



Greater Vancouver Extreme Weather Response Report and Evaluation of the 2005 - 2006 Year

and

Final Evaluation for SCPI Funding 2003 - 2006

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For: Greater Vancouver Cold/Wet Weather Strategy

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Every year of Extreme Weather Response is made possible only by the commitment and hours of work (much of which is volunteer) of literally hundreds of community volunteers across Greater Vancouver. It is impossible to name all of these volunteers, however, it is still important to express our thanks and appreciation. Their dedication and nights of lost sleep help keep hundreds of people across this region safe in times of cold weather.

In addition to those who work at the sheltering sites, there are between 6 and 15 people in each community who spend hours planning and preparing for the Extreme Weather Response in their communities. Many do this off the side of their desk because of their commitment to helping some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Their commitment helps ensure the responses are as smooth and coordinated as possible. They also provide invaluable community perspective to ensure the response meets the needs of the people who are homeless in their community.

All of this was made possible this year with additional funding from BC Housing who provided operational funding for communities without other sources of funding and for responses beyond the 5 days available in communities with funding from the National Homelessness Initiative. The staff at BC Housing took on this funding portfolio mere weeks before the cold weather began. Despite the pressure and complexity of this new funding program, they were a joy to work with and demonstrated incredible flexibility.

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The Task Group also provide support and Guidance to the three consultants who worked on this project: Michelle Ninow (pilot project and 2003/2004), Annie McKittrick (2004/2005) and Michael Anhorn (2005/2006).

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Objectives

2005/2006 was the third season of implementation for the Greater Vancouver Cold/Wet Weather Strategy (CWWS) Extreme Weather Response (EWR) program. It was also the final year of the 3-year funding received through the Supporting Community Partnership Initiatives (SCPI) of the National Homelessness Initiative. This is the third evaluation of the Extreme Weather Response program in Greater Vancouver. This year's report includes information from communities beyond the original five communities in the original EWR program.

The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the program in its third year of operation and to make recommendations for the future needs of both the local EWRs across Greater Vancouver and the regional coordination that has been provided through the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy.

The evaluation has four objectives as follows:

1. To provide an overview of the EWR Program in 2005 – 2006
2. To identify inputs, outputs and outcomes
3. To analyze strengths and challenges faced by the EWR program, and
4. To report on progress towards financial sustainability and make recommendations on final steps to secure financial sustainability of EWRs across Greater Vancouver.

1.2 Scope

This evaluation covers the period from August 21, 2005 when the current Extreme Weather Response Coordinator was contracted to March 31, 2006. Analysis of the strengths and challenges provides quantitative and qualitative information to inform program planning and negotiations with potential funders in subsequent seasons.

1.3 Methodology

The evaluator developed the design of this study in consultation with members of the Extreme Weather Task Group. Research methods were designed to be consistent with the objectives stated above.

The consultant used various data sources in the preparation of this report including the following:

- CWWS documents including meeting minutes
- Service statistics
- Ongoing feedback from local and regional EWR organizers
- Planning and evaluation meetings with local EWR organizers
- Meetings with EWR funders
- 5 responses from EWR organizers to an on-line survey

2.0 OVERVIEW OF EXTREME WEATHER RESPONSE IN GREATER VANCOUVER

2.1 Background

Grassroots, informal, extreme weather responses began in Vancouver many years ago. For the most part, it was individual agencies responding to people standing and lying outside their doors on the coldest of winter nights. Over the years the City of Vancouver joined in and the ability to offer extra sheltering sites during cold snaps was noticed in other communities across Greater Vancouver.

EWR plans were developed for Surrey, Langley, Richmond and New Westminster in 2003 and Vancouver's response was documented. These plans set the framework for expanding community resources for homeless persons during the winter months to prevent hardships due to extreme winter weather conditions.

In Richmond, Surrey, Langley, and New Westminster the EWR Plans were developed by local steering committees. The community members involved in this planning process represented a broad array of organizations and agencies. The Cold/Wet Weather Strategy, through funding from the Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative, provided assistance with the planning process. In Vancouver the plan reflected the EWR that was already being implemented, primarily through funding from the then Ministry of Human Resources.

In 2004 – 2005, the second year of operation, Richmond, Surrey, Langley and New Westminster continued to fine tune their plans and all five communities implemented their plans. In addition, planning was begun on the North Shore and Tri-Cities (Port Coquitlam, Coquitlam, and Port Moody) and discussions began in Burnaby.

