

Winter Emergency Coordination – Report for the Winter of 2006-2007

Prepared by Boyle Street Community Services

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A. Background

Last summer and fall, community organizations serving people who are homeless met to develop a plan aimed at helping people without homes survive the coming winter. Their goals were to reduce the risk of being homeless and advance the collective response to the growing number of people unable to access market housing, supported and transitional housing or shelter and intervention services.

The resulting Winter Emergency Response Plan was prepared for the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing and Homelessness and was endorsed by Edmonton City Council on October 30. The plan encompassed a tapestry of services intended to enhance supports for people without homes, with a view to increasing their wellbeing and ultimately their ability to secure and maintain a home. Emergency elements of the plan included 400 additional mats at emergency shelters in the inner city, the operation of warming centres, the deployment of a van to provide direct service to homeless people on the street and the hiring of a winter plan coordinator. Funding for these elements was provided by the Government of Alberta and the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund.

The purpose of this report is to review the plan's effectiveness, highlight what worked well this winter, identify areas that need additional attention and provide suggestions for the future.

B. Environmental Scan

The winter of 2006-2007 may be viewed as a turning point in the city's history. People were flocking to Edmonton in search of jobs and opportunity. At the same time, housing costs continued their upward climb, rental vacancies plummeted and the availability of affordable housing became scarce.

During the winter, many of the shelters and warming centres noted the tide of people arriving from Ontario and the Maritimes. Organizations such as the Mustard Seed and the WeCare Ministry remarked on the new and unfamiliar people that were showing up in their line-ups for hot meals and clothes. Mustard Seed typically saw about 500 people each night for an evening meal and WeCare, which sets up at a downtown parking lot to hand out food and clothing every Sunday, similarly saw 500 people every weekend.

Concerns about housing increased over the winter period. The 211 information line reported that they received almost 1500 calls from people with housing issues, during the period November 1 to March 15, 2007, about 10.5% of all the enquiries they received. In the previous year, during the same time frame, only 5.9% of calls dealt with housing. From January 1 to March 31, 2007, 12.6% of calls to 211 were housing related.

The 211 line also tracks the number of requests for assistance that staff are unable to fulfil. The number of unmet needs related to housing calls increased to 192 during the first quarter of 2007 from 80 during the last quarter in 2006.

More Edmontonians were facing a housing crunch and fears were growing that a new group of people, the working poor, was about to tip into homelessness as rents increased at a pace never before seen in the city.

Shelters noted the increasing number of working people with jobs but no place to call their own. At the Herb Jamieson men's shelter, officials estimated that at least one quarter of their 250 beds were filled by working people.

Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (AEII) continued placing families in urgent situations in city hotels. Some AEII staff reported that it would take five or six calls to find a hotel willing to take a family in crisis. Hotel operators were becoming more selective in who they would accept into their establishments.

The YMCA, which had five rooms this winter for families, noted it was taking much longer to transition families into the community, reflecting the tight rental market. Apartment managers were also more selective in accepting tenants, often leaving socially disadvantaged people in the lurch.

Secondary immigrants, who started their stay in other Canadian cities, also came to Edmonton in search of jobs. Immigrant aid agencies reported that these secondary immigrants were often individuals who did not do well in their initial Canadian location and came to Edmonton in the hopes of turning around their lives. Often, the profile was of people with fewer language and employment skills. Many looked to their fellow nationals to occupy space in a backyard or a couch during summer and were left with few options when winter arrived. Few of these individuals looked to the emergency shelters for accommodation.

Homelessness continued to grow as a citywide phenomenon, no longer restricted to the inner city or individuals with chronic substance abuse and mental health issues. During the winter, Edmontonians were advising various agencies that they were seeing homeless camps in open fields, far away from the city centre. The growing "inner city" along Stony Plain Road continued to attract attention. The Fort Road smokestack camp and the stockyards were a major focus for the van contacts were made in the deep west while Whyte Avenue being called further south. Many homeless people were avoiding

the inner city, perceiving the downtown core to be more violent than other neighbourhoods. People working without homes were also in search of places that did not drag them into the homelessness vortex.

For its part, the downtown inner city continued its transition into a more dangerous place. People who worked at drop-ins remarked that there was more blatant use of drugs on the street. In the past, people might drink in a back alley away from public view; some inner city veterans now noticed drug users were more public in feeding their habits, shooting up in plain view.

