours of existing drop in facilities in Edmonton. The gaps in provision of warm alternatives exist in the early morning hours (before most agencies open and/or after overnight shelters close), evening hours (after several agencies close) and on weekends & holidays when most agencies are closed.

There are a number of Agencies that are currently interested in hosting Drop-In Centers this winter. These include:

- ✓ Boyle Street Community Services
- ✓ Salvation Army – Crossroads Community Church (E3C)
- ✓ Mosaic Centre
- ✓ Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre
- ✓ Bissell Centre
- ✓ Fort Road Victory Church

As in past years, there is a need for a Drop-In Centre on Edmonton's south side. Over the past two years Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre has been looking for, but unable to secure a suitable space. Recently they have been working with several churches to develop a temporary winter solution with plans for a more permanent outcome in the future. The south side has a distinct population with a high number of individuals who choose not to cross the river to access the downtown shelters despite the transportation van and relationships with an outreach worker.

**Drop In/Warming Budget \$700,000**

### **Coordination & Communications**

A focused coordination has been a key factor of a successful delivery and most effective use of existing and new resources to address the initiatives identified in the WER Plan. This also involves communication to stakeholders, monitoring of shelter use, initiation of appropriate responses depending on need, provision of resource contact information (Resource list) of available services over the winter months.

**Coordination Budget \$50,000**

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**Total Cost of 2009-2010 Plan \$1,300,000**

### **Contingency**

In the event of the cold weather or unanticipated high shelter usage, it is expected that the Marv Holland Building purchased by the City of Edmonton in 2007 will be accessed on an as needed basis. It is available December 31, 2009 but there is a possibility of early access. We estimate a need of 100 mats x 50 days x \$30/mat.

**Contingency Budget \$250,000**

**Extreme Situation**

With the possibility of an H1N1, pandemic or policy changes around a health crisis it is our due diligence to put into place an extreme situation contingency plan; although we believe, there to be little probability this contingency plan will need to be executed. If we happen to end up in a situation where the shelter space that is currently available is reduced dramatically for an extended period of over 50 nights, we are proposing that the Marv Holland building, which has recently been obtained by the city, be opened and funded. The estimate is 250 mats x 180 days x \$30/mat.

**Estimated Cost: \$ 1,300,000**

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**Total Cost of 2009-2010 Contingency Plan \$1,550,000**

## Strategies

The Winter Emergency Response Committee has greatly improved coordination and collaboration amongst stakeholders involved in providing emergency shelter and services. All those involved acknowledge the need for a comprehensive response with several elements and shared responsibilities.

### Summary of Shelter Beds and Mats

Shelter Resources	Existing	Contingency	Extreme Situation
Winter Emergency			
Hope Mission*			
> Herb Jamieson	235		
> Intox	70		
> Youth	60		
> Women	50		
> Year round mats	200		
George Spady Centre*	80		
WEAC**	75		
YESS**	16		
Salvation Army - Downtown	154		
<b>Total</b>	<b>940</b>		
Extreme Situation & Contingency			
Marv Holland – 50 nights		100	
Marv Holland – 180 nights			250
<b>Total</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>250</b>

\*Hope Mission mat numbers reflect the funded spaces. However, additional mats may be provided pending resource availability. \*\*Shelters noted are unable to provide more space than they currently do.

NOTE: There are agencies that may be able to provide accommodation spaces in an emergency situations and upon availability i.e. Inner City Youth Housing Project (ICYHP), Edwardson Place (operated by Hope Mission), E4C – Elizabeth House.

**Funding Summary**

2009/2010 Winter Emergency Response Plan  
Funding Summary

Activity	08/09 Budget	09/10 Budget	Proposed funding sources		
			HT		Province
			Other	Federal	
Shelter	300,000	100,000			100,000
Services/Special Needs	200,000	200,000	100,000		100,000
Transportation	250,000	250,000			250,000
Drop Ins/Warming	700,000	700,000		400,000	300,000
Coordination	25,000	50,000	50,000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,475,000</b>	<b>1,300,000</b>	<b>150,000</b>	<b>400,000</b>	<b>750,000</b>

Contingency & Extreme Situation	08/09 Budget	09/10 Budget	Proposed funding sources		
			Other	City**	Province
Contingency	250,000	250,000		70,000	250,000
Extreme Situation		1,300,000		70,000	1,300,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>250,000</b>	<b>1,550,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>140,000</b>	<b>1,550,000</b>

\*Homeward Trust Edmonton receives funding from the three orders of government. Allocation of funds towards the Winter Emergency Response Plan depends on the available funding at the time of approval

\*\*in-kind contribution of the Marv Holland space.

## Community Agencies

Collective representatives of a broad group of community agencies have made commitments to assume responsibility for staffing, managing, and operating Emergency Winter programs once resources are made available for implementation. The collective involves participation by the following organizations and agencies:

- ✓ Bissell Centre
- ✓ Boyle Street Community Services
- ✓ Boyle McCauley Health Centre
- ✓ City of Edmonton
- ✓ EMCN - Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- ✓ Homeward Trust Edmonton
- ✓ Jasper Place Health & Wellness
- ✓ Province of Alberta – Housing & Urban Affairs
- ✓ Salvation Army

Respectfully submitted,

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On behalf of the Winter Emergency Response Committee  
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