This past year (2005 – 2006) saw implementation of the North Shore's EWR Plan and both Burnaby and the Tri-Cities finalized all aspects of their plan except for one item. Burnaby continues to search for an appropriate site and the Tri-Cities require an organization that can supervise and schedule staff for their EWR Shelter.

2.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Program

The overall purpose of the EWR is to protect homeless people in Greater Vancouver from contracting a critical illness, becoming hypothermic or dying due to exposure to extreme winter weather.

According to the SCPI funding proposal, the objectives of the project are to:

1. Provide safe and adequate temporary extreme weather shelter for up to 190 homeless people (in Surrey, Richmond, New Westminster and Langley) per night during periods of extreme winter weather;

2. Provide outreach in Surrey, Richmond, New Westminster, and Langley (warm food, winter clothing and blankets) during extreme weather to those living rough who do not want to use emergency shelters;
3. Co-ordinate community based co-operative approaches for all aspects of the EWR including meal provision, shelter, transportation, and communication;
4. Coordinate communication among communities implementing EWR;
5. Foster increased public awareness about homelessness in the Greater Vancouver and the potential impacts of extreme weather on the homeless;
6. Develop trained volunteers to support the EWR; and,
7. Increase the response's sustainability by securing ongoing funding.

The following will be among the indicators of success used to monitor this project:

- The communities will implement their EWR plans as the weather requires in a safe and effective manner;
- Homeless people in the EWR communities requiring shelter will receive it during extreme weather; and,
- Information about the extreme weather alert within the communities will be circulated quickly and effectively – homeless people will know when there is alert and what resources are available to them

2.3 Program Logic Model

The following logic model chart shows inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes for the EWR.

| | |
|------------|---|
| Inputs | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding provided by the Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative and BC Housing. 2. Planning time given by staff and volunteers from non-profit service agencies, faith groups, municipalities and others. 3. Community donations from individuals, corporations, service clubs, faith groups and others. 4. In-kind contributions, including facility space, food, blankets, winter clothing, hygiene kits, and volunteer time. |
| Activities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development and Revision of EWR Plans. 2. EWR Volunteer Training. 3. EWR implementation during periods of extreme weather. 4. Response tracking. 5. Media Relations. 6. Communication between different EWR Communities. 7. Communication with funders. |
| Outputs | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of EWR bed nights provided. 2. Number of nights EWR shelters were available. 3. Number of clients reached by outreach teams. |
| Outcomes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved access to emergency shelter during extreme weather. 2. Reduced risk during extreme weather. 3. Improved co-ordination of sheltering services during extreme weather. 4. Improved understanding of local and regional needs during extreme weather. 5. Increased public awareness of homelessness and extreme weather. |

2.4 Activities

This year extreme weather occurred during three different periods of time (end of November, middle of February and beginning of March) and there were 15 nights where one or more communities implemented their EWR Plan. At the beginning of the season, BC Housing confirmed that the Province of British Columbia would continue to provide funding for EWRs that were outside of the scope of the funding received from SCPI. This allowed communities to respond to the needs of homeless people without the pressure of securing private donations.

This year EWR providers in Vancouver (including the Aboriginal Extreme Weather Response) gathered for a planning meeting in the fall and reconvened in December to address some concerns that had been raised in the media in response to a homeless man who died during a cold snap. The planning meeting in the fall represented a huge step forward toward closer communication and coordination of EWR Shelters in Vancouver. A significant amount of work remains to be done to build an integrated and well coordinated response in Vancouver, however, the importance of the work done this year can not be underestimated.

The Tri-Cities completed their EWR Plan and secured all resources they need to implement it except for an organization to supervise and schedule staff during an Extreme Weather Alert. There is no emergency shelter for homeless people in the Tri-Cities and so it has been difficult to find an organization with the expertise and capacity to take on this task.

Burnaby also completed their EWR Plan and even implemented their response for one night this season. Unfortunately the location of the EWR Shelter proved to be inaccessible to homeless people and so they are now looking for a more conveniently located facility.

Additional EWR Coordinator activities included:

- Managing media relations (press releases, interviews for print, radio and television)
- Updating media information
- Liaising with BC Housing
- Collection of EWR data
- Updating the EWR Planning Guide
- Developing a EWR Volunteer Training Guide (based on Surrey's EWR Volunteer Training Guide)
- Attending local Extreme Weather Response planning meetings in all EWR communities
- Providing administrative support to the local EWRs (especially in updating their EWR Plans)
- Preparing to report at and attending Extreme Weather Response Task Group meetings
- Evaluation of the 2005 – 2006 year and the three years of SCPI funding.