Prescription pills, crack and crystal meth dominated the use of drugs in the inner city but the explosion of crack was particularly noticed by health agencies. Warming centres in the south side and west end noted the increasing incidence of crack among people they served with mental illness. For those who migrated to the inner city for shelter or other services, the ready accessibility of highly addictive drugs made the transition to healthier lifestyles more difficult. The increased toxicity of street drugs became and remains a common concern.

Service agencies, including emergency shelters, were suffering this winter from the continuing growth in demand and burgeoning caseloads. Government agencies that work out of emergency shelters noticed that people were staying longer compared to previous years; stays were often at least one month. Two years ago, caseloads at a community health centre were approximately 70 per month per outreach worker; this winter a monthly caseload of 200 was not unusual. Equally, social support services experienced overburdening demands and examined ways to manage their work.

This was the backdrop for the winter of 2006-2007: an increasing number of people arriving in the city looking for work, a quickly evaporating affordable housing market and a growing number of people turning to emergency shelters as a last resort while service agencies strained to keep up with demand. It was the winter of the perfect storm.

C. Winter Program Service Use

Counts of Edmonton’s homeless population started in 1999. The numbers have steadily increased in the intervening years as shown in the table below, derived from “*Out in the Cold, A Count of Homeless Persons in Edmonton,*” published by the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing in October 2006.

Table 1: Total Homeless in Edmonton

<i>March 1999</i>	<i>November 1999</i>	<i>March 2000</i>	<i>September 2000</i>	<i>October 2002</i>	<i>October 2004</i>	<i>October 2006</i>
	7	1125	1160	1915	2192	2618



A total of 2618 homeless persons were counted on October 17, 2006. This included 1774 individuals who were considered absolute homeless (68% of the total homeless) and 844 (32%) who were living in emergency shelters. Approximately 90% of the homeless people counted were single.

The first stark question raised by these numbers is, how are the people who are not staying in emergency shelters surviving, where are they staying and what services are being accessed.

This section provides some data and key accomplishments related to the projects funded under the winter emergency plan. We include reference to the George Spady Centre as it is a crucial shelter service that provides a useful indicator of demand, although its funding comes from AADAC, not the winter plan. Individual projects are reporting in more detail to the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund on the profile of individuals using services and program outcomes.

Shelter Use

Shelter services in Edmonton have a year-round capacity of about 536 beds and mats. Under the Winter Emergency Plan, an additional 400 mats were provided at the Hope Mission (250), the Print Shop (100) and the Salvation Army (50). As indicated in Table 2, occupancy increased significantly from November to January (beds and mats used per day increased by an average of about 100). Average occupancy climbed an additional 5 per cent between February and April. The April increase was likely due to the shutdown of oil and gas rigs in northern Alberta and the continued influx of newcomers to the city from other provinces. The April increase, as evidenced this year by the highest per-day average, has been observed annually.

Table 2: Shelter Occupancy By Month, Winter 2006–2007*

Month	Total Occupied Beds and Mats	Average per Day
November 2006	20,528	684
December 2006	22,164	715
January 2007	24,472	789
February 2007	21,996	786
March 2007	24,885	803
April 2007	24,841	828

** For the Women’s Emergency Accommodation Centre, Hope Mission mats and intox, Herb Jamieson, Print Shop, Salvation Army mats and The George Spady Centre.*

Table 3 includes statistics for the number of people that came to the Crossroads Church overnight drop-in, indicating a peak in use during January. Crossroads reports that they tended to attract people from the immediate neighbourhood, which may partly explain their rather steady average per-day use statistics.

Table 3: Use of Overnight Chairs at Crossroads Church Warming Centre

Month	Number of People Served	Average per Day
November (started Nov.3)	784	24
December	1030	23
January	1506	26
February	1209	28
March	1184	26
April (to April 28, inclusive)	828	30

As illustrated in Table 4, occupancy was higher at emergency shelters during warmer days from November to February. This has been the experience in previous years, as more people make a couch or their room available to friends during extremely cold days. Cheque day has the largest impact on reducing occupancy. The first week of April, however, had particularly cold weather and significantly larger occupancy numbers compared to warmer days later in the month. This may be indicative of more newcomers coming to the city with fewer community connections.

