

**The Lower Mainland  
Cold/Wet Weather Strategy:  
Evaluation of the 2001-2002 Year**

**Prepared by  
James Pratt Consulting**

**Prepared for the  
Lower Mainland Cold/Wet Weather Strategy**

**September 19, 2002**

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The primary purpose of this evaluation of the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy's 2001-2002 year is to assess levels of effectiveness. The secondary purpose is to provide information for use in action planning and in further development of the Strategy.

The evaluation has three objectives as follows:

1. To provide an overview of the Strategy in 2001-2002
2. To measure inputs, outputs and outcomes
3. To analyze strengths and challenges faced by the Strategy.

The consultant used four types of data sources in the preparation of this report: Cold/Wet Weather Strategy (CWWS) documents, shelter service statistics, shelter user surveys, and Strategy participant surveys.

## Overview of the Strategy

### Mission

The Lower Mainland Cold/Wet Weather Strategy is a regional network of organizations responding together to meet local shelter needs during the winter months.

### Vision

We envision accessible, high quality emergency shelter services as part of a continuum of housing and supports.

### Goals

**Goal 1: Co-operative planning.** Maintain a responsive, effective, and accountable partnership.

**Goal 2: Communication.** Communicate service availability to the homeless and the larger community.

**Goal 3: Funding.** Establish coordinated and sustainable funding to support service delivery throughout the region.

**Goal 4: Service development.** Promote coordination and enhancement of services.

### Core Values

We share the following three core values:

- ❖ Housing people in their own communities;
- ❖ Balance among the continuum of emergency, second stage, and independent affordable housing;
- ❖ Respect for the dignity and the diversity of shelter users.

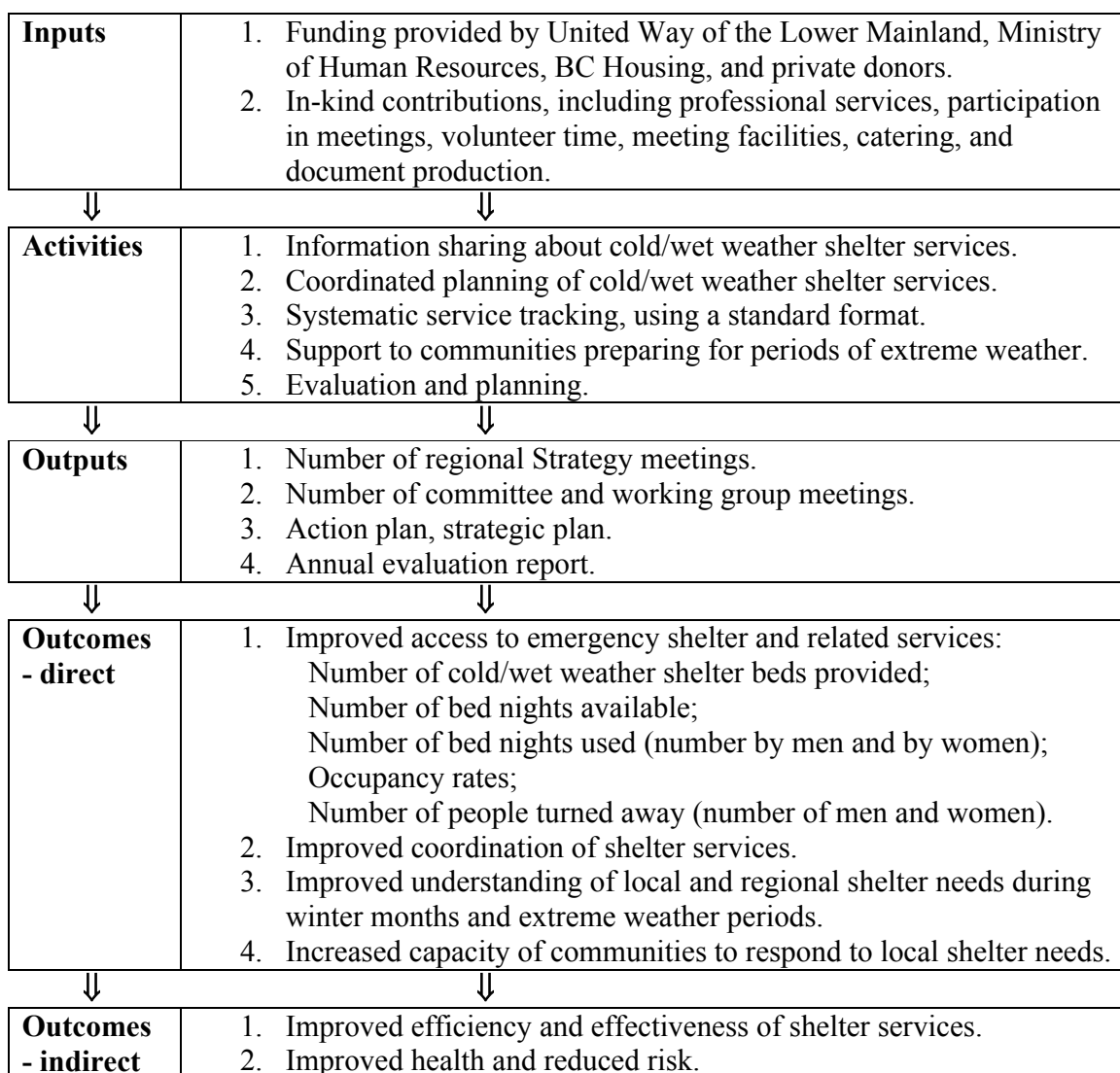
## Operating Principles

The Strategy upholds the following three principles:

- ❖ Multi-stakeholder collaboration;
- ❖ Representation of diverse communities and interests;
- ❖ Consensus decision-making.