3.0 SERVICE STATISTICS (OUTPUTS)

3.1 Burnaby

There were two nights of Extreme Weather Response in Burnaby this year. Unfortunately, a combination of the location of the sheltering site and too short of notice for outreach workers to disseminate information to homeless people resulted in no people staying in the EWR shelter. The local EWR planning group, however, learned very valuable lessons regarding the location of shelter sites that they are now using in their search for an appropriate site.

3.2 Langley

Langley issued Extreme Weather Alerts for 9 nights. They sheltered an average of 7 people per night. The vast majority of people sheltered were men. At most, there was one woman on any given night.

| Date | 29/11/05 | 02/12/05 | 03/12/05 | 04/12/05 | 14/12/05 | 15/12/05 | 16/02/06 | 17/02/06 | 18/02/06 |
|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Southgate | 1 | 4 | 7 | n/o | 7 | n/o | 7 | 10 | 11 |
| Brookwood | n/o | 6 | n/o | 8 | n/o | 0 | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Total | 1 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 10 | 11 |

n/o = Shelter was not open

3.3 New Westminster

New Westminster issued Extreme Weather Alerts for 18 nights. They sheltered an average of 19 people per night. As in Langley, the vast majority sheltered were men. The largest number of woman sheltered on any given Extreme Weather night was 2.

In addition, New Westminster opened the Salvation Army Extreme Weather Shelter as “warming and drying” centres on Wednesdays and Saturdays from the middle of December until the end of February. This “warming and drying” shelter was open for 17 nights and sheltered an average of 17 people per night. Detail statistics are not reported for the warming and drying nights as those nights are outside the scope of the Extreme Weather Response program though they do seem to have provided a good and needed service in New Westminster.

| Date | 29/11/05 | 01/12/05 | 03/12/05 | 04/12/05 | 06/12/05 | 12/12/05 | 13/12/05 | 14/12/05 | 15/12/05 |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Salvation Army | 14 | 7 | 18 | 23 | 12 | 16 | 20 | 15 | 25 |
| Purpose (Youth) | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Total | 14 | 7 | 18 | 23 | 12 | 16 | 20 | 15 | 25 |

| Date | 16/12/05 | 17/12/05 | 18/12/05 | 14/02/06 | 15/02/06 | 16/02/06 | 17/02/06 | 18/02/06 | 19/02/06 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Salvation Army | 23 | 22 | 29 | 12 | 19 | 22 | 18 | 28 | 23 |
| Purpose (Youth) | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Total | 23 | 22 | 29 | 12 | 19 | 22 | 18 | 28 | 23 |

n/a – No statistics were received

3.4 North Shore

The North Shore EWR issued Extreme Weather Alerts for 14 nights and provided 71 bed nights of shelter. The sheltered an average of 5 people per night, all of whom were men. While the North Shore EWR Plan has provisions for an over-flow shelter, they did not need to open it this year.

| Date | 29/11/05 | 30/11/05 | 02/12/05 | 03/12/05 | 04/12/05 | 05/12/05 | 15/12/05 | 16/12/05 | 17/12/05 |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Lookout | 4 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 7 |
| Total | 4 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 7 |

| Date | 18/12/05 | 16/02/06 | 18/02/06 | 19/02/06 | 20/02/06 |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Lookout | 6 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Total | 6 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

3.5 Richmond

Unfortunately the Richmond EWR did not function this year. There was staff turn over at both the Salvation Army and the City of Richmond that lead to a loss in leadership for the EWR planning group in Richmond. Combine this loss in leadership with low usage statistics in the previous two years and it proved to be too much to keep this EWR function. A significant amount of development work will be needed next year to determine whether there is need and community capacity for an EWR in Richmond.

3.6 Surrey

According to the consultant's records, Surrey EWR issued 4 Extreme Weather Alerts this year and provided 16 bed nights of shelter. The number of clients staying in EWR shelters this year dropped dramatically from previous years. The EWR planning group in Surrey believes this happened because they were unable to get outreach teams to disseminate information about the additional shelter spaces to the homeless population of Surrey.

