

## **VANCOUVER 2009-2010 EXTREME WEATHER RESPONSE PLAN**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This latest version of the Vancouver Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless represents an evolving strategy for coordinating the response in the Vancouver Community and overcoming challenges encountered in previous years. Expanding upon last year's plan, it documents the framework for extending resources to homeless persons to prevent hardship due to extreme (fall and winter) weather conditions.

The 2009-2010 Vancouver Extreme Weather Response has been developed through the involvement and efforts of the following organizations and people:

- Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy
- BC Housing
- City of Vancouver
- Lookout Emergency Aid Society
- 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue Alliance Church
- Covenant House
- East Vancouver Vineyard Church
- Evelyne Saller Centre
- First Baptist Church
- The Gathering Place
- Grandview Calvary Baptist Church
- St. James Community Service Society
- St. Mark's Extreme Weather Shelter
- The Salvation Army
- James Pratt, Regional EWR Coordinator
- Grant Gayman, Vancouver EWR Coordinator

### **2. THE CURRENT HOMELESSNESS SITUATION**

The most recent Metro Vancouver 24-Hour Homeless Count (conducted March 11, 2008) estimated that there were 765 sheltered homeless people and 811 street homeless people for a total of 1,576 homeless people in the City of Vancouver. This represents 59% of the Metro Vancouver homeless population. In addition, although the 2008 Homeless Count didn't report this figure, the 2005 Count estimated there were 44,205 people living in at-risk households in Vancouver (34% of all people living in at-risk households in the region). Those numbers were generally accepted as conservative estimates at the time, as they did not fully include those who slip through cracks in the social services system. There is every reason to believe that these numbers have increased to date. It is hoped that any data collected through this year's Extreme Weather Response Program will add to the overall knowledge of homelessness in Vancouver.

## **Regular Shelter Capacity**

There are currently 708 year-round hostel and shelter beds in the City of Vancouver. During fall and winter months (November 1 to March 31), an additional 50 Cold/Wet Weather mats become available, for a total of 758 beds/mats.

## **Homeless Emergency Action Team**

It must be recognized that while the number of year-round shelter beds increased dramatically by the conversion of provincially-funded Cold/Wet Weather beds, the total number of shelter beds available during the worst times of the year had not increased significantly despite the greatly-increased number of homeless individuals demonstrated by the 2005 and 2008 Homeless Counts. Perhaps to address this fact, the 2008-2009 season fortunately saw formation of the Homeless Emergency Action Team, a joint initiative of the City of Vancouver, the Province of BC and the Streethome Foundation. Under this initiative, five HEAT shelters were opened in various locations around the city's downtown core. Usually averaging over 400 persons each night, these facilities sheltered the increased number of homeless persons on Vancouver streets in a way EWR shelters were never intended to. Only three of these shelters (New Fountain, 201 Central and First United Church) are expected to operate during the 2009-2010 EWR season.

## **2008-2009 Extreme Weather Response**

Extreme Weather Alerts were issued for a total of 37 nights between December 12, 2008 and March 11, 2009. During this period the 11 Vancouver EWR sites provided a total of 2,149 bed nights of service. That figure included 1,919 men, 223 women, and 7 youth (under 19 years). Both the number of Alerts and the number of bed-nights represent a one-third increase over 2007-2008 figures. While the availability of the HEAT shelters, with their earlier opening and longer operating hours, greatly reduced the number of individuals accessing EWR shelters in the Downtown East Side, the average number of individuals sheltered in Vancouver EWR shelters each night of an Alert actually increased from the previous year (58 versus 57). This reflects an increased number of homeless persons in areas outside of the city core and an increased number of shelter openings in those neighbourhoods.

## **The Broader Homeless Population**

In addition to the homeless who seek shelter through the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance or through self-referral, there are those in the homeless population who do not seek admission into either year-round or cold/wet weather shelters. The desire to live outside of the formal shelter system stems from a varied and complex range of reasons including addictions, distrust of the social services system and government in general, and mental health issues, to name a few. While there is no clear estimate of the size of this broader homeless population, the Extreme Weather Response Plan must anticipate that many of these homeless persons will be forced to seek shelter when conditions worsen.

### 3. THE EXTREME WEATHER RESPONSE PLAN

The Extreme Weather Response Plan must meet the needs of a wide range of homeless people (e.g. men, women, youth, seniors, and families) in the community and be flexible enough to deal with a varying number of people. To meet these criteria, the Vancouver EWR Plan involves a range of options and levels of response.

#### **Extreme Weather Alerts**

In the past, Extreme Weather Alerts were called on a facility-by-facility basis. Since the 2006-07 season, calling an Extreme Weather Alert has been the responsibility of the Sub-Regional EWR Coordinator following consultation, whenever possible, with members of the Vancouver EWR Community Committee

An Alert will be called when weather conditions are deemed **severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless persons**. Factors taken into account include:

- Temperatures near zero with rainfall that makes it difficult or impossible for homeless people to remain dry; and/or
- Sleet/freezing rain; and/or
- Snow accumulation; and/or
- Sustained high winds; and/or
- Temperatures at or below -2 degrees Celsius.

Feedback from clientele of the various facilities may also be considered.

The sub-regional coordinator is also responsible, again following consultation with members of the Committee, to decide which facility or facilities will be open on a given night. It is most likely that not all extreme weather facilities with capacity to open will do so on the same night. This will allow for rotation of which facilities are open which nights in case of an extended period of Extreme Weather.