Table 4: Impact of Weather and Cheque Day on Shelter Occupancy*

Month	Average Occupancy Per Day: 5 Coldest Days	Average Occupancy Per Day: 5 Warmest Days	Occupancy – Cheque Day**
November	690	700	659
December	715	721	657
January	784	783	678
February	764	788	674
March	805	782	756
April	852	780	740

* Based on temperature data reported at Edmonton International Airport, for the period November 15/06 to April 30/07. ** Four working days prior to end of month.

Throughout the season, individual shelters were either close to full capacity or over capacity, as illustrated by the following table.

Table 5: Beds, Mats and Chairs
November 1, 2006 – April 30, 2007

Facility (Capacity)	Percentage Occupancy					
	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April
Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre (75 beds and mats)	96.6%	94.5%	92.3%	95%	95%	97.3%
Hope Mission Mats (250 mats; men, women, couples, somewhat alcohol tolerant)	68.9%	71.8%	84.1%	85.3%	89.1%	94.2%
Hope Mission Intox (70 mats, men)	90.3%	92.2%	98.6%	100.8%	102.5%	102.2%
Print Shop* (100 mats for youth and adults; somewhat alcohol tolerant)	69.4%*	93%*	112%*	107.8%*	72.2%*	70.7%*
	* of 40 mats available Nov1-Feb 22					
Herb Jamieson (250 beds for sober men)	101.7%	99.4%	103.5%	101.4%	104.6%	110.9%
Salvation Army Mats (50 mats for sober men)	19.5%	58.4%	97.3%	94.1%	93.8%	90.4%
George Spady Centre (80 mats, men and women; alcohol tolerant)	108.8%	106.5%	110.7%	109.1%	105.6%	105.3%
Crossroads Church (overnight drop-in, up to 75 chairs for men and women)	37.3%	44.3%	64.8%	57.6%	50.9%	39.4%

* From November 1 – February 22, the Print Shop capacity was 40 mats for youth. From February 23 – April 30, adults also occupied the Print Shop. Although the official capacity for youth and adults was 100 mats, the actual was closer to about 75. Based on the actual mats available, occupancy rates were higher: 96.3% in March and 94.3% in April.

The increased use of the Hope Mission mats underlined the growing demand for space over the winter period, as occupancy steadily increased from almost 70% in November to 94% in April. The growing use of the Salvation Army mats, once their availability became better known, similarly illustrated the increasing demand for emergency shelter (and the lack of other alternatives).

The Print Shop was initially planned as an overflow facility for adults but was pressed into service as a place for youth as the second floor of the Hope Mission (the youth wing) was unavailable while renovations and repairs continued during the winter. This too helped explain increasing occupancy at the Hope Mission mat program.

The inability to recruit additional staff for the Print Shop to supervise youth and adults was one of the main factors that limited its use to youth only. In late winter, the Hope Mission hired security guards (for the Print Shop and the mat program) funded from the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund, resulting in more

adults being streamed to the Print Shop. Occupancy at the Hope Mission mat program continued to increase during March and April.

As noted earlier, shelter operators commented this winter that the continuing influx of single men from other parts of the country looking for work was one of the most remarkable factors resulting in increased shelter use.

Anecdotally, people who work in shelters noted that shelter stays were longer this winter – it was not unusual for a person to stay one month in a shelter while looking for alternative accommodation that was increasingly difficult to find. One of the contributing factors to longer stays in shelters is the reduced availability of cheap hotels and rooming houses. Longer wait lists to access detox and treatment services also kept people in shelters for longer periods.

Some shelters remarked that there has been a gradual increase in their use by women over the past few years but more statistics would have to be reviewed to confirm the trend. However, anecdotally, inner city services would confirm that there was an increase in younger women, particularly Aboriginal women, appearing on the street. The growing presence of women in street and criminally involved communities has also been observed.

The high overall occupancy underlines the need to examine options for meeting shelter space requirements in the immediate term as well as next winter. The occupancy data indicates that there was a steady demand this winter by 780-800 people for emergency shelter space at the locations surveyed. Suggestions on how to address growing demand are noted later in this report.

Transportation, Warming Centres and Weekend Drop-In Use

Each funded project is submitting a report on its activities to the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund. It is nevertheless useful to provide a brief overview regarding some key accomplishments and observations.

- *Winter Van* – Last year, between December 12, 2005 and April 30, 2006, the Boyle Street winter van served 292 distinct individuals. During the winter period just ended, from November 1, 2006 to April 30, 2007, 724 distinct people were served, over a slightly longer period than the previous winter. Increased use of the van is due, in part, to its positive reputation and the growing number of homeless people across the city. The van was regularly contacted by Edmonton Police Services, inner city agencies and concerned community members. The van provided immediate assistance (food and clothing), transportation to city shelters, access to medical services and follow-up to clients who needed access to community and government programs.



