

North Shore Extreme Weather Response Plan 2011-2012

Prepared Oct 28, 2011

1. Introduction

The North Shore Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless sets the framework for expanding resources for homeless persons during the winter months to prevent hardships due to extreme winter weather conditions.

The North Shore Extreme Weather Response Committee has spearheaded the development of the Extreme Weather Response. The Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (previously the Cold Wet Weather), through funding from the Federal Government's Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative, had provided assistance with the planning and implementation process. BC Housing now funds the Extreme Weather Response. In November 2009, the Assistance to Shelter Act became law in BC, enabling the local police to transport homeless individuals to shelter during extreme weather. The community members involved in the North Shore Extreme Weather Response represent a partnership between a broad array of organizations and represent the North Shore Homelessness Task Force.

EWR Committee members for 2011-2012 include:

- Lookout Emergency Aid Society
- North Shore Neighbourhood House
- Hollyburn Family Services Society
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- North Shore Salvation Army
- North Vancouver RCMP
- City of North Vancouver
- District of North Vancouver

2. The Current Homelessness Situation

As elsewhere in the Lower Mainland and throughout Canada, the North Shore community has a portion of their population sleeping in local parks, under bridges or other places conducive to sleeping rough. While long unrecognized on the North Shore, in the mid 1990's the absolute homeless became more visible, leading all three municipalities, the health authority, local service providers, police, government representatives, residents, faith community and service clubs to cooperatively develop local responses. The North Shore Task Force on Homelessness initiated research in 1999 and over a nine month period, found 82 individuals living on the North Shore who were absolute homeless. This led to the establishment of a youth safe house, adult emergency shelter with transitional housing and a coordinated response to local homeless issues.

The Homeless Count

It continues to be difficult to obtain an accurate count of the homeless population on the North Shore and in the Region. In an effort to understand the need, Metro Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness has undertaken four Homeless Counts at three year intervals. Homeless Counts help provide the most accurate numbers, although it is important to note that given that counts are at a single point in time and with only known areas surveyed, counts underestimate the number of homeless people.

The last North Shore count occurred in March 2011, at the same time as the other Metro Vancouver municipalities. The results of this count showed that the number of homeless people across Metro Vancouver has remained largely the same since the 2008 Homeless Count, and the North Shore findings are consistent with this. The exception is a considerable rise of homeless youth on the North Shore, with an almost 40% increase from 2008. This highlights the critical need not only for an extreme weather response plan on the North Shore, but the importance of a partnership including the North Shore Youth Safe House. The homeless count figure is widely understood to be a significant undercount,, with some services identifying as many as 300 homeless people on the North Shore (*The Vancouver Sun*, July 10, 2011).

In addition to the North Shore homeless who seek shelter in other municipalities in the Lower Mainland (primarily Vancouver), there are those in the homeless population who do not seek admission into shelters. There are many areas on the North Shore where the homeless will sleep outdoors, such as in parks, under bridges, in private garages, and in cardboard recycling dumpsters. The homeless frequently mention couch surfing with friends or family.

Homeless Shelters and Services on the North Shore

At present, there is one shelter for adult men and women on the North Shore, The North Shore Housing Centre (operated by Lookout Emergency Aid Society). The shelter has the capacity for 45 year-round beds. SAGE Transition House (operated by North Shore Crisis Services Society) has room for 18 women and their children each night for women and their children specifically fleeing abuse. The North Shore Youth Safe House (operated by Hollyburn Family Services) has a 4 bed capacity for 13-18 year olds.

There are not many services providing support to the homeless or persons living on low income on the North Shore. There is no local full-service food bank, 7 day-a-week drop in centre, or 7 day-a-week free food services on the North Shore. Although a number of community agencies and faith organizations operate food programs (food is available at various centres almost seven days a week), food hamper programs, distribute food vouchers and the Greater Vancouver Food Bank delivers foods once a week through the North Shore Neighbourhood House. The Harvest Project provides food hampers to those trying to improve their situation. Their recent location move, however, has impacted access.

Free clothing is available at a number of locations including: Harvest Project, North Shore Crisis Services Society, North Shore Shelter and the Salvation Army. North Shore Crisis Services Society operates the Good Stuff Connection and supplies clothing vouchers to other services. A shower program is run through Harry Jerome Recreation Centre Saturday mornings for unsheltered homeless.

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 including individuals who may be coping with challenging issues such as mental illness, addictions and other health issues. To meet these criteria, the following response has been developed.

Extreme Weather Alert

Extreme weather is defined, as conditions deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless persons such as:

- Temperatures at or below 0 degrees Celsius; OR +2° with wind chill
- Significant snow accumulation; OR
- Freezing rain; OR
- Combination of low temperatures at or below 4° with three or more consecutive days of rain

Temperature 'triggers' are not absolute and are flexible to other weather conditions.

On the North Shore, due to the geography of the area, extreme conditions may mean that the alert is enacted when other Metro Vancouver areas may not be facing extreme conditions.