#### **Vancouver Extreme Weather Shelters**

During extreme weather the following facilities may be opened:

- **10<sup>th</sup> Avenue Alliance Church** (10<sup>th</sup> & Ontario)  
Can accommodate up to 25 people. Open 10:00 pm to 7:00 am.  
Contact: Julie Linden – 604-876-2181
- **Covenant House** (575 Drake St)  
Will provide overnight accommodation on cots for up to 12 youths (16-22 yrs).  
Registration between 9:00 and 11:00 pm. An evening hot meal and breakfast are provided.  
Contact: On-shift Team Leader: 604-685-7474
- **East Vancouver Vineyard Church** (1648 E 1<sup>st</sup> Ave)  
The shelter operates Tuesday and Wednesday evenings (and perhaps more) out of the Salvation Army building; access is through side entrance to lower level. Pillows, blankets and sleeping mats are provided for up to 40 people; a light meal or snacks at

night; a hot breakfast in the morning. Hours are between 10:00 pm and 8:00 am; carts are secured in a locked, covered outside shelter.

Contacts: Dave Titley (778-686-8817) and Mark Perry (778-968-2121)

- **Evelyne Saller Centre** (320 Alexander Street)  
During extreme weather the centre opens between midnight and 7:00 am. The Centre can accommodate up to 40 people. People are provided with a blanket for the night and they receive a light snack before going to sleep and coffee, toast and jam in the morning.  
Contacts: Alex Chisholm and Jacques Masse: 604-665-3075
- **First Baptist Church** (969 Burrard St)  
During extreme weather the facility opens between 10:00 pm and 7:00 am. Up to 35 people can be sheltered in the gym. People are provided with blankets and mats to sleep on and food and beverages are provided in the evening and in the morning.  
Contacts: Brad Steyn and Robert Marwick: 604-683-8441
- **The Gathering Place** (609 Helmken St)  
During extreme weather the facility opens between midnight and 7:00 am. Up to 40 people can be sheltered in the theatre space at the facility. People are provided with blankets and mats to sleep on and food and beverages are provided in the evening and in the morning.  
Contacts: Jennifer Standeven and Jo-Ann Stevens: 604-665-2391
- **Grandview Calvary Baptist Church** (1803 East 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue)  
Their “Out of the Cold” program offers a meal at 6:30 pm on Thursday nights followed by an overnight shelter for up to 35 people with breakfast in the morning. On Friday evenings (starting Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>), the shelter opens at 10:00 pm; breakfast is provided in the morning.  
Contact: Geordan Hankinson: 604-255-1411
- **Powell Place** (329a Powell St.)  
St. James Community Service Society operates 6 beds for women, open from 11:30 pm to 7:30 am. A meal is provided upon intake and a light breakfast or “take-away” breakfast is given in the morning.  
Administrative contact: Trudi Shymka: 604-606-0355; Shelter: 604-606-0403
- **St. Mark’s Extreme Weather Shelter** (1805 Larch St)  
Operating from St. Mark’s Anglican Church, this facility can accommodate up to 25 people. Opens at 9:30 pm -- Intake closes at 11:00 pm. Hot meal on intake. Carts stored inside.  
Shelter Telephone (after 9:15 pm): 778-990-1401
- **The Salvation Army Belkin House** (555 Homer St.)  
Can accommodate 15 men and 5 women. Opens after other shelters full after 11:00 pm. Breakfast is served at 7:30 am.  
Contact: Rebecca Bell: 604-694-6646
- **The Salvation Army Harbour Light** (119 East Cordova St.)  
Can accommodate up to 50 people. People receive mats, pillows and blankets. Coffee and a snack are provided in the morning. This shelter will only open if there is sufficient overflow from Harbour Light’s year-round and CWW shelters.  
Contact: Grant Gayman: 604-646-6847

## **Outreach**

**Lookout Emergency Aid Society** has an outreach team that works in the community and publicizes any extreme weather response.

## **Notification**

In addition to service providers, outreach workers and BC Housing, a wide range of drop-in centres, community centres, health centres and government and service agencies will be notified when Alerts are called and of the names and addresses of facilities that will be open.

## **Media Inquiries**

Extreme Weather facilities are encouraged to direct **all** media enquiries to James Pratt, Regional EWR Coordinator, @ 250-858-1001 ([james@prattconsulting.ca](mailto:james@prattconsulting.ca)).  
Alternatively: Grant Gayman, Vancouver EWR Coordinator @ 604-250-3138 ([mggayman@telus.net](mailto:mggayman@telus.net)).

## **Timeframe**

The extreme weather response can be implemented whenever Alert criteria is met. It is anticipated that Alerts will be issued intermittently and for varying lengths during the fall, winter and early spring as weather conditions and need dictate. Last year, Alerts were declared on 26 consecutive nights between December 12<sup>th</sup> and January 6<sup>th</sup>, an unprecedented stretch of extreme weather. Six or more shelters were open on 22 of those nights. Staff and volunteers at all shelters deserve commendation for their dedication (and stamina)!

## **Deactivation**

Each EWR facility is encouraged to have a pre-determined plan on how and when they will close. Some facilities in Vancouver have a one or two-day closing process to give their clientele some warning and time to make other arrangements. Facilities are encouraged to inform the Vancouver EWR Coordinator of their plans to close and the reasons for closing as these decisions are made so he can inform other EWR partners as necessary.

It is understood that due to different micro-climates and different levels of on-going services for homeless people in different neighbourhoods within Vancouver, some EWR facilities may remain open after others have closed.

## **Evaluation & Plan Revision**

This plan has been developed for Vancouver's 2009-2010 EWR season. It is anticipated that following March 31, 2010 the Vancouver EWR Community Committee will

reconvene to assess the implementation of the plan over the season and to consider future amendments.

To assist with the evaluation process, EWR facilities will collect and submit usage data to BC Housing on a daily basis following each EWR opening.