Centres – In addition to the Crossroads Church overnight drop-in (noted on page 5), two new drop-ins were used this winter. Jasper

Place Health and Wellness Centre (JPHWC) opened in June 2006 and received funding to extend its evening and weekend hours during the winter. From November 1, 2006 to April 30, 2007, there were 4796 week end and evening visits (data on the number of individuals who used the service is not available). Jasper Place offered shower facilities, an area to store carts and access to computers. Approximately 150 individuals at JPHWC used the Boyle Street winter van about 948 times to go from JPHWC to downtown shelters; approximately 50 people were admitted to detox or other substance abuse treatment programs as a result of JPHWC efforts and at least 20 people were helped to find a place to live.

Strathcona Baptist Centre (SBC) opened a small warming centre on Whyte Avenue on January 7, 2007 with fairly limited hours in the evening. SBC had about 1200 visits to the end of April from approximately 250 individuals; 120 people used the Boyle Street winter van to go from SBC to downtown shelters.

- *Weekend Warming Centre at Boyle Street* - Boyle Street opened its drop-in on three weekends in November and December, prior to receiving funding from Edmonton Housing Trust Fund in January 2007. From November 1, 2006 to April 30, 2007, there were 7445 visits from 2647 individuals. Funding was received to operate a warming centre only. Thus, staffing levels were low and the drop-in did not provide more intensive personal service; it served primarily as a place to survive the cold, when no other location was open downtown for the homeless. EHTF noted that high demand merited more staff, however, the part-time and short-term nature of the project combined with perceived wage caps contributed to no change in staffing levels. It was generally difficult to recruit and retain staff throughout the project.

D. What Went Well

A number of successes, including promising innovations and initiatives, made the winter response more effective.

- **Warming Centres** – The four drop-in centres, dispersed in various locations across the city, proved to be a valuable addition to the city’s social infrastructure. What was particularly interesting is that the centres often helped create a sense of community for people without homes. They became an important location where people could escape the elements, get some food, generally feel safe, connect with others and often reduce tension. Warming centre staff alternately described their centres as “living rooms” or “a little Switzerland,” a neutral spot where tensions from the street were, at times, left behind.



Street, after considerable effort and despite inexperienced and low wages, dysfunctional behaviours began to appear less frequently. Issues between weekday and weekend users as well as drop-in

users from other services caused concern. Behaviour was turned around once boundaries about acceptable behaviour were established. Community members often enforced rules to keep the centre peaceable. Some of the other warming centres reported similar results, once consistent rules and expectations were applied.

- ***Additional Healthcare Resources*** - As a result of financial assistance from Capital Health, Boyle McCauley Health Centre (BMHC) was able to engage an additional nurse for the period, March 13 to April 27. The nurse, Lisa Heslip, connected with the warming centres, shelters, the Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services and Streetworks. She provided much needed medical attention to people without homes. A total of 57 clients were served during a six-week period, addressing chest infections, wounds, frostbite and other medical conditions. Addictions was a major issue for about 95% of patients and the need for housing came up constantly. The drop-ins proved to be particularly valuable as a place to engage people in a somewhat more relaxed environment and find out more about their needs and priorities. It is worth noting that the additional nurse resource is to continue at BMHC.
- ***Mental Health Services*** – There were some promising developments in terms of improving access to mental health services through agencies that serve homeless and poor people in the city. A number of discussions were held this winter between Capital Health and service agencies involved in the winter plan to assess the need for enhanced, year-round access. We are now expecting a point person or coordinator to be appointed who will expedite access to mental health professionals. The acknowledgement that access is a year-round issue was an important step.
- ***Winter Van Services*** - As noted earlier, the use of the Boyle Street winter van increased significantly this year. The van was especially valuable in reaching out to people who did not frequent warming centres or other services. This mobile outreach was able to connect with people on the ground and further reduce the risk of anyone succumbing to the elements. It became a source of immediate help, the provider of harm reduction messages and tools, and a link to other community services (including identification cards, access to social services and health care). Van staff was especially useful in placing people who were displaced from the tent city on Fort Road and assisting with the orderly dismantling of a camp under the stairs at the former First Pentecostal Tabernacle on 107 Avenue. Media interest in these efforts was high and garnered considerable public support for community action against homelessness.

