



Edmonton Winter Emergency Response Plan

2010- 2011

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Overview

The Winter Emergency Committee was initiated several years ago by Homeward Trust Edmonton 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.

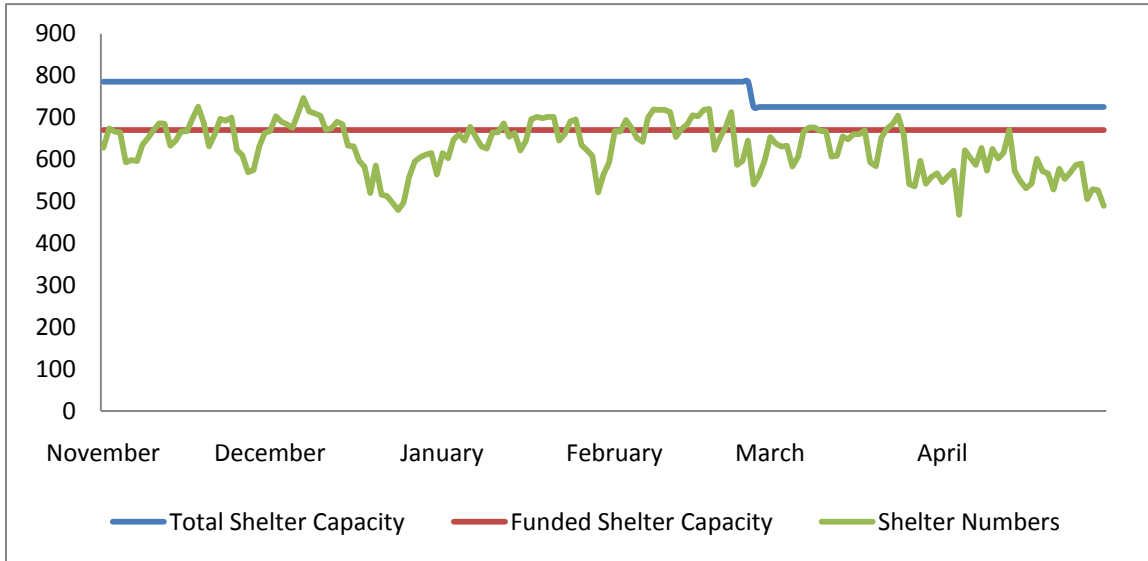
There are a few factors which contribute to the challenge of arriving at a comfortable prediction of how many additional shelter mats and other services that might be required over the winter months. The number of people camping in the river valley and city parklands has decreased, largely due to stringent enforcement, whereas the numbers in urban areas has increased. 800 camps were reported this summer, down from 1300 in 2009. Additionally, shelter usage has gone down over the last several months. A reduced contingency is planned again for the 2010/11 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.