Timeframe

The extreme weather response is implemented:

- Between October 15 and March 31 or whenever extreme weather occurs
- Intermittently during this period as weather conditions determine need
- When regular local shelter beds are not available to fill the need

Hours of Operation

- North Shore Shelter, Sage House and the Youth Safe House will provide services on a 24-hour basis.
- 2nd stage (overflow) Extreme Weather night-time shelter opens between 8:00 pm and 8:00 am.

Activation Team/ local coordinators

The following people, or their designate will decide when to call an extreme weather alert. Two people will jointly make the determination based on local weather reports and the perceived need for shelter space in the community. They, or their designated alternates, must be available on a 24 hr/7 day-a-week basis to call an alert. Where two people are not available to jointly make the call, the person available shall do so.

Any two of the following agencies will confer on the call for activation:

- 1) Masami Tomioka -- (alternate - Al Mitchell (to November 21)), North Shore Housing Centre – Lookout Emergency Aid Society
- 2) Paul Butler, Youth Safe House – Hollyburn Family Services
- 3) Cheryl McBride, North Shore Neighbourhood House

A list of duties and responsibilities for local coordinators is attached to the plan.

Assistance to Shelter Act

Once an Extreme Weather Response is called by the Extreme Weather Activation Team, for the duration of the EWR, members of the RCMP have the authority to assist homeless individuals found on the street to a shelter by providing transportation.

Notification

The table in the appendix list the parties that will, at a minimum, be notified in the event of an Extreme Weather Alert. The purpose of the notification is to raise awareness of the severity of the weather and the potential impacts to the homeless and to provide information about the additional shelter and outreach that is being offered during the alert. These organizations will also receive information about how to get access to donated winter clothing and blankets, which can be provided to homeless clients on an as needed basis. It is expected that all contacted agencies will ensure that their staff and clientele are made aware of this situation and resources.

The EWR Work Group is responsible for regularly updating the Notification List. Lookout Emergency Aid Society has agreed to distribute the notifications by fax and/or email. Outreach to the street homeless will be offered by Lookout Emergency Aid Society, the Salvation Army and Canadian Mental Health Association.

The RCMP headquarters notification is to follow the requirements and language as outlined by BC Housing and in the Assistance to Shelter Act. It is to also request confirmation that the email has been received and that the RCMP have activated their authorities to assist persons at risk due to extreme weather.

Media Inquiries

For local / North Shore media enquiries, the North Shore EWR Coordinator will act as the spokesperson for the North Shore Extreme Weather Response. All regional media inquiries will be re-directed to the Regional EWR Coordinator, James Pratt 1-250-920-7826 or 1-250-858-1001.

BC Housing will offer media support in case of major media interest (e.g. if a controversial issue develops), or should it become necessary to coordinate media response between communities. Sam Rainboth, Senior Manager, Public Affairs, BC Housing Corporate Communications, is available to advise the Coordinator.

The Response

When an extreme weather alert is called, the following responses will be activated:

1. The North Shore EWR Coordinator Masami Tomioka (alternate - Al Mitchell (to November 21)) will co-ordinate the response and sends out email/fax notification by 11 a.m. of the day of the response. The alternate for notifications is Karen O'Shannacery.
2. The North Shore Shelter will act as the triage area and the primary response site. North Shore Shelter staff will link with the other local shelter providers (Sage House and North Shore Youth Safe House) to determine their ability to house youth, women, or women with children during the Extreme Weather alert.
3. The North Shore Shelter will be responsible for ensuring supplies and materials are on-hand to provide the response including: mats, bedding, pillows, first aid supplies, etc. Clothing will be available and distributed freely as available through donations.
4. Adult men and women (over 18) will be housed on mats on the main floor lounge of the North Shore Shelter. Where possible, individuals will be transferred to regular shelter beds with priority towards women and individuals with special needs. The number of mats that will be available is 20.
5. Overflow back-up sheltering site will be the North Shore Neighbourhood House at 225 East 2nd street. The North Shore Shelter will arrange for all supplies and mats to be on hand at the Neighbourhood House.
6. Women with children will be referred to SAGE Transition House. Single women that are inappropriate for the North Shore Shelter will also be referred.
7. Youth will be referred to the Youth Safe House.
8. Extreme Weather Shelter users, wherever possible, shall be integrated into the regular shelter services provided through extreme weather suppliers: e.g. extreme weather shelter users shall have, where available, access to free phone, computers, showers, laundry, etc.
9. Dinners, snacks and breakfasts will be available at all sheltering locations.

10. Staff from North Shore Shelter will provide staffing throughout the hours the response is in place - supported by trained volunteers. SAGE Transition House and the Youth Safe House will provide their own staffing for their facilities.
11. The Extreme Weather Committee will endeavour to train volunteers through the Regional Extreme Weather Response or services providing to the needs of the homeless.
12. North Shore Crisis Services Society will provide assistance with transportation from Lookout Emergency Shelter or other North Shore location to SAGE Transition House for women and children who are referred to SAGE Transition House during extreme weather conditions. The North Shore Shelter will provide transportation assistance for those being referred to the back up site, i.e. North Shore Neighbourhood House.
13. Extreme Weather resources will keep statistics on the provision of extreme weather service including numbers of shelter spaces available, number shelter spaces used on each night open, gender, any service turnaways and reasons for such. Lookout will compile and submit these statistics to BC Housing each morning of the response.