The demographics of the people sheltered varied greatly depending on the night. One night three of the four people sheltered were women, and another night both of the people sheltered were women under the age of 18. By far, Surrey had the most fluctuation in the demographics of the people staying in their Extreme Weather Shelters.

| Date | 29/11/05 | 16/12/05 | 18/12/05 | 18/02/06 |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Kla-how-eya | n/o | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| Urban Mission | 4 | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Hyland House | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Total | 4 | 6 | 4 | 2 |

n/o = Shelter was not open

3.7 Vancouver

This winter, there was at least one Extreme Weather Shelter open in Vancouver on 29 nights. Combined, the Vancouver EWR Shelters provided 1,613 bed nights of shelter. Vancouver does not issue Extreme Weather Alerts, but allows each sheltering site, in conversation with the others, to determine if they are going to open or not on any given night.

Vancouver has the largest EWR in Greater Vancouver with the potential of opening eight (8) Extreme Weather Shelter Sites if required (plus two located in Vancouver that are part of the Aboriginal Extreme Weather Response). In 2005/2006, the highest number of shelters opened on any given night was six (6).

| Date | 29/11/06 | 30/11/06 | 01/12/06 | 02/12/06 | 03/12/06 | 04/12/05 | 05/12/05 | 06/12/05 | 07/12/06 | 14/12/06 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 10 th Alliance | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 1 | 25 | 9 | n/o | 25 |
| Evelyne Saller | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 13 | 15 | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Gathering Place | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Kits Community Centre | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 6 | 12 | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| First Baptist | 39 | 32 | 32 | 31 | 32 | 31 | 33 | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Grandview Calvary | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 30 | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Life Skills Centre | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 45 | 53 | n/o |
| Total | 39 | 32 | 32 | 31 | 62 | 51 | 85 | 54 | 53 | 25 |

| Date | 15/12/05 | 16/12/05 | 17/12/05 | 18/12/05 | 13/02/06 | 14/02/06 | 15/02/06 | 16/02/06 | 17/02/06 | 18/02/06 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 10 th Alliance | 2 | n/o | 3 | 3 | n/o | n/o | n/o | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Evelyne Saller | 26 | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 14 | 21 | 14 |
| Gathering Place | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 9 | 18 | 39 | 16 | 28 |
| Kits Community Centre | 3 | 20 | 15 | 16 | n/o | n/o | 5 | 20 | 20 | 23 |
| First Baptist | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 7 | 40 | 26 | 25 | 28 | 26 |
| Grandview Calvary | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Life Skills Centre | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Total | 31 | 20 | 18 | 19 | 7 | 49 | 49 | 100 | 89 | 94 |

Vancouver EWR statistics continue on the next page.

| Date | 19/02/06 | 20/02/06 | 21/02/06 | 24/02/06 | 25/02/06 | 08/03/06 | 09/03/06 | 10/03/06 | 11/03/06 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 10 th Alliance | n/o | 27 | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Evelyne Saller | 18 | n/o | n/o | 17 | 17 | 38 | 47 | 35 | 27 |
| Gathering Place | 15 | 19 | n/o | 26 | 20 | n/o | 18 | 18 | 17 |
| Kits Community Centre | 21 | n/o | n/o | 10 | 16 | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| First Baptist | 24 | 32 | 30 | 10 | 19 | 34 | 30 | 30 | n/o |
| Grandview Calvary | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | 35 | n/o | 23 |
| Life Skills Centre | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o | n/o |
| Total | 78 | 78 | 30 | 63 | 72 | 72 | 130 | 83 | 67 |

n/o – Shelter was not open

3.8 Aboriginal EWR

The Aboriginal EWR is an independent EWR run by the Aboriginal community as a sub-group of the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee with funding from the Urban Aboriginal Homelessness program of the National Homelessness Initiative as administered by Lu'ma Native Housing Society. Their statistics are included in this report for information only. However, the shelter provided by this response adds 412 beds nights of shelter offered to people who are homeless in Vancouver.

This year a strong effort was made to increase the communication between the Vancouver EWR and the Aboriginal EWR and to try and coordinate efforts between the two EWRs.

| Date | 04/12/05 | 16/02/05 | 17/02/05 | 18/02/05 | 19/02/05 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| VAFCS | 27 | 69 | 98 | 106 | 103 |
| AMCS | 7 | 5 | 3 | n/o | n/o |
| Total | 28 | 74 | 101 | 106 | 103 |

VAFCS - Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society

AMCS – Aboriginal Mother Centre Society

The Aboriginal EWR also provided outreach to the homeless and offered rides to their shelters and a transit ticket in the morning for people to return to the area they stay in. Most nights the outreach teams brought everyone they contacted to the shelters, however, on the night where the temperature was a little warmer, about one third of the people the outreach teams had contact with did not stay in either of the Aboriginal EWR shelters. Concerns had been expressed by other EWR shelter providers that when the Aboriginal EWR shelters opened there wasn't a need for the Vancouver EWR shelters to open as most of their clients went to the Aboriginal EWR shelters. This year, however, the statistics do not support this observation as the number of people in all shelters was very high on nights that both EWRs were operating shelters (Feb 16 – 19, 2006).

3.9 Summary of 2005 - 2006 EWR Data

Communities in Greater Vancouver implemented their Extreme Weather Response Plans between 4 and 29 nights of Extreme Weather Alerts in the 2005/2006 winter. They provided at least 2,517 bed nights of shelter on the coldest nights of the winter.

3.10 Comparison of three years of EWRs

Despite offering more nights of EWR shelter, this year fewer bed nights of shelter were provided (2,755) than last year (3,820). This still represents a large increase in the number of bed nights provided in the first year of this three-year project (832). The main reason for this is that the Aboriginal EWR lost one of their sheltering site (Arrows to Freedom in Burnaby) and encountered some uncertainty with their funding. In addition, the Surrey EWR sheltered very few people because they were not able to get outreach teams together to let homeless people know when and where the EWR shelters were open.

3.11 Effect of EWR on Year Round and Cold/Wet Weather Shelters

The Extreme Weather Task Group asked the consultant to try to determine if opening Extreme Weather Shelters had any effect on the occupancy rates of the year round and cold/wet weather shelters.¹ Analysis of this has been limited to Feb 16 to 20th EWR in Vancouver. This was the time period that saw the highest number of EWR shelter sites open in Vancouver and so should be most likely to demonstrate an effect. The analysis has been limited to Vancouver as in other communities there either is no other shelter that could be affected, or the Extreme Weather Response Plan is closely tied into the one shelter in the community and is only implemented when the shelter is at capacity.

| Date | 15/02/06 | 16/02/06 | 17/02/06 | 08/02/06 | 19/02/06 | 20/02/06 |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Alexander St. | 43 | 43 | 46 | 46 | 46 | 45 |
| Anchor | 50 | 40 | 35 | 43 | 44 | 50 |
| Beacon | 60 | 60 | 45 | 40 | 53 | 60 |
| Catholic Char. | 95 | 93 | 97 | 96 | 102 | 93 |
| Crosswalk | 35 | 28 | 25 | 27 | 27 | 34 |
| Haven | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 |
| Powell Place | 22 | 25 | 24 | 23 | 26 | 24 |
| Umbrella | 25 | 25 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 24 |
| Yukon | 67 | 71 | 70 | 68 | 67 | 68 |

Bold dates were EWR nights.

¹ Thanks to James Pratt and the Cold Wet Weather Strategy for providing the occupancy statistics for the shelters.

The only shelters that the opening of EWR Shelters appears to have had any effect on were The Anchor of Hope, The Beacon and The Crosswalk. Before this effect can be determined for sure, further analysis is required.

The Anchor of Hope, experienced their lowest occupancy rate for the month (35 people) during the EWR (on Feb 17th). All other days of the response, however, matched or exceeded the second lowest occupancy rate for the month (which was 43 and occurred on Feb 2 when no EWR shelter sites were open). EWR Shelters, therefore, seem to have minimal to no effect on the occupancy rates at the Anchor of Hope outside of their normal fluctuation in occupancy.

In the month of February, The Beacon generally ran at capacity (60 people). During the EWR, however, they dropped to between 70 and 75% occupancy. It does appear that the opening of EWR shelters draws clients from The Beacon.

The Crosswalk experienced a large fluctuation in their occupancy rates during February ranging from 24 to 35 people. They had 5 nights of 24 or 25 people in the month of February and only one of those nights occurred during an EWR. The fluctuation experienced during Feb. 16 – 19 is well within the regular fluctuation experienced by this shelter and could not easily be attributed to the opening of EWR Shelters.

From this analysis, therefore, it appears that the opening of EWR Shelters has negligible effect on the other shelters in Vancouver. The anecdotal evidence is not supported by the statistics as they have been reported this winter. Furthermore, the additional number of people sheltered during the EWR, far outnumbered the number that left the Beacon. The EWR in Vancouver sheltered at least 75 to 100 people who would not otherwise have had shelter on each of those nights. If you add the Aboriginal EWR to this, the number sheltered who would not otherwise have been sheltered rises to between 149 and 206.