- ***Inter-Agency Discussion and Information Sharing*** - As part of the coordination role provided under the winter plan, agencies met to discuss issues and opportunities this winter. Activity in this area included:
 - Meetings with emergency shelters shared information about shelter use.
 - Challenges in serving wheelchair-bound community members who live in shelters were reviewed.
 - Links with an Aboriginal employment agency were established to recruit Aboriginal staff for emergency shelters.
 - Warming centres were brought together to discuss training needs and other challenges.
 - A training session was organized on de-escalation of angry clients.
 - Meetings were organized with health care providers on how to maximize use of the additional nurse resource hired by Boyle McCauley Health Centre.
 - Discussions were held on mental health needs.
 - Representatives from a west-end church-based community group participated in a visit to Inn from the Cold in Calgary to find out more about that city's efforts to address the needs of homeless families.
 - A broad range of agencies met to discuss and identify particular initiatives that would assist homeless women in the city.
 - Emergency shelters stepped up their efforts to coordinate their services. For example, the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre, the George Spady Centre and the Hope Mission regularly stayed in touch to place women that needed a mat or bed.
 - Coordination efforts led to a valuable link between the YMCA and Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (AEII). A number of families were staying longer at the Y's residence, partly because transition assistance resources were strained. With additional assistance from AEII, some families will have improved access to employment and other services to assist with their transition into the community.
 - A monthly newsletter was circulated to update service providers, community organizations and government officials about efforts to respond to winter needs in the city.
 - A resource list helped keep a broad range of people informed about the winter response.

Each of these interventions contributed to enhancing the community response to people who are homeless. After winter ended, many service providers noted the need to continue inter-agency discussion and coordination.

E. Issues and Recommendations

The purpose of this section is to bring forward a number of issues and recommendations arising from our experience with the winter emergency response. Some of the recommendations look beyond a winter response to homelessness, as the issue is truly a year-round challenge without seasonal borders.

Issue: Increasing Demand for Emergency Shelter Space and Crowded Conditions

The Hope Mission, the major operator of emergency shelter spaces in the city, has reported that occupancy at its facilities has dramatically increased compared to the winter of 2005-2006. Last year, there was an average of 450 people staying at Hope Mission emergency shelters; during the past winter, the average increased to 650 and peaked at over 700 on April 4th. Table 5 on page 6 relates the high occupancy at all emergency shelters.

The crowding of the homeless at emergency shelters has many impacts: increased difficulty for working people to get the rest they need (and stay employed), a higher likelihood for the transmission of illness, heightened tension for residents and staff and more violence.

Crowding also made it harder to find out the needs of shelter residents and assist them with the transition into housing. The George Spady Centre, for example, reported that they are not as able to engage shelter users as in the past, when occupancy was, on average, 20-30 people per night; last winter, occupancy was typically in the 80-90 range.

With the continuing migration of people to Edmonton to chase jobs, we cannot simply react by providing more emergency shelter space for those without accommodation – this is not a sustainable strategy.

More importantly, we must ask ourselves whether emergency shelters are an appropriate response for people without homes. Individuals with chronic addictions and/or mental illness should be in accommodation coupled with appropriate support and intervention services. Working people without a place to stay should have increased access to independent housing.

Indeed, the mission of some shelters elsewhere in Canada is to reduce the number of available beds. This is accomplished through aggressive outreach efforts during the shelter intake process and the provision of appropriate follow-up services. Such an approach is consistent with the Government of Alberta's "Homelessness Policy Framework; Implementation Strategy" issued in July 2000.



ources are present, for example at the Herb Jamieson (through ment, Immigration and Industry) to provide information and

advice to shelter residents, staff in most shelters are stretched to accomplish the objective of transitioning people out of shelters.

Recommendation #1: Through the Edmonton Community Plan, articulate an overarching philosophy and strategy underlining the role of shelters as a transitional step to a permanent home.

Recommendation #2: Deploy additional resources to the community to engage shelter residents, determine their needs, help access services (health care, transportation assistance to work, access to social services, etc.) and assist with the transition into the community.

Recommendation #3: Pursue the establishment of worker hostels across the city, with access to appropriate outreach and support services.