Deactivation

The North Shore Extreme Weather Response will be deactivated when other beds are available. It shall also be deactivated when the weather is forecasted to remain above 0 degrees Celsius and/or when the weather no longer represents a substantial threat to the life of homeless people on the North Shore. The decision to maintain the response or deactivate will be re-evaluated daily.

The homeless using EWR resources shall be notified prior to leaving the EWR whether the EWR is deactivated for that day.

Lookout Emergency Aid Society will be responsible to distribute the deactivation notice following the notification procedure above and will post closure notices on the EWR doors.

4. Evaluation & Plan Revision

This plan has been developed for the 2011/2012 winter period. Before March 31, 2012, the North Shore Extreme Response Committee will reconvene to assess the implementation of the plan and to amend it as required. As part of the evaluation procedure, data collected by the organizations involved in the response will be collated and submitted to the BC Housing each morning of the response. Regular reports will be provided to the North Shore Task Force on Homelessness.

North Shore Extreme Weather Response Plan
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TO BE UPDATED AND REPLACED

NOTIFICATION LIST:

As stated above, the intent is to notify all groups that provide after-hour service as well as all organizations providing services to the homeless when an extreme weather opening is occurring. The following list may not be inclusive, but provides guidance for the notification.

Organization	Name
GVSS EWR Regional Coordinator	James Pratt
North Shore Emergency Program	TBA
RCMP	RCMP "E" HQ OCC
BC Ambulance Service	Dispatch
<i>Lions Gate Hospital</i>	on duty staff
Emergency ward	on duty staff
Psychiatric nurses	on duty staff
<i>BC Housing</i>	Sheila Matthews Roberta Randall Fergus McCann Homelessness Services Dominic Flanagan Bruk Melles
Minister of Housing & Social Development	Ministry Paul Woolley Maryann Anderson
<i>City of North Vancouver</i>	
Community Development	Lisa McCarthy
Library	on duty staff
North Vanc Recreation Commission	on duty staff
City Fire & Rescue	Dispatch
<i>District of North Vancouver</i>	on duty staff
Fire Rescue	Dispatch
Parks	on duty staff
Recreation	on duty staff
By-Law department	on duty staff
Social Planning	Phil Chapman
Library	Chief Librarian

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Organization	Name
<i>District of West Vancouver</i>	on duty staff
Fire Rescue	Christa Rutherford
Parks & Community Services	on duty staff
Parks & Community Services	Anne Mooi
Alano Club of NS	on duty staff
Avalon Womens Centre	Monica Morten
BC Schizophrenia Society	Marguerite Hardin
Bridge Community Church	Rev. Brian Lindquist
Capilano Community Services Society	Miki Nash
Chamber of Commerce	email/fax info
Churches – youth Pastors	Dave Sattler
Community Corrections	Rob Gregoire
Community Psychiatric Services	on duty staff
Co-Pro	Barbara Davies
Crisis Intervention Serv - RCMP	Linda Thorp/duty officer
Family Services NS	on duty staff
Harvest Project	On duty staff
Hollyburn Family Services Society	Alan Kwinter/Paul Butler
John Braithwaite Community Centre	Richard Gauntlett Mary McSween
Lookout Emergency Aid Society	Masami Tomioka Al Mitchell Karen O'Shannacery Yukon Shelter Cliff Outreach New Westminster Shelter Downtown Shelter North Shore Shelter
MSD Intake & Family Services	Terry Leiko (team leader)
Mental Health Services	on duty staff
<i>Ministry of Social Development</i>	on duty staff
After Hours (evenings & weekends)	On duty staff
Native Courtworker & Counseling Assoc	on duty staff
North Lonsdale United Church	Rev. Robin Jacobson

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Organization	Name
North Shore Community Resources	Li Boesen Elaine Smith
North Shore Neighbourhood House	Tricia Andrew
North Shore Crisis Services	
North Shore Family Services	Sue Bauman
North Shore Geriatric Outreach Pgm	Jaqueline Darguzas (admin)
North Shore Homeless Task Force	Chief Medical Health Officer and Chair Sandra Edelman
North Shore Neighbourhood House	Don Rutherford
North Shore Shelter	on duty staff
Parkgate Community Serv Society	Arleta Beckett
RCMP	Watch Commander
RCMP Crisis Intervention Unit	Linda
Ron Andrews Community Centre	Trish Holme
SAGE House	on duty staff
Salvation Army	Peter Defehr
Services to Seniors Coalition	Tom Carney
So-Sah-Latch Centre	on duty staff
Squamish Ntn crisis line Healing & Wellness	On Duty staff
St. John's Anglican Church	Dan Meeks
Vancouver Coastal Health – NS	Sarie Peters
West Coast Alternatives Society	on duty staff