## Logic Model

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



## **Inputs**

Three agencies provided core funding for operation of the Strategy: United Way of the Lower Mainland, the Ministry of Human Resources (Region 1), and BC Housing. Total funding for 2001-2002 was \$37,500. In addition, the Strategy received \$10,537 in net funds from the December 2001 “Notable Jazz” fundraiser.

In-kind contributions during the period included: participation in Strategy meetings by diverse participants; administrative services provided by Lookout; and meeting facilities, copying and refreshments provided by BC Housing and the Salvation Army.

## **Outputs**

Outputs during the September 2001 through August 2002 period were as follows:

- 9 Committee of the Whole meetings;
- 6 committees and task groups formed, including terms of reference: Communications Committee, Finance and Development Committee, Women and Children Committee, Extreme Weather Task Group, Data Task Group, and a Planning and Evaluation Task Group;
- 15 meetings of these committees and task groups;
- Planning and coordination of “Notable Jazz”, a major fundraising event;
- A successful proposal for an Extreme Weather Preparedness Planning project;
- An evaluation of the 2000-2001 year;
- A 3-year Action Plan;
- A Communication Plan;
- A revised Strategic Plan.

## **Outcomes**

**The Strategy has resulted in improved access to emergency shelter and related services.**

The primary indicators of improved access to shelter and related services are service statistics for the year:

- Number of cold/wet weather shelter beds provided;
- Number of bed/nights available;
- Number of bed nights used (by men and by women);
- Occupancy rates;
- Number of people turned away (men and women).

### Summary of Cold/Wet Shelter Service Statistics: 2001-2002

	Number of CWW beds	Total number of bed nights available	Total number of bed nights used	Breakdown of bed nights used		Occupancy rate	Number turned away	
				Men	Women		Men	Women
Caring Place	6	816	779	638	141	95%	25	22
Catholic Charities	10	1,820	1,273	1,273	N/a	70%	853	N/a
Crosswalk & Harbour Light	35-39 -mats	Approx. 3,589	3,579	3,398	181	100%	133	N/a
Garfield Hotel	6 - mats	726	494	739	N/a	68%	82	N/a
Gateway Shelter	36	5,436	3,685	3,347	338	68%	53	0
Golden Ears Hotel	4-6	605	408	408	N/a	67%	44	N/a
The Haven	25	4,025	4,025	4,025	N/a	100%	No data	N/a
Hope Com. Services	2	302	147	89	22	49%	0	0
Marpole Shelter	54	7,938	6,543	5,004	1,539	82%	270	85
Mission Com. Services	Approx. 2 - flexible	Approx. 174	174	No data	No data	100%	No data	No data
North Shore Shelter	22 + 3 mats	3,625	3,582	2,894	688	99%	295	120
Richmond House	3	429	145	145	n/a	34%	21	N/a
The Umbrella	16	2,352	2,004	N/a	1,542	85%	N/a	457
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>227 Approx</b>	<b>31,837 Approx</b>	<b>26,838</b>	<b>21,960 +</b>	<b>4,451 +</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>1,776</b>	<b>684</b>

As shown in the table above, the various participating agencies provided approximately 227 cold/wet weather shelter beds in the 2001-2002 year, up from 185 in the previous year (a 23% increase in beds).

The total number of bed nights available was approximately 31,837, up from approximately 24,000 in the previous year. Of 26,838 bed nights used, men used 82% and women used 18%. The number of bed nights used increased approximately 36% from the previous year. The overall average occupancy rate in the 2001-2002 season was approximately 84%, up from approximately 83% in the previous year.

Service providers reported a total of 2,460 incidences of turning people away due to no vacancy, lack of appropriate bed, or other reasons.<sup>1</sup> Of these people, 1,776 (72%) were men and 684 (28%) were women.

**The Strategy has continued to result in improved coordination of shelter services.**

Opinion of Strategy participants indicates continued success in improved coordination of shelter services. Survey respondents rated their levels of agreement with the following statement: *“It facilitates information sharing, coordination, and support among shelter providers.”* The average survey response on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = “strongly agree” and 5 = “strongly disagree”) was 1.38. This number represents a slight increase in agreement levels indicated in the previous year.

**A large majority of participants believe the Strategy is effective.**

Asked to rate the effectiveness of the Strategy over the past year, on a scale of 1 to 5, 89% of survey respondents indicated that it was either effective or very effective.

## **Strengths and challenges**

**The previously identified strengths of the Strategy remain.**

Survey responses confirmed the ten CWWS strengths identified in the previous evaluation. Strengths 1 through 5 pertain to capacity of the Strategy. The following strengths are ranked in order of agreement level among survey respondents, and this ranking did not change from the previous year:

1. It brings together funding agencies, planners and service providers;
2. It facilitates information sharing, coordination and support among shelter providers;
3. The Strategy group works to continuously improve its performance;
4. It helps facilitate the development of regional shelter initiatives;
5. Participants have high levels of commitment.