4.0 OUTCOMES

The logic model developed for the Extreme Weather Response program lists five outcomes. A few of these outcomes have quantitative indicators; most, however, use qualitative indicators.

4.1 Improved access to emergency shelter during extreme weather

During 2005 – 2006 winter season, there were 600 extra emergency shelter beds available to be opened during extreme weather. The availability of these beds led to well over 906 bed nights of emergency shelter being offered that would otherwise have not been available. In addition, there were no reported turn-aways at EWR shelters. In addition, there is some evidence that the number of turn-aways at the year round and cold wet weather shelters were reduced during the EWR.² Thus, there was improved access to emergency shelters during extreme weather.

4.2 Reduced risk during extreme weather

For homeless people who stayed at the EWR sheltering sites during extreme weather, the risks of illness, hypothermia and death were reduced. Several communities' EWR Plans call for outreach teams to travel to areas known to be frequented by people who are homeless to disseminate information about the location of EWR sheltering site and to distribute hot drinks and blankets to those who choose to remain outside. Unfortunately the outreach activities in 2005 – 2006 were very limited.

4.3 Improved co-ordination of sheltering services during extreme weather

During extreme weather periods, the Extreme Weather Coordinator provided daily (and often twice daily) updates to EWR contacts in all communities that had or were developing EWR Plans (Burnaby, Langley, New Westminster, North Shore, Surrey, Tri-Cities and Vancouver). These updates contained information on the weather forecasts for communities across Greater Vancouver and information on which communities were implementing their EWR Plan that night. This feedback helped coordination of sheltering services across the region.

In addition, EWR planning groups in each community would communicate among themselves and with other service providers working with people who are homeless to ensure everyone knew which shelters were open that night.

For the first time, in 2005 – 2006 the emergency shelter providers in the City of Vancouver met to discuss communication protocols during extreme weather. The shelter providers (regular and EWR) agreed to communicate with one another about their decisions to open and close so that they would be able to refer clients to other sheltering sites if their shelter was at capacity. While

² Based on statistics submitted to James Pratt and the Cold Wet Weather Strategy

more work needs to be done to develop a fully coordinated EWR in Vancouver, this represented an important and significant step towards this goal.

4.4 Improved understanding of local and regional needs during extreme weather

Work with people who are homeless during extreme weather periods this year taught many communities of the importance of Outreach Teams to spread the word about the availability and location of EWR shelters. The absence of these teams appeared to reduce the number of people staying in shelters.

In Burnaby, the EWR learned the importance of the location of EWR shelters. They tried to operate a shelter that was some distance from where the majority of homeless people in Burnaby reside. The result was that, even though transportation to the shelter and back was offered, no one would go to the EWR shelter. EWR Shelters need to be in the area or at least close to the area that their intended clients reside in.

The Vancouver EWR identified the importance of shelter opening times. In Vancouver outreach teams found that many people who were homeless would be 'nesting' in for the night before many of the EWR shelters opened because they required more than the 6 to 6 ½ hours sleep that was possible at some shelters.

Finally, the demand for media interviews demonstrated the need for ongoing regional coordination of EWR. The media demands were almost overwhelming for the Extreme Weather Coordinator who did not have to implement an EWR Plan. If this kind of demand was placed on the local EWR coordinators who are working to ensure sheltering sites are open, their job would be made much more difficult and would likely become overwhelming.

4.5 Increased public awareness of homelessness and extreme weather

The EWR in November/December 2005 served to focus media attention on the issue of homeless and EWR. During the EWR, media coverage in all communities with shelter sites was high in television, print and radio. Unfortunately much of this coverage was critical of the EWR despite our attempts to focus the issue on the great volunteer work of the local EWRs and the need for longer-term solutions such as affordable and supported housing. The EWR in January, however, provided a lot of positive media due in large part to the Vancouver EWR being very responsive and flexible in their definition of extreme weather.

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY

5.1 Local Extreme Weather Responses

The financial sustainability of local EWRs has been addressed by BC Housing's commitment to provide funding to communities who have developed an EWR Plan and who have negotiated an operational budget with BC Housing. Communities continue to be responsible to raise funds for any capital expenses (i.e. for mats and blankets); however, operational expenses will continue to be covered by BC Housing for the foreseeable future.

With the financial sustainability of EWRs secured, the availability of sufficient and trained volunteers becomes a more pressing matter. A couple of communities resisted calling Extreme Weather Alerts early in the season due to their concern that their volunteers would be stretched too thin. A number of communities held volunteer trainings and this year the Extreme Weather Coordinator finalized and distributed a volunteer training manual based on the manual created by the Surrey EWR. Next year local EWRs should be strongly encouraged to hold volunteer training sessions prior to the start of the extreme weather season. In addition, they may want to connect to organizations that have volunteers trained in emergency and disaster response.

Finally, the local EWRs are coordinated by staff people in local agencies volunteering their time. In other words, they are coordinated off the corner of people's desks. This method works for the small EWRs as the demands are relatively small. However, in communities with numerous sheltering sites and with homeless people distributed over large geographic areas, the demands on the local coordinator are more than can be dealt with off the corner of their desk. These communities required a coordinator that is paid to do the development work to maintain the EWR and to facilitate its implementation in periods of extreme weather. Communities that require three or more sheltering site to serve the needs of their homeless population require this additional support. Communities with one or two sheltering sites do not encounter the same level of on-going development demands nor the level of negotiation on which sites will open on which nights that are encountered in communities requiring more sheltering sites.

5.2 Regional Extreme Weather Coordination

The original vision of the Extreme Weather Task Group was to have the regional coordination phase itself out over time. The Regional Extreme Weather Coordinator, however, has provided at least three important services to the local EWRs that if they were not provided at a regional level would make the local planning groups' job more difficult and may threaten the existence of EWR in the Lower Mainland. These services are outlined in the following three paragraphs.

Before the extreme weather season starts, the Regional Extreme Weather Coordinator has proved to be an important position to ensure that each EWR community in the Lower Mainland reviews and starts to update its EWR plan. In each of the three years of this project, the Coordinator has been the catalyst to start the EWR planning, provided administrative support to the planning groups and has been an important source of information exchange between the communities.

In times of extreme weather, the Coordinator has acted as a communication hub. During times of planning and evaluation, the Coordinator has exchanged information between the EWR communities in Greater Vancouver so that they each know what the others are doing and are aware of both the troubles and successes other communities are experiencing. This has helped to maintain some level of consistency across communities. The Coordinator has also proved to be an important link between the EWR communities and the funders of extreme weather shelter sites. The person in this position has been able to keep funders informed of what is happening in the local community responses and has helped bridge breakdowns in communication between the communities and the funders—a role both funders and community groups have expressed appreciation for.

In addition, the Coordinator has been the main contact for the news media. Having one regional contact for the media has provided at least three important benefits. It has protected EWR planning groups from the often onerous task of media relations when their time and energy needs to be focused on serving the homeless people in their communities. It has also allowed consistent messaging with the media across the region. Finally, having one media contact has allowed the Coordinator to work closely with the funders when challenges have arisen in media relations that may have otherwise endangered the ongoing funding of the EWRs.

For the reasons outlined above, it is important that there continue to be regional coordination of the Extreme Weather Response program in the Lower Mainland. Unfortunately, sustained funding has not yet been secured for this task. It is recommended that the Extreme Weather Task Group begin negotiations with funders for ongoing funding to support this function.

6.0 GREATER VANCOUVER EWR STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

6.1 Strengths

1. Local communities were able to respond appropriately based on availability of local emergency beds and local weather conditions.
2. Having centralized media relations and common key messages helped to manage a negative news story and turn it back into a positive story of the work being done to serve people who are homeless.
3. Region-wide communication during the extreme weather event via email worked well and helped to keep many people ‘in the loop.’
4. Experience of EWR in several communities has contributed to positive movement towards more permanent services for homeless people.
5. Support for EWR in communities remains high both among those directly involved in planning and implementing the response and among the public.
6. Communities appreciated the exchange of information and resources from other EWR Communities as this helped to minimize the amount of work they had to do and allowed them to take advantage of the lessons learned in other communities.
7. Availability of funding from BC Housing eliminated the need of communities to do fundraising to support their EWR. This allowed them to concentrate on providing shelter and relieved a large amount of stress they experienced in previous years.

