

## 2021-2022 Community Homeless Winter Emergency Response Summary Report

### Purpose

This report summarizes and reflects on the *2021-2022 Community Homeless Winter Emergency Response*.

### Background

For the third 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, 2021 – April 1, 2022.

### 2021-2022 Response Summary

The 2021-2022 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 12 hour period (overnight hours) from November 1, 2021 until April 1, 2022. The determined operating hours were 7 days a week between 11pm and 6am when the response is activated.

The Committee decided to hire a Late Night Café Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator which provided consistency, stability, and expertise within the Late Night Café structure. The Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator were 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.

The Committee was successful in receiving the Community Initiatives Program (CIP) grant from the Government of Alberta in the amount of \$14,950 to support WER. This was the primary revenue source for 2020-2022. Contributions from Community Service groups and other community donations accounted for remaining funds. These contributions supported one paid coordinator and one paid assistant coordinator.

### 2021-2022 WER Response by the numbers

- The Late Night Café was open for **31 nights** during the months of December, January, and February.
- There were **194 individuals** that used the Late Night Café with many of the individuals as repeat users. This increased from 125 individuals the previous year.
- **44 unique individuals** used the Late Night Café. This increased from 18 unique individuals in the previous year.
- There was an average of **6 guests** using the Late Night Café when open.

- **20 trained volunteers** were on the roster completing shifts at the Late Night Café with 16 volunteers consistently scheduled. Each time the Late Night Café was open, there were **3 - 7 volunteers** that were managed by the Late Night Café Coordinator through the Spruce Grove Community Church and the Congregational Christian Fellowship Church.
- There were **53 taxi trips** in the 2021-2022 season. This increased from 39 taxi trips in the previous year.

### **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:

- Able to increase service level between the 2020/21 response and the 2021/22 response by providing guests cots to rest on.
- Provided a service during night hours where there was an identified need.
- Acquired resources and identifying future resource needs.
- Increased role clarity between committee and operational roles.
- Identifying, addressing volunteer and coordinator burnout
- Developed a shared use agreement with the location of the Late Night Café.

The areas for growth of the response:

- Allow for a balance between consistency (hours and alerts) and flexibility (being responsive to needs)
- Volunteers would like to do more to help.
- The Committee recognized a need for clarity around the transportation needs and options.
- Guests would like to see the weather threshold lowered.

While the Winter Emergency Response is currently supporting the needs of the community it is not a long-term solution for unsheltered individuals in our community.

### **Impact in the Community**

*“The Winter Emergency Response for the unsheltered has become a great new option for Police officers at the Parkland Detachment. When the service is activated during extremely cold nights, it gives officers a local community option to take someone in need of a warm place to stay. This keeps those who live on the street and trying to simply survive, out of jail; and in many cases, out of the judicial system. People have committed offences during the extremely cold weather in an effort to get arrested so they have a warm place to sleep, and a chance to get a meal. With the Winter Emergency Response, those who take advantage of the service have a much better option than to resort to crime just to stay alive for the night. The service also gives them a chance to connect with others and perhaps find an option to get help and support that may apply to their specific needs, which could eventually get them off the streets.”* Parkland RCMP Committee Member

*"In the past year Spruce Grove has faced an undeniable increase in its the homeless population. As a member of the Winter Emergency Response program and a public hub, the Spruce Grove Public Library has seen an increase in use by vulnerable populations. We have been able to provide services to these individuals, whether it be as simple as providing them a warm shelter to safely rest during the day; to reference work, such as assisting someone with bus schedules, so he could make his way to an Edmonton homeless shelter for the night; to even having the privilege of assisting someone in their search for housing resources. Without the initiative and guidance of the Winter Emergency Response Program, these experiences may not have been as successful, or at the very least, may have gone relatively unnoticed."* Spruce Grove Public Library Committee Member

**Looking Forward: 2022-2023 Winter Emergency Response**

The committee is now planning for the 2022-2023 season.

The Winter Emergency Response Committee continues to develop and strives for continual improvement of the response to serve the community. In looking to the 2022-2023 response, the committee will continue to build trusting relationships and focus on communication and clarity around roles. The committee is evolving to continue respond effectively to growing community needs. Listening to the guest's feedback, the Committee will be reviewing the weather threshold and how this impacts activations and financial and human resources.

**Appendix 1 – 2021 – 2022 Committee Membership**

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

Saints Church Glory Hills

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