Strengths 6 through 10 pertain to the impact of the Strategy on shelter services. These strengths are listed in order of agreement level indicated by survey respondents, a ranking which changed somewhat from the previous year:

6. It provides a forum for planning of cold/wet weather shelter services;
7. It raises the profile of homelessness issues and shelter needs;
8. It mobilizes funding and other resources to meet needs for cold/wet weather shelter services;
9. It has resulted in provision of low-barrier shelter beds;
10. It spans the Lower Mainland and encourages local responses.

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<sup>1</sup> “No vacancy” is defined as “all beds/rooms full”. “No appropriate bed” is defined as not having a bed due to facility criteria for gender, age, or wheelchair access. “Other” reasons for people being turned away include substances, safety considerations, and people having been barred.

### **The Strategy has addressed its five capacity challenges.**

Analysis of meeting minutes and participant surveys suggests that the Strategy has effectively addressed the five capacity challenges identified in the previous evaluation:

1. Staffing to support the Strategy;
2. Capacity to follow up on the Strategic Plan;
3. Governance and accountability structure;
4. Balanced representation;
5. Efficiency of meetings.

For all five of these challenges, respondents indicated agreement that they were “less of an issue now”.

### **Shelter service challenges need to be addressed.**

Analysis of participant survey responses clearly indicated a shared view that the CWWS should address the five shelter service challenges. In recognition that the Strategy did little in the 2001-2002 year to address the five challenges in this category, the survey asked whether the Strategy “should work to address” each of these challenges.

Challenges 6 through 10 are listed in order of priority, based on analysis of survey responses. This order is almost exactly the same as the average level of agreement indicated in the previous year: 6 and 9, which are very closely related, switched places.

6. Lack of needs assessment to determine shelter resource requirements;
7. Accessibility of individual shelters services;
8. Lack of linkages to further services;
9. Service gaps;
10. Coordination of funding.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This evaluation of the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy’s fourth year has documented overall performance and analyzed strengths and challenges. Once again, the volume of cold/wet weather shelter service increased from previous years. Despite this increase, the overall occupancy rates of shelter beds associated with the Strategy also increased.

As the Strategy moves forward, the information presented in this evaluation and previous ones can be used to help analyze trends, identify priorities for action, and strengthen overall performance.

Recommendation 2002-1: Continue to address CWWS capacity challenges.

Recommendation 2002-2: Work with Shelter Net BC to address service challenges.

Recommendation 2002-3: Implement the CWWS Communication Plan.

Recommendation 2002-4: Continue using the CWWS Action Plan to guide the work of the Strategy and to monitor progress.

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Many thanks to:**

Participants in the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy member survey;

Participants in the shelter service user survey;

Judy Graves, who conducted the shelter user survey;

Cold/Wet Weather service providers, who collected shelter statistics using a standard format;

Data Task Group members, who provided direction to the collection of shelter statistics by service providers;

Planning and Evaluation Task Group members, who provided direction to the evaluation process.

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose and objectives

The primary purpose of this evaluation of the Lower Mainland Cold/Wet Weather Strategy's 2000-2001 year is to assess levels of effectiveness and efficiency. The secondary purpose is to provide information for use in action planning and in further development of the Strategy.

The evaluation has three objectives as follows:

1. To provide an overview of the Strategy in 2000-2001
2. To measure inputs, outputs and outcomes
3. To analyze strengths and challenges faced by the Strategy.

## 1.2 Background

Participants engaged in three previous evaluations of the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy (CWWS) covering the 1998-1999 through 2000-2001 years. These evaluations analyzed the capacity of the CWWS to deliver on its goals and priorities and provided initial evidence of outcomes achieved. The evaluations also identified key strengths and challenges.

Other key relevant background is as follows:

- In October 2001 the CWWS approved a three-year action plan;
- In May 2001 the Planning and Evaluation Task Group revised the CWWS program logic model and developed a draft strategic plan.

## 1.3 Scope and definitions

This evaluation covers the period from September 1, 2001 through August 31, 2002. Analysis of strengths and challenges provides qualitative information that may contribute to action planning. The evaluation measures inputs, outputs, and outcomes, defined as follows.

Inputs are resources dedicated to a program, such as money, staff time, volunteer time, facilities, equipment and supplies.

Outputs are the quantities of services provided.

Outcomes are the changes for individuals or systems that evidently resulted from the program.

## **1.4 Methodology**

### **Design**

The evaluator developed the design of this study in consultation with members of the Planning and Evaluation Task Group. Research methods and tools were designed to be consistent with the previous evaluations and with the objectives stated above.

### **Data Gathering**

The evaluator used four types of data sources in the preparation of this report: CWWS documents, service statistics, shelter user surveys, and Strategy participant surveys.

- CWWS documents included meeting minutes, Action Plan, Action Update, Communications Plan, and past evaluations.
- Service statistics included numbers of bed nights provided, numbers used, and incidence of people being turned away.<sup>2</sup>
- 18 Strategy participants participated in a written survey.
- 5 shelter users participated in verbal surveys<sup>3</sup>.

### **Analysis**

This report derives from both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. Quantitative analysis included:

- Calculation of shelter use statistics;
- Tabulation of shelter user survey responses;
- Calculation of average responses to scaled questions in the Strategy participant survey.

Qualitative analysis included:

- Review and synthesis of Strategy participant survey comments;
- Review and sorting of shelter user survey comments;
- Review of CWWS minutes and other documents.