Issue: Recruitment, Retention, Staffing and Training at Shelters and Warming Centres

It was exceptionally difficult to recruit and retain employees at shelters and warming centres this winter. Low wages and the seasonal and part-time nature of work were major impediments to recruiting and retaining staff. Shelter staff typically earned about \$11 per hour. In addition, new recruits were often unprepared for the rigors of the job and soon left for other opportunities offering better pay and less stress. In many cases, shelters operated with about 70% of needed staff during the past winter, further adding to job-related stress. For their part, warming centres underlined that they required more staff per shift to effectively deliver service but were hard pressed to find qualified personnel.

Recommendation #4: Using the Boland study, expedite the review of wage scales for shelter workers in order to address the quickly changing labour market.

Recommendation #5: With the experience of the past winter, reconsider future staffing levels necessary to effectively work with homeless people at warming centres and the significance of job security and benefits in this market.

Recommendation #6: Establish a centralized service to recruit appropriate individuals to work at shelters and warming centres. Coordinated training efforts might be particularly relevant for warming centres.

Recommendation #7: Consider providing stress relief services to staff k at shelters and warming centres. The work environment for

front-line workers is particularly stressful. Stress management is often a key to staff retention.

Issue: Year-Round Street-Based Services

As noted, some shelter staff remarked on the continuing wave of single men coming to Edmonton from out of province, particularly during the late winter and early spring. Clearly, the migration trend will continue. At the same time, we have affirmed this winter that homeless people are dispersed throughout the city, and in many cases deliberately avoid the inner city. As a result, it is worth considering whether a number of the efforts pursued during the winter should continue during the rest of the year.

Recommendation #8: Establish a coordinated network of year-round community gathering and assistance centres in various locations across the city. The centres would serve as an initial triage service to identify client needs and access needed services such as mental health and employment services. In many ways, the proposed centres would build on the experience of the winter warming centres but with expanded resources.

Recommendation #9: With the dispersal of homeless people across the city, consider year-round funding for a homeless outreach van to address immediate needs (e.g., food, clothing and access to medical services). The van could also serve as a link to stable housing and support services.

Recommendation #10: To complement the work of the proposed community gathering and assistance centres, develop an aggressive on-the-street information outreach campaign aimed at new arrivals (particularly single men and women) regarding available food, health care, shelter and other services. Such services would be available at the bus depot, food bank outlets and other locations and direct people to the proposed gathering centres and other service providers.

Issue: Winter Project Neighbour Relations

Not-in-my backyard issues became a factor for some of the winter projects. In particular, they nearly resulted in the closure of the Crossroads overnight drop-in.

Recommendation 11: In cases, where NIMBY may be a factor, include funding to enable a project to actively engage community interests on an ongoing basis. Such efforts should link with advisory resources available from the City of Edmonton.

Issue: Addressing the Medical and Nutritional Needs of Homeless People



**Boyle Street
Community Services**

th care issues were noted by front-line service providers this
mple,

- It is not unusual for ill shelter residents to spend their days on the street, as capacity at the Herb Jamieson medical ward and other downtown clinics is limited. As a result, inner city health professionals observe that a range of shelter resident medical needs go unaddressed and worsen as a result. Given the crowded conditions, the potential for the transmission of illness is significant.
- Winter van, warming centre and weekend drop-in staff also reported that they found individuals who need attention for immediate health care issues including chest infections, wound care, foot care and frostbite.
- It is well known that people without homes do not present well in hospitals, feeling unwelcome and often not representing their needs effectively. Winter van staff note that direct care on the street is often the most effective.
- Hospitals continued to face the challenge of what to do with homeless people who have no place to live after discharge. Currently, there are few options for them to continue their rehabilitation and integration into the community. This is particularly the case for single women.
- Although there is a sense that there are many places to get food, accessing nutritious food remains a challenge. At the George Spady Centre, many people line up daily at 3 p.m. to gain access to the shelter, often missing a supper meal – this often results in increased tension. In a recent report completed by the Bissell Centre, “Living Without Food,” homeless respondents underlined how hard it is to access food.
- There is a firm impression by community agencies that it is taking much longer to gain access to detox and treatment services. The result is that more people are left in shelters waiting to gain admission. The delay between detox and treatment worsens the prospect of a successful outcome.

Recommendation #12: Assess the role of the additional nurse resource and consider the need for additional nursing outreach at homeless shelters and drop-ins. This might include holding ill shelter residents in the morning to receive immediate care at a shelter. Consider the advantages of enabling the nurse resource to prescribe selected medications.