6.2 Challenges

1. Collecting statistics and invoices from the sheltering sites proved to be very difficult and in some cases impossible as can be seen in Chapter 3 were the outputs for this season are reported.
2. Several communities (especially early in the season) experienced great difficulty in determining when to issue Extreme Weather Alerts due to significantly different forecasts issued by different weather services. Communities outside of Vancouver seemed to rely mostly on the Weather Network whereas Vancouver relied mainly on Weather Canada.
3. Maintaining up-to-date notification lists proved difficult in Surrey and Vancouver due to the number of people and organizations that need to be notified.
4. The Surrey EWR encountered difficulties in maintain cohesiveness in their response due to some misunderstandings between agencies.
5. All communities experienced difficulty in disseminating the opening and location of Extreme Weather Shelters to people who are homeless. A lack of funding and training for outreach teams during EWR’s were identified as the major barriers.
6. Communicating which shelters in which communities were open which nights (especially to funders) was a common difficulty.

7. Staff changes in some communities lead to significant changes in the local responses that, in some communities, concentrated the responsibility for the response in one or two organizations and in others caused the response to laps for this season.
8. This was the first year that Vancouver used a temperature-based definition of extreme weather. This lead to the response being less flexible than in past years which raised concern among shelter providers and other people offering services to the homeless. In response, Vancouver changed its definition of extreme weather so that it is based more on the needs of homeless people than on a specific temperature on the thermometer.
9. The Extreme Weather Responses in Vancouver and Surrey identified the difficulty of planning and implementing such large responses off the corner of everyone's desk without any one being dedicated to this task specific to their community.
10. There continues to be difficulty in communication with services outside of the EWRs and this occasionally leads to other community groups lacking trust in the EWR to provide sufficient shelter during extreme weather.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultant offers the following recommendations for consideration and action by the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy:

1. To better address the sleeping needs of people who are homeless, the Extreme Weather Task Group (EWTG) needs to encourage EWR shelters to open no later than 9:00pm. They also need to encourage local EWRs to make provisions to deal with people whose normal routine may require them to remain awake all night.
2. The Extreme Weather Coordinator should work with BC Housing to develop consistent and easy to complete invoice/shelter usage form including the development of deadlines to submit these forms and a standard method for determining the date (some shelters date the forms when the date that clients wake up and others date it the day the Extreme Weather Alert is issued).
3. The EWTG and the Extreme Weather Coordinator need to encourage local EWRs to develop partnerships with organizations that have pools of emergency/disaster response volunteers.
4. To avoid the trouble experienced this season in Richmond, EWR Communities need to ensure support from as many organizations as possible for both the planning and implementation of their EWR Plans.
5. The EWR Coordinator, service providers and other involved in EWR planning in Vancouver need to continue to foster the development of strong communication and collaboration among extreme weather sheltering sites and other organizations serving the homeless in Vancouver. This needs to include the Aboriginal Extreme Weather Response.
6. The EWTG, Vancouver EWR and Aboriginal EWR need to work together to stabilize the funding for the Aboriginal EWR as they provide a needed service whose opening does not appear to be a duplication based on the statistics from this year.
7. The EWR Coordinator should encourage each EWR community to include in their EWR Plan which weather service they will use to call their alerts. This will help to minimize confusion and arguments when an Extreme Weather Alert is being considered.
8. The EWR Coordinator needs to encourage all EWR communities to have open EWR planning tables and at least two communication lists: one list for those that are actively involved in the planning and implementation of their EWR Plan and the other a very broad notification list to announce when Extreme Weather Alerts have been called and which sheltering sites will be open. These lists must be maintained locally.
9. The EWTG needs to work in partnership with the local EWR planning groups, to begin negotiations with funders for funding to provide paid EWR coordinators for communities with more than two EWR sheltering sites (Vancouver and Surrey). The Extreme Weather Task Group and the Vancouver and Surrey EWRs need to document the number of hours spent on EWR coordination in each community, the tasks that didn't get done that should have and come up with a budget to present to potential funders. The EWR coordinators could be independent consultants or a local agency that agrees to take on and receive funding for this work. Regardless, it will be important that they understand their work is to develop

and maintain a broad based Extreme Weather Response in the community and that it needs to continue to be coordinated with the regional response.

10. The EWTG needs to secure sustained funding for regional coordination of the Extreme Weather Response in Greater Vancouver.
11. The EWTG and Extreme Weather Coordinator should host a media event near the beginning of the cold/wet weather season to education the media on how the Extreme Weather Response fits into the larger shelter system and to provide them with an opportunity to obtain visuals.