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<sup>2</sup> Service providers tracked data on numbers of people turned away using standardized definitions of “no vacancy”, “no appropriate bed” and “other”. As these definitions were developed during the 2001-2002 season, the numbers for various types of turn-aways are presented in combined totals.

<sup>3</sup> Shelter user surveys were conducted at North Shore shelter only.

## 1.5 Organization of Report

The body of this report consists of three sections, as follows:

- “Overview of the Strategy”, which contains information on the CWWS strategic plan, governance structure, activities in 2001-2002, additional action taken on the October 2000 recommendations, and a revised program logic model;
- “Inputs, outputs and outcomes”, which presents information on the volume of resources invested in the Strategy in 2001-2002, the quantity and types of services delivered in that year, and the results of these services;
- “Strengths and challenges”, which contains analysis of member opinions on strengths and challenges identified and analyzed in previous evaluations.

The conclusion provides general analysis of the evaluation findings.

## 2.0 Overview of the Strategy

### 2.1 Strategic Plan

#### **Mission**

The Lower Mainland Cold/Wet Weather Strategy is a regional network of organizations responding together to meet local shelter needs during the winter months.

#### **Vision**

We envision accessible, high quality emergency shelter services as part of a continuum of housing and supports.

#### **Goals**

**Goal 1: Co-operative planning.** Maintain a responsive, effective, and accountable partnership.

**Goal 2: Communication.** Communicate service availability to the homeless and the larger community.

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**Goal 4: Service development.** Promote coordination and enhancement of services.

## **Core Values**

We share the following three core values:

- ❖ Housing people in their own communities;
- ❖ Balance among the continuum of emergency, second stage, and independent affordable housing;
- ❖ Respect for the dignity and the diversity of shelter users.

## **Operating Principles**

The Strategy upholds the following three principles:

- ❖ Multi-stakeholder collaboration;
- ❖ Representation of diverse communities and interests;
- ❖ Consensus decision-making.

## **2.2 Governance**

The CWWS is an unincorporated entity that is governed by an open multi-stakeholder group referred to as “Committee of the Whole”. In 2001-2002 the Committee of the Whole formally established two ongoing committees: Communications; and Finance and Development. In addition, it formed a number of time-limited task groups.

## **2.3 Action on recommendations**

The October 2000 evaluation report provided the following four recommendations:

- Purchase staff support;
- Implement the Action Group and Regional Committee structure;
- Develop and use an annual action plan;
- Implement consistent monitoring and evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

The Strategy endorsed all four. The October 2001 evaluation report documented action taken on these recommendations, and did not make any additional ones.

The following shows details of each recommendation, in italics, and summaries of action taken in the 2001-2002 year.

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<sup>4</sup> The October 2001 evaluation report did not offer additional recommendations. Instead, future directions were set out in the Action Plan.

***Recommendation 2000-1: Purchase staff support.***

*The CWWS should secure a contracted staff person to provide coordination, communication, and meeting facilitation support. The volume of professional services may be approximately the equivalent of 0.5 of a full time position.*

Action taken on Recommendation 2000-1: The Strategy purchased professional services from James Pratt Consulting: approximately 47 days of services over a ten-month period (just over one day per week from November 2001 through August 2002).

***Recommendation 2000-2: Implement the Action Group and Regional Committee structure.***

*Full implementation of the adopted structure could create more consistency of meeting participation by Strategy partners by enabling less involved organizations to remain active and have input without being expected to come to monthly meetings.*

Action taken on Recommendation 2000-2: As a result of instability associated with the Province's Core Services Review and associated changes, the Committee of the Whole decided to delay implementation of the Action Group governance structure. However, it did delegate responsibilities to six committees and task groups.

***Recommendation 2000-3: Develop and use an annual action plan.***

*An action plan, which specifies responsibilities and completion dates, could contribute to the effectiveness and accountability of the Strategy. The action plan should include communications activities, both for internal communication (among strategy partners) and external communication (targeted to broader audiences).*

Action taken on Recommendation 2000-3: The Strategy developed, adopted, and began implementation of a three-year action plan. Committee of the Whole directed the Planning and Evaluation Task Group to revise this Action Plan for the 2002-2003 year.