Recommendation #13: Consider establishing a resource in city hospitals that would work with homeless individuals (and others) to ensure there is clear communication about patient needs and medical follow-up. Winter van staff have also discussed the need to establish ongoing relationships with emergency hospital contacts – this should be pursued.

Recommendation #14: Work with Capital Health to launch health campaigns that include a focus on people who are marginalized and aim at such issues as diabetes management and respiratory care that may be part of a broader Edmonton-wide health maintenance effort.

Recommendation #15: Reserve rooms at appropriate community facilities such as the YMCA for homeless individuals who are discharged from city hospitals so they can continue their climb back to health. Provide appropriate ongoing support and services to facilitate community re-integration.

Recommendation #16: Governments should provide adequate funding for nutritious food at all emergency shelters.

Recommendation #17: Continue discussions with AADAC and other service providers to assess options for expeditious access to addiction treatment services.

Issue: After-Hours Services to the Homeless

A number of issues related to hours of service continued to be prominent this winter:

- Several inner city agencies noted there are more people sleeping in their waiting areas during the day because there are few other places to rest.
- Homeless people who are discharged from some shelters at 7 a.m. have nowhere to go, until drop-ins and service offices open at 8 a.m. or later.
- When inner city service agencies close at 4:30 p.m., there is a long gap until people may access most shelters or food services, such as the Mustard Seed daily supper at 7 p.m.
- A number of agencies noted the need for more shower and laundry facilities across the city, particularly on weekends, when agencies are closed.

Recommendation #18: Consider establishing a daytime respite for people who do not use shelters overnight or have been working late-night shifts and cannot access available beds at the Herb Jamieson.

Recommendation #19: The ability of shelters to alter their hours of operation is directly related to staffing and budgeting challenges. It is therefore necessary to adequately resource the continuum of services to ensure coordinated 24/7 support and intervention is available through established shelter and community services. Experiences elsewhere, including the Calgary Drop-In may inform this exploration.

Recommendation #20: The proposed community gathering and assistance centres should be equipped with laundry and shower facilities, similar to the recently available at the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre.

Issue: Access to Shelters by Handicapped Individuals

Some efforts were undertaken this winter to identify the number of handicapped or mobility-challenged people that arrive at city shelters. Typically, wheelchair-bound individuals end up at the George Spady Centre. The Hope Mission mat program often does not have the space or the staff to look after handicapped individuals. The George Spady Centre, in turn, do what they can in light of their limitations.

Recommendation #21: Continue to investigate options to address the needs of handicapped and mobility-challenged people at city shelters.

Issue: Individuals Barred from Service

This winter we had hoped to do more case planning for individuals that are barred from service agencies. This was to be accomplished, in part, through the execution of a personal information release form that would enable agencies to share case information. This remains a work in progress and indicates the need for a dedicated resource to make it happen.

Police contacts made during the winter continued to note the burden they face in transporting barred individuals from facility to facility, searching for a place for the barred person to stay.

In the past, individuals who were barred from some service agencies were often rotated among other agencies where the doors were still open. However, with the growing numbers at all service providers, there were fewer available options to place barred people. In the result, they ended up in police cells or the ante room of the Herb Jamieson.

Recommendation # 22: Investigate options for a centralized information and referral system that could be accessed by police and others to ensure effective dispatch of individuals to shelters and other available services.

Issue: Transportation to the Workplace

In many cases, individuals who stayed in downtown shelters had particular difficulty in making their way to employers, including temp agencies, located in various parts of the city.

Recommendation #23: Expand the availability of bus tickets for individuals who need transportation for work purposes.

Issue: Data Regarding Homeless and Shelter Residents

Shelters face particular challenges in gathering information about people who stay at their facilities. There is a rush to admit people each night and, in some cases, too many questions are seen as intrusive. There were hopes this year to use the HIFIS system for additional analysis of shelter use; technical issues, however, frustrated this intent. The ability to gather more detailed information about who is coming to city shelters remains an important tool to effectively plan for future needs.

Earlier recommendations about deploying resource teams to city shelters to engage residents and establishing community gathering and assistance centres would help accumulate needed background information about the face of homelessness and complement the work of the homeless count.

Issue: Winter Emergency Coordination

The winter emergency plan provided for a coordinator to work with service providers, encourage inter-agency communication and share information about the winter response. Expectations about the coordination role and duties varied and changed as the winter progressed. Front-line service providers valued the role. However, the need for the role was questioned by some, highlighting underlining questions about who should be responsible for winter coordination. This situation resulted in many frustrations for all parties.