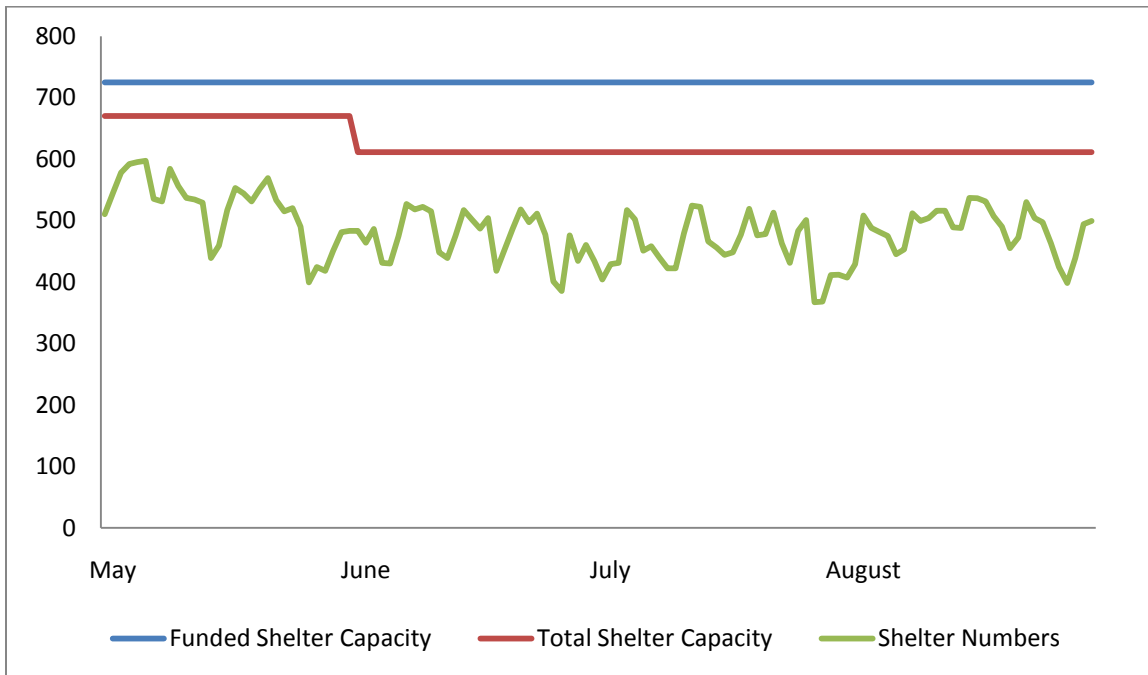
Like the 2009/10 plan, this plan anticipates lower shelter numbers but increased need for drop in availability. As is evidenced in the following chart, shelter numbers have fluctuated over the course of the 2010 summer, and agencies have indicated that they are seeing a dramatic increase in visits over the course of the summer months. Boyle Street Community Services reported that the drop in has been experiencing a dramatic increase in numbers over the summer months, reporting that visits to the drop in have doubled since the summer of 2009. Further to this, staff members at the Boyle Street drop in have observed that half of those visiting are not well known to staff. This is unprecedented, and shows that there will likely be a need for drop ins over the course of the year to remain open, and extend their hours.

We are requesting funding in the amount of \$700,000 for the continuation of the extended drop in centres, and \$200,000 for the continuation of the transportation services from the province. A further \$50,000 for coordination of the WER will be used from a different funding source. We have a total of \$487,987 in carry over from the 2009/10 Winter Emergency Response period. In total, we are requesting \$412,013 in new funding for this coming Winter Emergency Response period.

The following chart reflects what the shelter usage was during the winter months of last year:



The following chart shows the shelter usage over the course of the summer of 2010:



2009-2010 Winter Emergency Response

The 2009-2010 Winter Emergency Response ran from November 1, 2009 to April 30, 2010. During this time, Homeward Trust administered \$714,787 in funding provided by the Government of Alberta. The five projects funded by Homeward Trust during this Winter Emergency Response period include drop ins at Boyle Street Community Services, Fort Road Victory Church, Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre, and Salvation Army Edmonton Crossroads Community Church, as well as the Boyle Street Community Services Winter Warming Van. As a result of this funding, drop in warming centres, outreach van services, staffing, and food for the Winter Emergency Response programs were able to serve homeless, and at-risk of homelessness clients throughout the city. Thanks in part to these projects, no major incidences or deaths occurred as a result of the cold weather. Over the course of WER, 102,316 visits took place, and 185,080 meals were served.

The role of Homeward Trust throughout the winter months was to administer the financial contracts of each of the drop ins and the warming van, coordinate bi-monthly meetings of the Winter Emergency Response Committee, collect and analyze the data provided by the agencies, and conduct the reporting. Homeward Trust acted as the administrative and financial agent to Winter Emergency Response.

The Winter Emergency Response Committee consisted of Homeward Trust and its partner agencies including Boyle Street Community Services, the Salvation Army, Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre, Bissell Centre, Hope Mission, and Boyle McCauley Health Centre, as well as government representatives from the City of Edmonton, and the government of Alberta. The committee met bi-weekly through the WER period in order to address issues experienced by the agencies, the progress of the response, data collection, and various other topics. These discussions have helped with the coordination efforts of the WER, as well as will help to guide future plans.

The Need

The overall number of clients accessing the services provided by the winter emergency projects during 2009/10 shows an increase over the previous years. Reasonable assumptions for this continual need are a high influx of temporary foreign workers and migrants into Edmonton, the results of the recession, 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.

Edmonton is one of the fastest growing communities in Canada. This means a larger population, and thus a larger number of people requiring shelter and services. This plays a role in the type of response we put forward for the winter months.

What We Are Currently 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. The Housing First model has continued to show results. As of June, 2010, 888 people have been housed through the program.

Housing First teams are also reaching those considered hard to house. With the addition of Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, including Boyle McCauley Health Centre's Pathways program, and Alberta Health Services' DiverseCity Teams, housing first is reaching a wider client basis, including those with mental health and addictions issues.

The 2010/11 Homeward Trust Annual Service Plan outlines a Housing from Streets, Parkland and Shelter program. Through our various partners, individuals will be housed and supported by teams wherever initial contact is made. There will be a concentrated effort to house the chronically homeless in the first year, however there are many in shelters and revolving through programs providing very short term shelter options. Without supports there is little hope of breaking this cycle. To provide as many doors out of homelessness as possible, teams will provide outreach in shelters, on the street, to those living rough in parkland and in known encampments throughout the city. The Rapid Exit team will expand to increase its support capacity and interim housing will be provided for very short periods to facilitate the housing process.

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.

Homeward Trust will establish a Housing First Agency Advisory Committee as part of its committee structure. The Housing First Advisory Committee will receive progress reports on the program. The committee will also have a role in disseminating the knowledge and learning's from the Housing First program and contributes to the continuous improvement of the program.

Bi-weekly team lead meetings for Housing First staff are currently taking place, and provide another opportunity for improvement of services. This is an advisory group which consists of the team leads of the contracted Housing First agencies. It is collaborative and meets for the purposes of implementing services.

Service Delivery

As reported by previous years' agencies delivering winter emergency services, it is necessary to have shelter options, drop in centres and transportation alternatives open to the homeless clients, depending on their various needs and demographics. These options include having drop ins located throughout the city, with the transportation services available to take clients downtown to the shelters. These alternatives include serving clients in numerous locations by diverse delivery agents.

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 2009/10 response Boyle Street Community Services usage at extended hours was twice what it has been in prior years, averaging 434 visits per day. Clients accessing the extended hours at Boyle Street include people who are leaving Hope Mission shelters. The adult shelters at Hope Mission require that those accessing the services leave at 6:45am, while the youth shelter requires that the youth leave by 8am. Without the extended hours, Boyle Street drop in is open at 8am, and closes at 4:30pm. This leaves an hour and fifteen minutes in the morning, and four hours after it closes and Hope Mission re-opens at 8:30pm where clients will be subjected to the cold.

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 2010-11 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 2010/11. The following chart shows the current Emergency shelter spaces available for winter 2010/11.

Shelter Resources Existing

Emergency	Funded Capacity	Capacity
Hope Mission- Intox Centre	70	70
Hope Mission- Herb Jamison Centre	235	250
Hope Mission- Mat Emergency Shelter Program	150	200
Hope Mission- Youth	40	60
Hope Mission- Women	50	70
WEAC	66	75
Total Emergency	611	725

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 will provide outreach and transportation services to individuals and families in need of emergency winter shelter in and around Edmonton.

This program consists of two vehicles, a large 12-passenger bus, which operates from 2pm to 10pm seven days a week, 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. Safe measures (blankets, hot drinks, referrals, and information on staying safe) will be given to clients who refuse rides. A follow-up service will be provided to people who utilize transportation services to address their personal circumstances in an effort to avert the recurrence of the same emergency.

Currently, there are different transportation services in the city. These include the Hope Mission Ministry Van, the Salvation Army's mobile canteen, the Street works van, and the Crossroads van. Many of these do not keep regular routes, and do not provide transportation to shelters, thus creating the need for the continued funding of the Boyle Street Community Services Winter Warming Outreach. During the 2009/ 10 Winter Emergency Response, the transportation services provided saw 20-40 per night, with a total of 2,155 van riders.

Estimated Cost: \$225,000

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. The best example of this is the Boyle Street Community Services' regular operating hours of 8am to 4:30pm daily, and the Hope Mission's rule of having adult clients out of the facility by 6:45am, and not back in until 8:30 pm, leaving critical gaps in services between those hours. Boyle Street Community Services has indicated that people begin to line up before 6am when the hours are extended.

The drop ins play a role in the transportation of clients from the warming centres to the shelters. 13.2% of Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre, and 18.6% of Ft. Road Victory Church visitors used the van service to be transported to downtown shelters during the last Winter Emergency Response¹. These warming centres provide individuals the opportunity to stay warm while they wait to obtain a ride to a warm place to stay for the night.

There are a number of Agencies that are currently interested in hosting drop in centres this winter. A proposal process has been recommended by the committee in order to best address the needs of the community. Criteria for selection would include geographic location, accessibility by transportation services, and the capacity of the centres. The intent is not to increase the number of drop ins funded in past years, but to create a process to ensure that the best equipped drop in centres will be those awarded contracts. The role of Homeward Trust in administering the disbursement of these funds will ensure that they are used effectively and that funded projects are complementary.

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. There have been preliminary conversations with a Baptist Church on the south side that is currently looking for funding. 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.

Estimated Cost: \$725,000

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.

¹ These percentages reflect the number of van riders compared to the total number of visits, not individuals utilizing the service.

Several recommendations were brought forward by the 2009/10 Winter Emergency Response Committee. In particular, four areas seem to be of universal concern for the agencies: training, staffing, resource guides, and security.

Agencies have indicated that there needs to be consistent, formal training for the Winter Emergency Response staff. Training was recommended in order for the agencies involved to have well trained staff members that are better capable of handling situations that may arise which are unique to the warming centres. Security training and best practices were also stressed by the agencies. Homeward Trust has suggested hosting a training session for all WER staff in person at our offices. This training could be filmed and posted online for any new staff members to use after the project has commenced, and will reduce costs for training in future years. These training sessions could be facilitated by the Government of Alberta’s Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit facilitators, as another cost savings method.

In particular, agencies stressed that training should be provided on mental health issues and addictions. Agencies have indicated that more than 29% of the visitors during the 2009/10 Winter Emergency Response period had some kind of mental illness, while greater than 47% of visitors were perceived to be under the influence.

The creation of a Winter Emergency Response resource guide in either a hard copy, or electronic form which contains reference material on housing first, services, mental health supports, etc would be beneficial to the participating agencies and their staff. Through this tool, information could be found in one location, and would be consistent at each site. This will further help staff provide referrals to clients who need their support. This will be created and updated by Homeward Trust.

For the sake of transparency, and open data, it has been recommended that Homeward Trust will keep weekly or monthly up to date statistics on its website in order for other organizations, the public, the media, etc to have access to the data collected by the winter warming projects. These statistics will be updated weekly or monthly by Homeward Trust staff with the data provided by the participating agencies.

Estimated Cost: \$ 50,000
Total Estimated Cost: \$1,000,000

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. We estimate a need of 100 mats x 50 days x \$30/mat.

Estimated Cost: \$ 250,000

Extreme Situation

Fortunately, the globe is in a post-pandemic state with the H1N1 flu virus. As such, there is no need to include an extreme situation plan for this year’s Winter Emergency. If an extreme situation does arise, we will prepare a separate plan to address the issue.

Estimated Cost: \$ unknown
Total Estimated Cost: \$250,000

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. Recommendations and the evaluation of last year's Winter Emergency Response provided by the committee have shaped the key elements of this plan.

It has been expressed that the committee may better serve as an advisory committee made up of members of the agencies, the homeless population, housing first teams to act as a coordination team to maintain awareness. This could include engaging homeless individuals to allow for the issues to be heard in their words, rather than through the committee. This would also serve as a place for organizations to share knowledge, lessons learned, and discuss their own experiences.

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:

- Boyle Street Community Services
- City of Edmonton
- Homeward Trust Edmonton
- Jasper Place Health & Wellness Centre
- Government of Alberta – Housing & Urban Affairs
- Salvation Army

Proposed Budget 2010/11

Activity	10/11 Budget	Proposed Funding Sources	
		HT	Province
		Other	
Shelter			
Transportation	\$ 225,000		\$ 225,000
Drop Ins/Warming			
Boyle Street Community Services Drop In	\$ 425,000		\$ 425,000
West End Drop In Centre	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	
South Side Drop In Centre	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	
North East Drop In Centre	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	
Coordination/Other	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	
Total	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 350,000	\$ 650,000
Carry over from previous funded WER			\$ (487,987)
Provincial Funding Request:			\$ 162,013

Contingency & Extreme Situation	10/11 Budget	Proposed funding sources	
		Other	Province
Contingency	\$ 250,000		\$ 250,000
Extreme Situation	unknown		
Total:	\$ 250,000		\$ 250,000