***Recommendation 2000-4: Implement consistent monitoring and evaluation.***

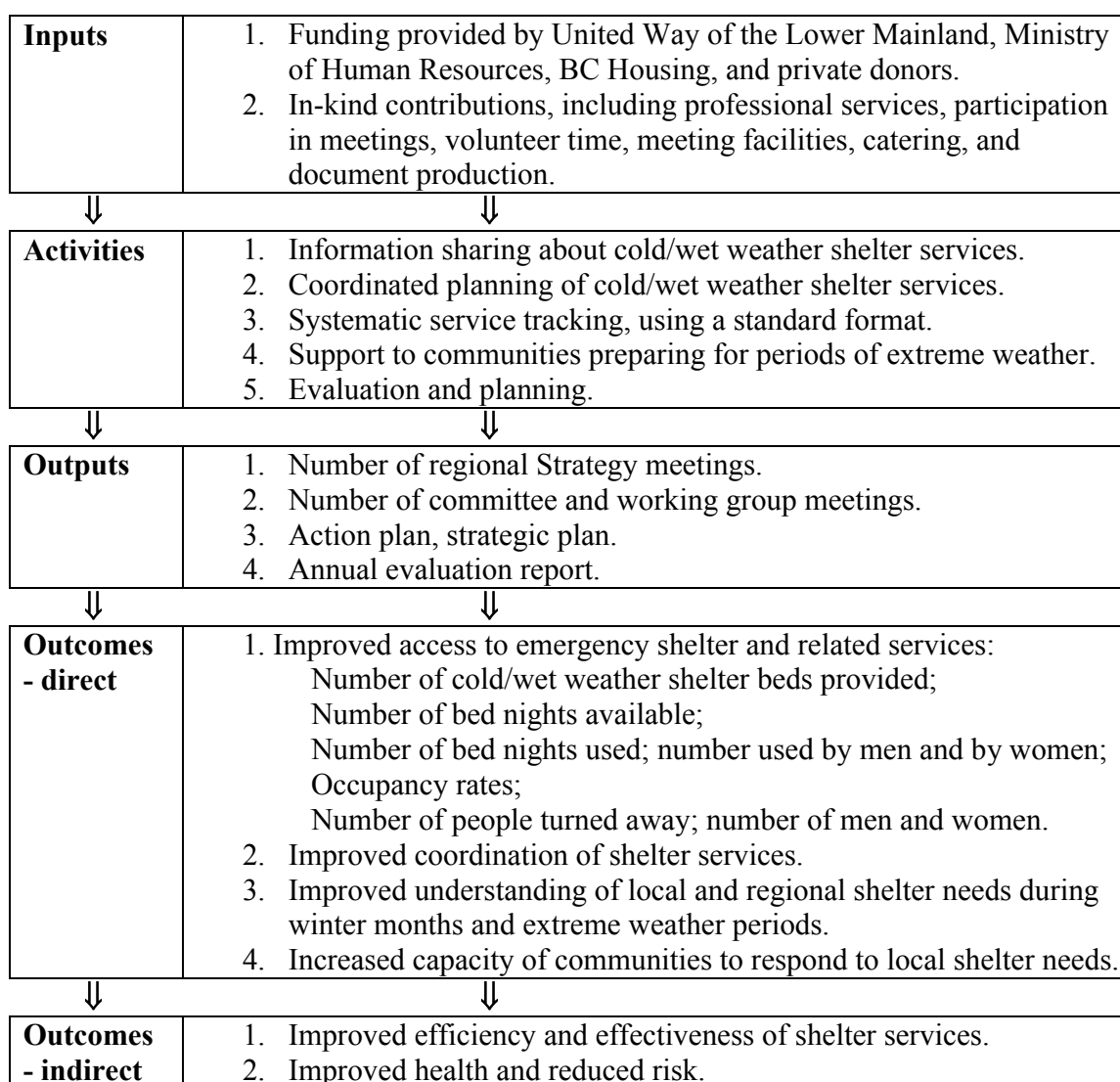
*Establishing coordinated data collection for winter shelter services, along with an internal evaluation process, will help the Strategy continue to build on its success.*

Action taken on Recommendation 2000-4: The Strategy developed a consistent format for reporting daily shelter service use, by gender, and three categories of turn away statistics, also by gender. Once again, the Strategy contracted with James Pratt Consulting to provide follow-up evaluation services and to prepare this report.

## 2.4 Program logic model

The following logic model chart shows inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes for the Strategy. This logic model is substantially different from the one presented in the 2000-2001 evaluation: it looks at the Strategy as the program, and the statistics for shelter services provided as indicators of “increased access”. Therefore, the inputs are the resources of the Strategy table, not the resources of participating service providers. Similarly, the outputs are those of the Strategy table, rather than those of service providers.

### Cold/Wet Weather Strategy: Revised Program Logic Model



## **3.0 Inputs, outputs, and outcomes**

### **3.1 Funding and in-kind resources**

Three agencies provided core funding for operation of the Strategy: United Way of the Lower Mainland, the provincial Ministry of Human Resources (Region 1), and BC Housing. Total funding for 2001-2002 was \$37,500. These funds paid for contracted services: coordination/support staff; strategic planning; and evaluation.

In addition, the Strategy received \$10,537 in net revenue from the December 2001 “Notable Jazz” fundraiser.

In-kind contributions during the period included: participation in Strategy meetings by diverse participants; contract administration services provided by Lookout Emergency Aid Society; and meeting facilities, copying and refreshments provided by BC Housing and the Salvation Army.

### **3.2 Outputs**

Outputs during the September 2001 through August 2002 period were as follows:

- 9 Committee of the Whole meetings;
- 6 committees and task groups formed, including terms of reference: Communications Committee, Finance and Development Committee, Women and Children Committee, Extreme Weather Task Group, Data Task Group, and a Planning and Evaluation Task Group;
- 15 meetings of these committees and task groups;
- Planning and coordination of “Notable Jazz”, a major fundraising event;
- A successful proposal for an Extreme Weather Preparedness Planning project (\$50,000 from the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative);
- An evaluation of the 2000-2001 year;
- A 3-year Action Plan;
- A Communication Plan;
- A revised Strategic Plan.

### 3.3 Outcomes

This evaluation measures two of the four direct outcomes identified in the logic model:

- Improved access to emergency shelter and related services;
- Improved coordination of shelter services.

#### Improved access to emergency shelter

##### Summary of Cold/Wet Shelter Service Statistics: 2001-2002

	Number of CWW beds	Total number of bed nights available	Total number of bed nights used	Breakdown of bed nights used		Occupancy rate	Number turned away	
				Men	Women		Men	Women
Caring Place	6	816	779	638	141	95%	25	22
Catholic Charities	10	1,820	1,273	1,273	N/a	70%	853	N/a
Crosswalk & Harbour Light	35-39 -mats	Approx. 3,589 <sup>5</sup>	3,579	3,398	181	100%	133	N/a
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<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>227 Approx</b>	<b>31,837 Approx</b>	<b>26,838</b>	<b>21,960 +</b>	<b>4,451 +</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>1,776</b>	<b>684</b>

<sup>5</sup> Harbour Light/Crosswalk occupancy rate is calculated based on the assumption of 37 beds (mats) available per night, from December 25, 2001 through March 31, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Golden Ears Hotel occupancy rate is calculated based on the assumption of five beds available per night.

As shown in the table above, the various participating agencies provided approximately 227 cold/wet weather shelter beds in the 2001-2002 year, up from 185 in the previous year (a 23% increase in beds). Participating agencies provided 167 beds in 1999-2000 and provided 155 beds in 1998-1999.

The total number of bed nights available was approximately 31,837, up from approximately 24,000 in the previous year.

Of 26,838 bed nights used, men used 82% and women used 18%.<sup>7</sup> The number of bed nights used increased approximately 36% from the previous year. The overall average occupancy rate in the 2001-2002 season was approximately 84%, up from approximately 83% in the previous year.

Service providers reported a total of 2,460 incidences of turning people away due to no vacancy, lack of appropriate bed, or other reasons.<sup>8</sup> Of these people, 1,776 (72%) were men and 684 (28%) were women.

### **Extreme weather shelter**

Two facilities funded by the City of Vancouver open their doors to provide shelter during extreme cold and/or wet weather: the Gathering Place and Evelyne Saller Centre.<sup>9</sup> During the 2001-2002 season, the Gathering Place provided shelter service on three nights (January 29, March 7, and March 18). It provided 52 bed nights: 41 bed nights used by men and 11 used by women. The Saller Centre opened for shelter service on four nights (January 7, 29 and 30, and March 8). It provided 89 bed nights: 70 used by men and 19 used by women.

### **Other additional winter shelter**

Some privately funded year-round shelter services add extra mats during the winter season and wet weather periods. For example, First Baptist Church provides shelter one night per week, and increases the number of mats from 17 to 27 for the winter period.

### **Services for families with children**

Two services provided shelter to families with children (Hope Community Services and the North Shore Shelter), for a total of 43 bed nights used by children. There were four recorded incidences of families with children being turned away (at North Shore Shelter).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The analysis of bed night use by gender was not available in the previous year.

<sup>8</sup> “No vacancy” is defined as “all beds/rooms full”. “No appropriate bed” is defined as not having a bed due to facility criteria for gender, age, or wheelchair access. “Other” reasons for people being turned away include substances, safety considerations, and people having been barred. The breakdown of data for these different categories of turn-aways during the 2001-2002 year is not feasible because the Strategy developed the specific definitions of the categories mid-year.

<sup>9</sup> Various faith organizations and others also provided shelter during periods of extreme weather, often on an informal basis. The Cold/Wet Weather Strategy has not yet documented such services.

<sup>10</sup> The cold/wet weather tracking form did not contain a space for turn aways of children.

## Shelter user survey findings

Analysis of cold/wet weather shelter user survey data provides evidence pertaining to improved access to emergency shelter. Asked, “if space at this shelter wasn’t available, where would you be staying?” 40% indicated they would be on the street or outdoors and the same percentage indicated that they did not know.<sup>11</sup> Comments in response to this question included the following:

- “I was in dumpsters. I wouldn’t have made it a couple nights without this shelter.”
- “I really honestly don’t know.”

### Responses: “If this space wasn’t available, where would you be staying?”

	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
On the street/outdoors	2	40%
Don’t know	2	40%
Another shelter	1	20%
TOTAL	5	100%

As with the 2000-2001 shelter user survey results, these findings suggest that a significant percentage of cold/wet weather shelter users would have otherwise been without shelter if these services were not available.

Of the 5 respondents, 2 (40%) indicated that they had been forced to leave other temporary housing facilities. One had overstayed the limit at a transition house. Another, who self-identified as a person with schizophrenia, had been asked to leave a facility for “bad conduct”.

Of 5 respondents, 3 (60%) indicated that they had an open file with the Ministry and 2 (40%) indicated that they did not. This finding, which is consistent with findings from the previous year’s shelter user survey, further suggests that the minimum-barrier approach contributed to improved access to emergency shelter.

## Improved coordination of shelter services

Opinion of Strategy participants indicates continued success in improved coordination of shelter services. Survey respondents rated their levels of agreement with the following statement: “*It facilitates information sharing, coordination, and support among shelter providers.*” The average survey response on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = “strongly agree” and 5 = “strongly disagree”) was 1.38. This number represents a slight increase in agreement levels indicated in the previous year (the average response then was 1.44).

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<sup>11</sup> The 2001-2002 shelter user survey focused on a smaller sample (five respondents participated). The respondents were users of the North Shore shelter.

## Overall effectiveness

Asked to rate the effectiveness of the Strategy over the past year, on a scale of 1 to 5, 89% of survey respondents indicated that it was either effective or very effective. Approximately 6% indicated “neutral or not sure” and the same percentage indicated “ineffective”.

**How would you rate the effectiveness of the Strategy over the past year?**

	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percent of respondents</b>
<b>Very effective</b>	5	28%
<b>Effective</b>	11	61%
<b>Neutral or not sure</b>	1	6%
<b>Ineffective</b>	1	6%
<b>Very ineffective</b>	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	18	100%

## 4.0 Strengths and Challenges

### 4.1 Strengths

#### Capacity of the Strategy

Survey responses confirmed the ten CWWS strengths that were identified in the previous evaluation.

Strengths 1 through 5 pertain to the capacity of the Strategy. These strengths are ranked in order of agreement level among survey respondents, and this ranking did not change from the previous year:

1. It brings together funding agencies, planners and service providers;
2. It facilitates information sharing, coordination and support among shelter providers;
3. The Strategy group works to continuously improve its performance;
4. It helps facilitate the development of regional shelter initiatives;
5. Participants have high levels of commitment.

#### **Strength #1: It brings together funding agencies, planners and service providers.**

The multi-stakeholder nature of the Strategy exemplifies an emerging model of partnership that brings together diverse interests to jointly address a shared challenge in an effective manner.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = “agree strongly” and 5 = “disagree strongly”), was 1.38. No respondents indicated disagreement. One commented: “*not many municipal planners at the table.*”

**Strength #2: It facilitates information sharing, coordination and support among shelter providers.**

Increased sharing of information, coordination, and collaboration among shelter providers helps to create a cohesive continuum of services. It can also lead to sharing of best practices and improved service quality.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 1.38. No respondents indicated disagreement.

**Strength #3: The Strategy group works to continuously improve its performance.**

The Strategy has made a concerted effort to learn from experience and continuously develop its effectiveness. Evaluation and strategic planning processes have contributed to this learning.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 1.44. No respondents indicated disagreement.

**Strength #4: It helps facilitate the development of regional shelter initiatives.**

Having increased communication, rapport, and relationship among cold/wet weather shelter providers and related stakeholders has been a catalyst for regional shelter initiatives.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 1.83. One respondent (6%) indicated disagreement (a rating of 4).

**Strength #5: Participants have high levels of commitment.**

Strategy participants have worked together as a result of their shared commitment to reduce the risks faced by homeless people due to lack of access to shelter in the cold/wet weather season.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 1.88. No respondents indicated disagreement.

## **Impact of the Strategy on shelter services**

Strengths 6 through 10 pertain to the impact of the Strategy on shelter services. These strengths are listed in order of agreement level indicated by survey respondents:

6. It has resulted in provision of low-barrier shelter beds;
7. It provides a forum for planning of cold/wet weather shelter services;
8. It mobilizes funding and other resources to meet needs for cold/wet weather shelter services;
9. It spans the Lower Mainland and encourages local responses;
10. It raises the profile of homelessness issues and shelter needs.

**Strength #6: It has resulted in provision of low-barrier shelter beds.**

Whereas year-round shelter beds funded by the Province normally require a referral through the Ministry of Human Resources Emergency Services, the cold/wet weather beds do not have this barrier.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 1.94. This response suggests decreased agreement with the statement from the previous year, when the average response was 1.31 (a change of approximately 0.63 points). One respondent indicated disagreement (a rating of 4).

**Strength #7: It provides a forum for planning of cold/wet weather shelter services.**

Without the Strategy, funding agencies, service providers, and planners would lack a forum for joint planning of cold/wet weather shelter services.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 1.44.

**Strength #8: It mobilizes funding and other resources to meet needs for cold/wet weather shelter services.**

The Strategy has mobilized funding and other resources from several sources to expand the supply of cold/wet weather shelter beds.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 1.88. Two respondents (12%) indicated disagreement (a rating of 4).

**Strength #9: It spans the Lower Mainland and encourages local responses.**

The Strategy has a mandate that spans the Lower Mainland, while also being a catalyst for local community responses to cold/wet weather shelter needs.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 2.0. Two respondents (12%) indicated disagreement (a rating of 4).

**Strength #10: It raises the profile of homelessness issues and shelter needs.**

The existence and work of the Strategy contributes to raising the profile of homelessness issues at all levels of government and with the public.

The average survey response regarding level of agreement with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 5, was 1.56. This represents increased agreement from the previous year, when the average response was 2.13 (a drop of approximately 0.57). One respondent commented: *“Could do better on this”*

Survey respondents did not identify any additional key strengths.

## 4.2 Challenges

### Capacity of the Strategy

Analysis of participant survey responses suggests that the Strategy has effectively addressed the five capacity challenges identified in the previous evaluation:

1. Staffing to support the Strategy;
2. Capacity to follow up on the Strategic Plan;
3. Governance and accountability structure;
4. Balanced representation;
5. Efficiency of meetings.

For all five of these challenges, respondents indicated general agreement that they are “less of an issue now”.

#### **Past challenge # 1: Staffing to support the Strategy.**

As noted in section 2.3 of this evaluation, the Strategy had professional staff support starting in November 2001. Regarding level of agreement with the statement, “staffing to support the Strategy and to follow up on the Strategic Plan, which was identified as a challenge in previous years, is less of an issue now” on a scale of 1 to 5, the average survey response was 2. Two respondents (12%) indicated disagreement. One commented: *“Staffing is important to ongoing success of CWWS.”*

#### **Past challenge # 2: Capacity to follow up on the Strategic Plan.**

The survey did not ask about this challenge, as the Planning and Evaluation Committee deemed this to be a function of challenge #1: that is, if the staffing challenge is effectively addressed, the capacity to follow up on the Strategic Plan will also be addressed.

#### **Past challenge # 3: Governance and accountability structure.**

Being an unincorporated inter-agency entity, and being relatively new, the Strategy had faced a challenge in developing a clear governance and accountability structure. As stated in section 2.3, it chose to defer implementation of the Action Group structure while also working through a variety of formally established Committees and Task Groups.

Regarding level of agreement with the statement, “the CWWS governance and accountability structure, which was identified as a challenge in previous years, is less of an issue now”, the average survey response was 2.17. Six respondents (33%) indicated “neutral or not sure” (a rating of 3) and one respondent (6%) indicated disagreement (a rating of 4).

#### **Past challenge # 4: Balanced representation.**

There had been uneven participation levels among categories of stakeholders and among geographic areas.

Regarding level of agreement with the statement, “balanced representation on the CWWS, which was identified as a challenge in previous years, is less of an issue now”, the average survey response was 2.18. One respondent (6%) indicated disagreement (a rating of 4).

**Past challenge # 5: Efficiency of meetings.**

The duration, structuring, and content of meetings had been identified as an issue. Since November 2001, CWWS contract staff facilitated Committee of the Whole meetings.

Regarding level of agreement with the statement, “efficiency of CWWS meetings, which was identified as a challenge in previous years, is less of an issue now”, the average survey response was 1.82. No respondents indicated disagreement.

**Other challenges**

Asked about their perceptions of other challenges related to the capacity of the Strategy, respondents commented as follows:

- ”Need a public relations strategy to get our message out.”
- “Continued communications challenges.”
- “One challenge is limited funding. Could do more with increased funding.”
- “Some participants are very informed, experienced, powerful and influential for a number of reasons. I would like to see some time to help less informed, less advantaged persons/agencies get up to speed.”

**Shelter services**

Analysis of participant survey responses clearly indicated a shared view that the CWWS should address shelter service challenges. In recognition that the Strategy did little in the 2001-2002 year to address the five challenges in this category, the survey asked whether the Strategy “should work to address” each of these challenges.

The following five challenges are listed in order of priority, based on analysis of survey responses. This order is almost exactly the same as the average level of agreement indicated in the previous year: 6 and 9, which are very closely related, switched places.

6. Lack of needs assessment to determine shelter resource requirements;
7. Accessibility of individual shelters services;
8. Lack of linkages to further services;
9. Service gaps;
10. Coordination of funding.

**Shelter service challenge # 6: Lack of needs assessment to determine shelter resource requirements.**

Volume of funding has not based on systematically assessed need for cold/wet weather shelter services. Asked about their level of agreement with the statement, “the Strategy should work to support needs assessment to determine shelter resource requirements,” the

average survey response was 1.39 on a scale of 1 to 5. No respondents indicated disagreement.

**Shelter service challenge # 7: Accessibility of individual shelters services.**

Some shelter services have problems with accessibility, particularly in terms of their capacity to serve relatively challenging clients. Asked about their level of agreement with the statement, “the Strategy should work to address accessibility of individual shelter services,” the average survey response was 1.5. No respondents indicated disagreement.

**Shelter service challenge # 8: Lack of linkages to further services.**

Cold/wet weather shelter services have been focused primarily on keeping people off of the street. Asked about their level of agreement with the statement, “the Strategy should work to address shelter providers’ capacity to link clients to further services,” the average survey response was 1.5. No respondents indicated disagreement.

**Shelter service challenge # 9: Service gaps.**

The Strategy has addressed some identified gaps in the continuum of cold/wet weather shelter services (e.g., women’s shelter). However, several identified gaps remained unresolved (e.g., youth shelter and transportation). Asked about their level of agreement with the statement, “the Strategy should work to address gaps in shelter services” the average survey response was 1.61. No respondents indicated disagreement. One commented: “*children and families need to be addressed!*”

**Shelter service challenge # 10: Coordination of funding.**

Having multiple agencies providing cold/wet weather shelter funding poses a coordination challenge. Asked about their level of agreement with the statement, “the Strategy should work to address coordination of shelter funding” the average survey response was 2.18. One respondent (6%) indicated disagreement.

## **5.0 Conclusion and recommendations**

This evaluation of the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy’s fourth year documented overall performance and analyzed opinions about strengths and challenges. An updated logic model realigned the conception of the Strategy to fit with the goals and objectives identified in the action plan. The evaluation presented shelter service use data to indicate achievement of the “increased access” outcome, whereas in the past such data was presented as outputs.

Once again, the volume of cold/wet weather shelter service increased from previous years. Despite this increase, the overall occupancy rates of shelter beds associated with the Strategy also increased.

Documentation of these findings contributes to accountability and provides a basis for further action planning. As the Strategy moves forward, the information presented in this evaluation and previous ones can be used to help analyze trends, identify priorities for action, and strengthen overall performance.

The evaluator offers the following four recommendations for consideration by the Strategy:

Recommendation 2002-1: Continue to address CWWS capacity challenges.

Recommendation 2002-2: Work with Shelter Net BC to address service challenges.

Recommendation 2002-3: Implement the CWWS Communication Plan.

Recommendation 2002-4: Continue using the CWWS Action Plan to guide the work of the Strategy and to monitor progress.