The real question is: do we need a coordination role to address a winter-specific strategy or more broadly an inter-agency, year-round response to homelessness? This issue is really bound up in how we plan and respond to homelessness in this city. In the attached appendix, we propose a structure and process to complement the work related to the Edmonton Community Plan on Housing and Support Services. The intent is to focus additional attention on the homelessness component of the Community Plan and enable all parties to respond to a quickly changing homelessness environment.

Appendix A: Toward Coordinated Planning for Edmontonians without Homes

Background

Homelessness is now a year-round concern in the City of Edmonton. The continuing influx of newcomers searching for jobs, the declining apartment vacancy rate, the steep rise in rents and the lack of rooming houses and low-cost inner-city hotel rooms have meant that there are more homeless people on the streets, throughout the year.

The homeless count in October 2006 confirmed an increase of almost 25% in the number of people without homes over a two-year period. In addition, the increased occupancy numbers at homeless shelters this past winter underline the growing incidence of homelessness in the city. In January 2007, the average per night occupancy at city shelters increased by 33% compared to January 2006.

The Edmonton Housing Trust Fund and the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing (EJPCOH) initiated a Winter Emergency Committee several years ago. Last summer and fall, building on past efforts, an inter-agency process resulted in the development of a Winter Emergency Response Plan. Edmonton City Council endorsed the plan in October 2006 and the Government of Alberta subsequently funded key elements.

While the concerns and risks are more acute during the cold winter months, it is clear that there is a need to plan and respond effectively on a year-round basis to the needs of people without homes.

Objectives

In this section, we outline a structure intended to promote coordinated planning and allow for timely and effective responses to the urgent and growing homelessness challenge. The planning effort would have the following objectives:

1. Articulate an overarching philosophy regarding the role of shelters and other service providers in addressing homelessness.
2. Identify projected demand for shelter spaces over a multi-year period.
3. Develop standards for shelter services in the City of Edmonton.
4. Identify and arrange for the delivery of support services necessary to help individuals living in shelters transition into the community.
5. Identify and support street-based support programs.



6. Identify the need for expanded and coordinated community-based outreach programs that address the physical and mental health needs of people without homes.
7. Identify and address the service and program needs of special populations that face homelessness (youth, seniors, immigrant, women, families, couples and disabled).
8. Identify housing support service needs for individuals once housed.

The results of the planning efforts would be incorporated into the Edmonton Community Plan on Housing and Support Services, developed by the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing.

Proposed Structure

The proposed planning structure is aimed at coordinating a number of critical tasks: data gathering, needs assessment and program and service responses. The proposed working groups would address each of these tasks while ensuring the information and recommendations are dealt with at one table, the proposed Coordinated Planning Group. The following describes the roles of the working/planning groups.

1. **Service Users Feedback Group** – The service users group would be comprised of individuals with a current or past history of homelessness, with the insight and ability to provide feedback about shelter and other community-based services. The group would provide comments about the adequacy of services and suggest possible improvements.
2. **Service Provider Working Groups** - Three working groups, comprised of community service providers and government representatives, would be established to focus on issues affecting particular populations: youth, women and families. All groups would consider the needs of immigrant populations. A fourth working group would be comprised of shelter service providers.

The working groups would focus on the following:

- a) Identify immediate service needs.
- b) Identify service need trends.
- c) Suggest program and service delivery options.

The working groups would identify priority initiatives that need attention. While each service provider would independently pursue initiatives related to its organization, the purpose of the working group would be to identify initiatives that cross boundaries, lead to increased coordination and effective service delivery.



service working group would develop projections about overall shelter use in the city and recommend strategies to address future

needs. Proposals from the Service Provider Working Groups would be recommended to the Coordinated Planning Group.

3. **Coordinated Planning Group** – The Coordinated Planning Group would include a representative from each of the service users and service providers working groups, as well as representatives from program funders (e.g., City of Edmonton, Edmonton Housing Trust Fund, Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing, other levels of government and foundations).

The Coordinated Planning Group would have the overall responsibility to meet the objectives noted earlier. The planning group would review priorities and initiatives identified by the working groups and decide which initiatives would be funded. A coordinator would support the efforts of the various working groups.

The proposed structure could be incorporated into the new entity resulting from the proposed merger of the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund and the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing.