

2019-2020 Community Homeless Winter Emergency Response Summary Report

Purpose

This report summarizes and reflects on the *2019-2020 Community Homeless Winter Emergency Response*. Information about collective learnings from the response period and goals for the 2020-2021 collective response are highlighted.

Background

This was the first 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 18, 2019 - March 31, 2020.

A Task Force¹ consisting of municipal and community members was assembled in July 2019 with the goal of developing a collaborative plan by November 2019 to support unsheltered individuals during extreme cold weather. The City of Spruce Grove was the convener, and Community Social Development took the lead as Chair.

The Task Force completed a gap analysis and resource scan to identify the number of people at risk of exposure and service provider capacity. Through the Tri-Region Housing and Services Estimation and service provider data, the Task Force estimated that approximately 10-15 individuals are unsheltered and at high risk in extreme cold weather. While evenings and weekends were identified as a gap in local homeless-serving supports and services, it was determined that a response would not fill this gap due to capacity considerations of the organizations creating and implementing the response.

The work of the Task Force completed in November 2019, with several members shifting roles and responsibilities as outlined in the *Community of Spruce Grove Homeless Winter Emergency Response*.

Participants/Members

City of Spruce Grove (Community Social Development and Protective Services)
Neighbourlink Parkland
Engage Church
Spruce Grove Community Church
Pay Forward Kindness (PFK)

¹ The term "Task Force", in this context, is used to describe bringing a group of people together for a defined period of time to accomplish a definitive objective or solve a problem. This is not a task force as per City of Spruce Grove Policy #5015.

Tri-Leisure Centre
Primary Care Network (PCN)
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)

2019-2020 Response Summary

Organizations committed to specific roles necessary to enact a plan including monitoring, issuing alert, outreach, distribution of warming kits, transportation, and hosting a warming location. This collective effort demonstrated strong collaborative action and accountability. Continued collaboration towards a shared vision is essential. The individuals and organizations that are part of this committee have strengthened as a collaborative. Partners are committed to continuing collective work in the 2020-2021 winter season and building on the lessons learned from the first year of implementation.

Analysis of the 2019-2020 response

The cold weather threshold, monitored daily, was set at -30 including wind-chill for a 24 hour period from November 18, 2019 until Monday February 10, 2020. On Feb. 10, the WER committee had a mid-term evaluation meeting to review and make any changes for the remainder of the season. The committee decided to reduce the threshold to -25 including wind-chill for a 24 hour period. This was the threshold from Feb. 10, 2020 - March 31, 2020 (the remainder of the season). The weather reached the cold weather threshold on April 1, 2020. Since the response plan ended on March 31, 2020, the response was not activated on April 1, 2020. The dates of the response will be reviewed for the 2020-2021 year.

There were three activations of the 2019-2020 WER alert, totalling 12 days. No activations were in place at the same time as the public health orders for COVID-19. During these twelve days of activation, Protective Services completed Cold Weather Patrols and had eleven interactions with unsheltered individuals. The officers referred individuals to the Winter Emergency Response when activated as well as to Spruce Grove FCSS. Even with cold weather patrols, many unsheltered try not to expose their encampment to enforcement, and the contacts were limited.

Resource Analysis:

The cold weather kits were created to help reduce cold weather risk, even when the response was not active. Neighbourlink Parkland assembled fifty cold weather kits with essential items. These kits were distributed through the Spruce Grove Public Library, Spruce Grove Community Church, City of Spruce Grove Enforcement Services, and Neighbourlink Parkland.

The Engage Bus and Neighbourlink Parkland provided options for transportation for individuals that may need to get to various locations, such as warming locations, within the City. The committee will explore alternatives, including easier to deploy options, for the 2020-2021 response.

Individuals experiencing homelessness did not access the warming location at the Spruce Grove Community Church when the response was active. The Spruce Grove Public Library was a daytime

warming location. Since any resident can go to the Library as a patron, it is difficult to collect specific data about who was using the Library as a warming location or for the Library services.

Vision for 2020-2021 WER

The committee started planning the 2020-2021 WER in May, 2020. The committee determined they will continue to focus on Spruce Grove for the 2020-2021 response recognizing that strengthening a WER in Spruce Grove benefits the entire Tri-Region.

For the 2020-2021 season, the goal is to scale up the response using the knowledge and capacity gained from the first year. The primary focus will be on options to reduce risk in evening and weekend hours and when other community locations are closed. To have the resources to achieve this, the committee will apply for grants and other possible funding sources to assist with the cost of the response. Some of the items identified as possible expenses include food, location rental, personal protective equipment (PPE), staffing, and cold weather items for the individuals using the response. Additionally, a large focus for the committee will be continuity planning and safety alignment with public health orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic and taking into consideration increased precautions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.