



Winter Emergency Response

Final Report
November 2011-April 2012



homeward trust
edmonton

opening doors. building hope.

Executive Summary

Winter Emergency Response 2011-2012

Homeward Trust Edmonton (HTE) is a community-based, comprehensive housing organization that provides leadership and resources towards ending homelessness in Edmonton. HTE fulfills its mandate by leading initiatives and programs, engaging community stakeholders and partners, conducting research, creating awareness, and funding housing and support projects.

The Winter Emergency Response Program (WER) is the provision of winter warming sites by community based agencies to provide a warm safe destination for individuals experiencing homelessness during the most inclement weather months of Edmonton's winter. Resources for WER are provided by Homeward Trust Edmonton through the resources of the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and the Government of Alberta.

Historically, there have been other efforts to address winter warming concerns; however in 2008 Homeward Trust implemented the first WER plan. This season marked the fifth winter for this initiative to address the needs of Edmontonians who are homeless during the harsh winter months. While emergency shelters, drop-in centres, and housing programs are available, there remains the threat that weather can present to individuals experiencing homelessness, who are required to leave shelters each morning, or who may be sleeping rough, or may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, to ensure their safety. Community-based services have limits to their operational funding and hours of operation, and require additional funds to offer services for extended hours. The WER Plan is intended to provide additional funding for an extension of hours of service during periods of the day that emergency shelters are closed.

This report is produced annually to demonstrate how WER funds are distributed throughout the Edmonton community, identify the utilization of resources, and report on trending relative to the WER contribution to ending homelessness. One of the evidenced trends indicate an overall decrease in the use of WER services over the three year period which is a positive correlation in the number of people who have been permanently housed through the initiatives of the 10 year plan to end homelessness in the same time frame.

The agencies contracted to provide WER services for the 2011-2012 season were Boyle Street Community Services (BSCS) Drop-in and Winter Warming Bus, Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre (JPHAWC), Mosaic Centre, and Salvation Army Crossroads Community Church. The WER committee was comprised of staff from each of the agencies, a representative from Alberta Human Services, and three staff from Homeward Trust. The committee met monthly to review data, share ideas and provide updates on their services. This report contains a summary of the data and recommendations for future WER planning.

Data Report

WER visits

Summary

A total of 79,335 visits were made over the course of the 2011-12 WER season, a decrease of 2086 or 2.5% compared to the 2010-11 season. This year's total continued the trend of annual decreases in total WER visits since the 2008-09 season, but represents a smaller decrease than in previous years. The total visits for the 2011-12 season are 36% lower than the total visits in the 2008-09 season. The decrease in overall WER visits is attributable to the fact that the Boyle Street Drop-In reported 9077 fewer visits compared to last season--a 15% decrease. The Boyle Street Bus and the other three drop-in centres, JPHAWC, Mosaic Centre and Salvation Army, all saw increases in total and average daily visits this season. However, it should be noted that the data reflected the greatest increase in the numbers of visitors to the other three drop-ins were by those who reported staying in their own home the previous night (see figures 1, 2,3).

As anticipated, the total daily visits to WER agencies were higher when temperatures dipped, although other factors such as dates for distribution for government cheques also have affected the number of visits reported. Also noteworthy, during one very cold snap in the middle of January, WER daily visits were low, which may be accounted for by the number of individuals that use WER sites but are not currently experiencing homelessness, choosing to remain home in the coldest weather, and people who are homeless seeking even temporary shelter solutions with the distribution of income support cheques (see figure 7).

During the 2010-11 WER season, responses to the question of where a participant slept the previous night were recorded according to four options: at a shelter, with family or friends, slept rough, or other. For the 2011-12 season, a fifth category was added: "at own home/apartment." The responses to this question about accommodation vary substantially across agencies, highlighting differences in the populations served (see figure 4 & 5). An observable trend amongst service users of drop-ins outside the inner city was use of WER services despite reporting having housing of their own, which is outside of the intended purpose of WER. The reported numbers of visits by people having a home of their own ranged between 36% and 75%. It is likely that these people are using WER sites for reasons such as socialization, poverty issues and provision of basic needs, which are valid and important needs, but are outside the intended purpose and scope of WER.

If individuals who have housing of their own are removed from the data set for total visits then the number of visits by people experiencing homelessness and using WER programs for the intended purpose would be reduced by a further 15,856 visits to a total of 63,479 visits.

In relation to collection of data, the reporting on where someone slept the night before includes an "other" category which needs to be more clearly defined or perhaps eliminated. People may select it because they don't want to say where they are sleeping, but it does not provide accurate data for the purpose of determining who is being served and what their needs are for housing.

Figure 1

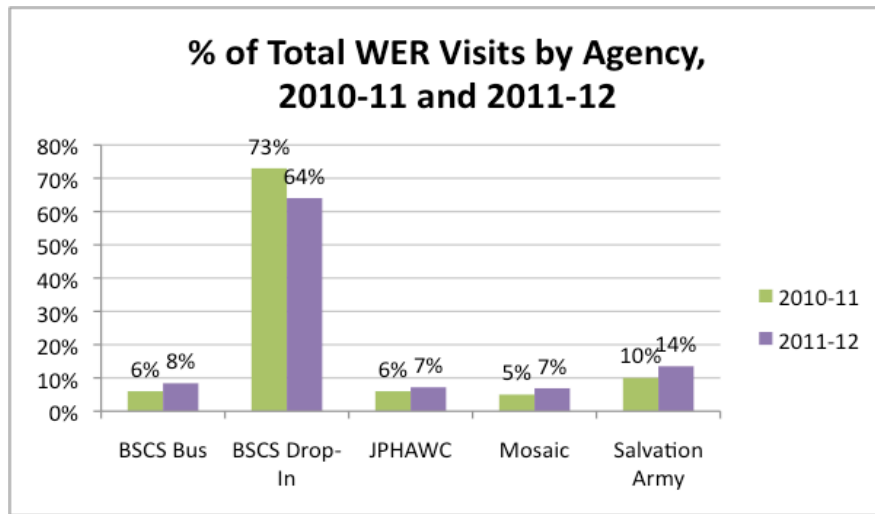


Figure 2

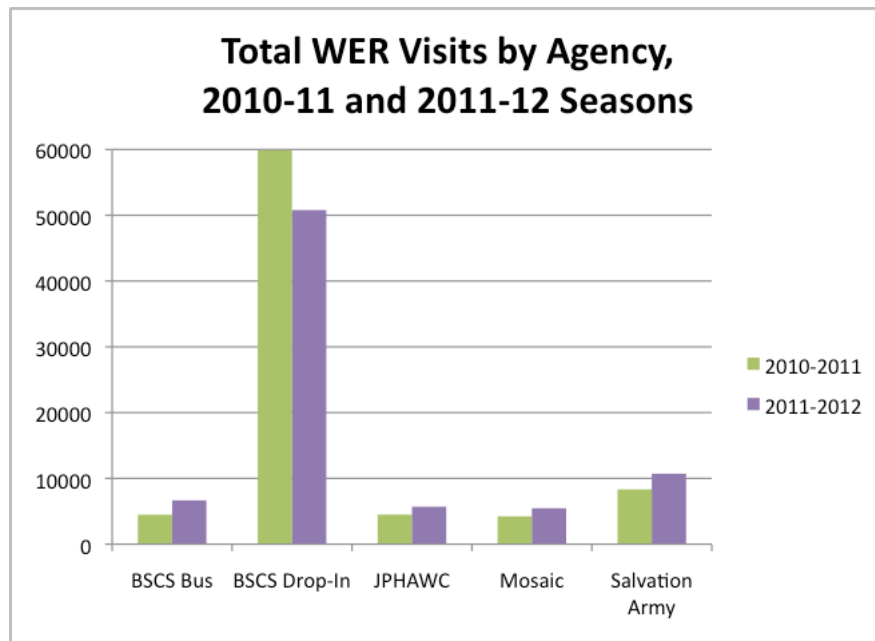
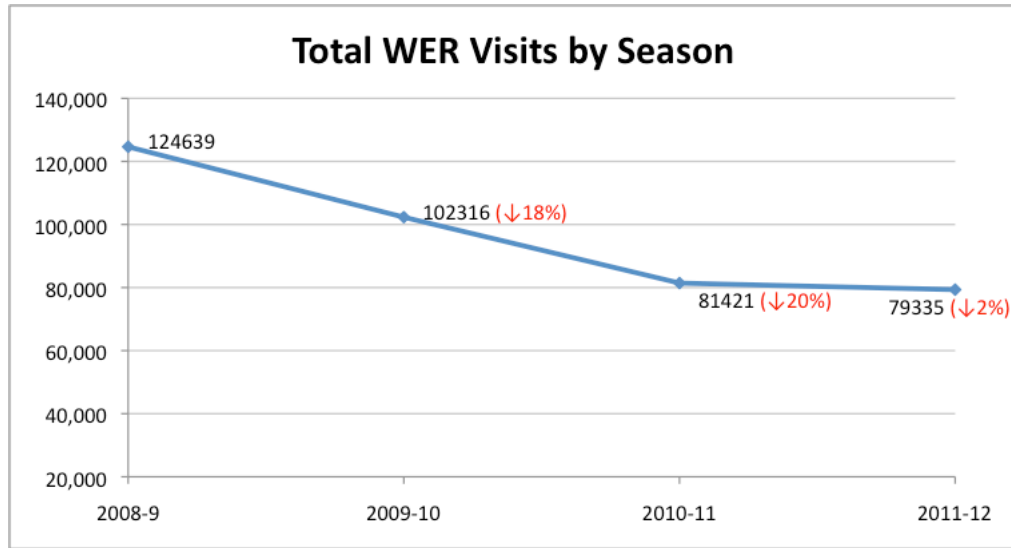


Figure 3



Season	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Total Visits	124,639	102,316	81,421	79,335
% change from previous season	N/A	(↓18%)	(↓20%)	(↓2%)
% change from 2008/09 season baseline	N/A	(↓18%)	(↓35%)	(↓36%)

Figure 4

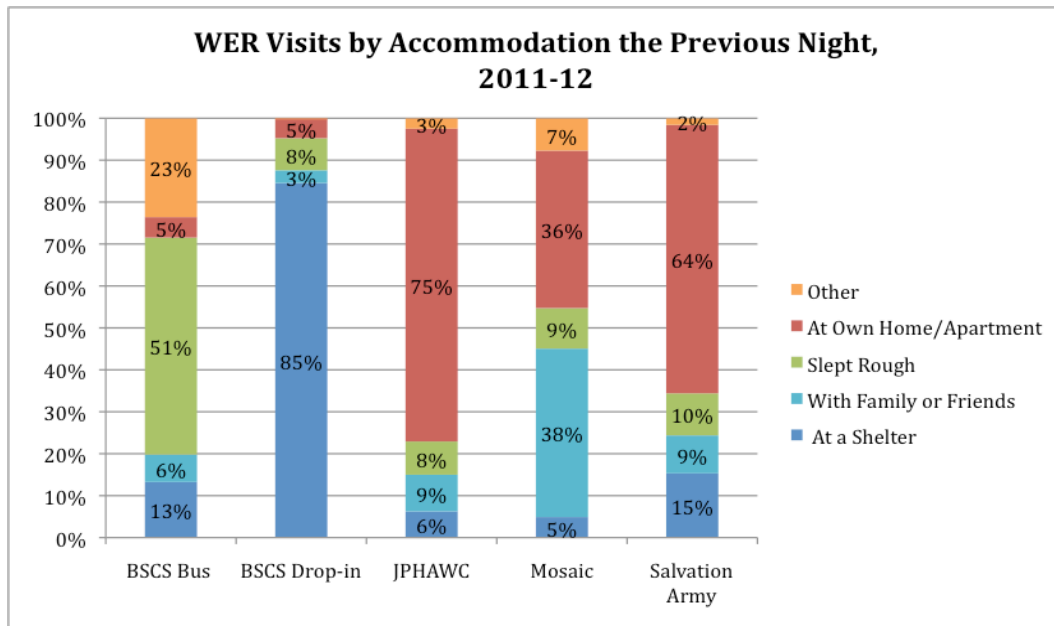


Figure 5

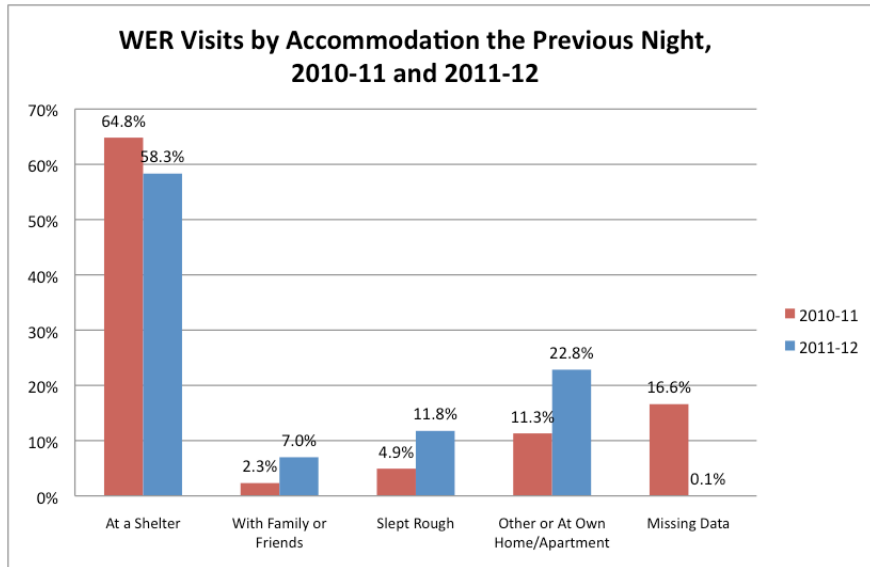


Figure 6

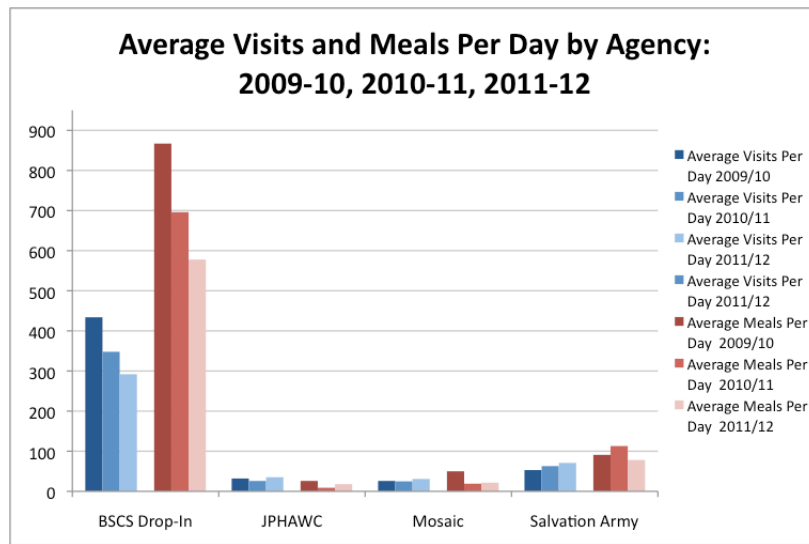
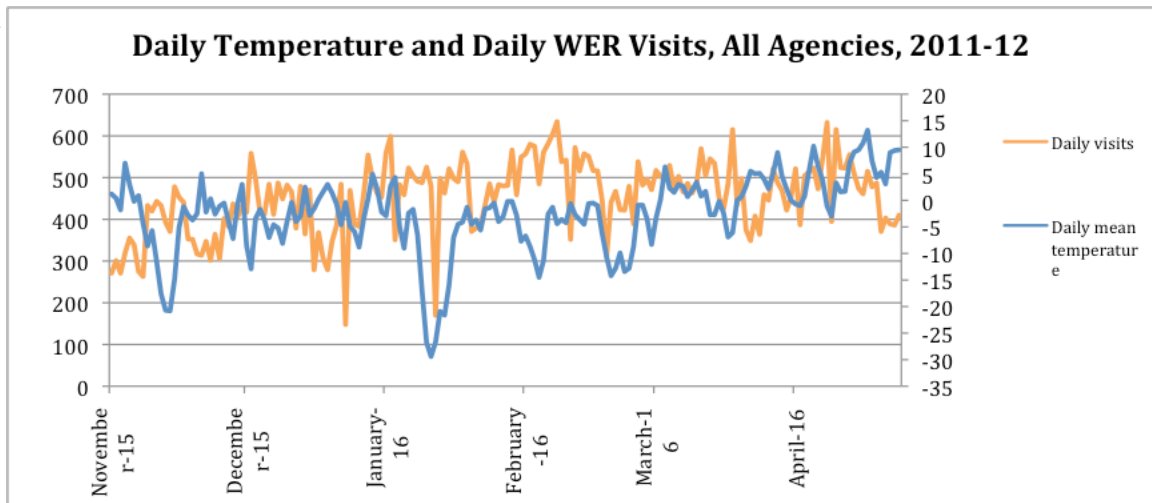


Figure 7



Demographics

Summary

The gender, age and ethnicity distribution of WER visitors in the 2011-12 season was almost identical to that of the 2010-11 season. Given the variability of observed demographic characteristics, none of the differences in demographic distribution between the two seasons were statistically significant.

Men accounted for three quarters of the visits to WER programs while one quarter of all visits were reported to be by women. This is indicative of the homeless experience overall in that women are often more hidden in their homelessness, seeking alternative living arrangements and in some cases exchanging sex for temporary accommodation, or are offered other emergency shelter options if they are the primary caregiver of children. It is also indicative of the fact that the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre (WEAC) does not require homeless women to leave the emergency shelter during the day and therefore they would not need to seek a warm haven in the WER programs.

JPHAWC recorded the highest proportion of visits by women (36%) and the BSCS Bus recorded the lowest proportion of visits by women (17%). A total of 50 visits were recorded by individuals observed to be transgendered, with most of those visits recorded by Mosaic Centre and Salvation Army. This number accounts for less than 1% of all visits, so it is not reflected in the graphs (see figure 8).

The vast majority (81%) of visits were by individuals observed to be between 31 and 64 years old. Of note is that almost a quarter of visits to the Salvation Army were by individuals over age 65, a significantly greater proportion of senior visitors than experienced by any other agency (see figures 9 & 10).

As in the 2010-11 season, 59% of all WER visits were by individuals observed to be Aboriginal, and another 38% were by individuals observed to be Caucasian. The remaining visits were by individuals observed to be of other ethnicities. These statistics are aligned with the overall homeless statistics that indicate 56% of people who are homeless are Aboriginal (see figures 11 & 12).

Figure 8

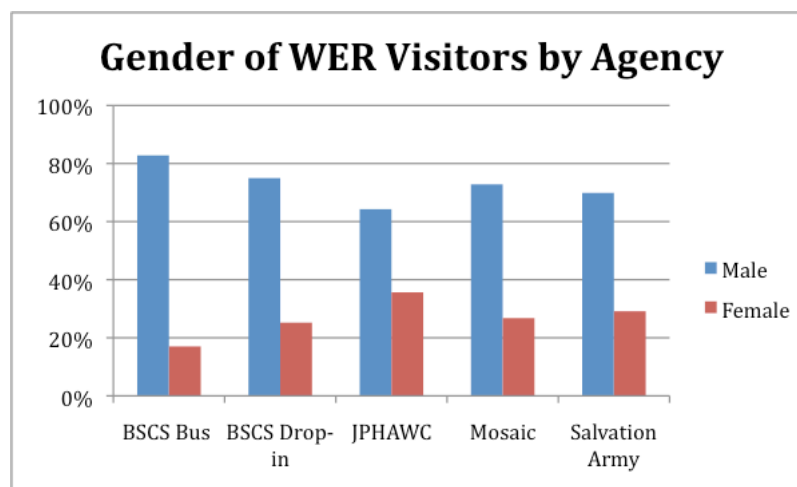


Figure 9

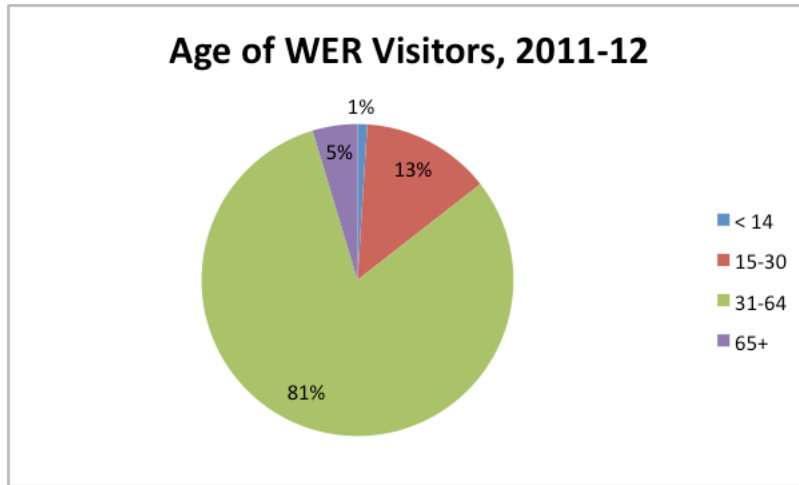


Figure 10

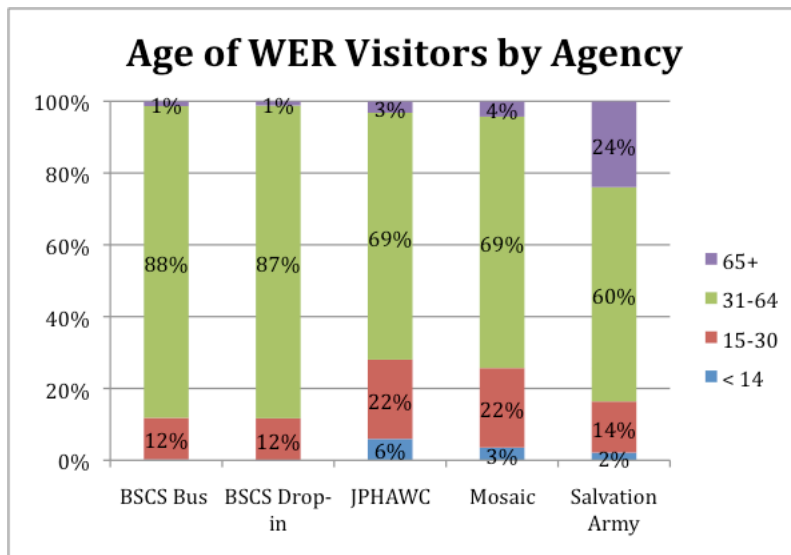


Figure 11

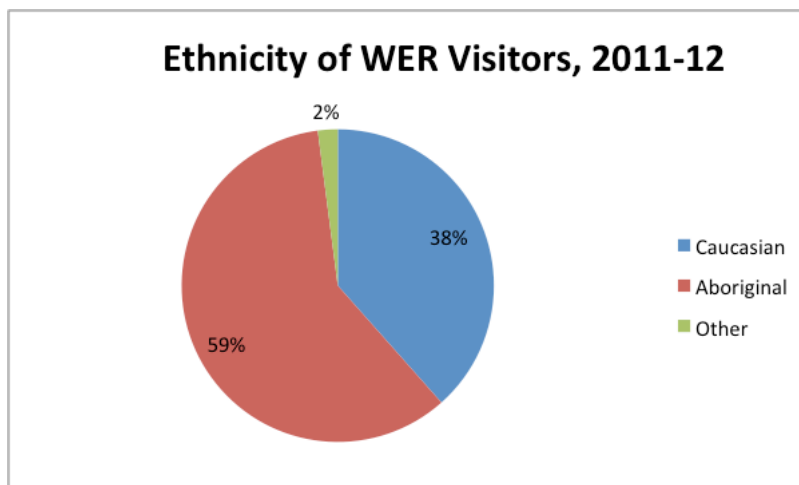
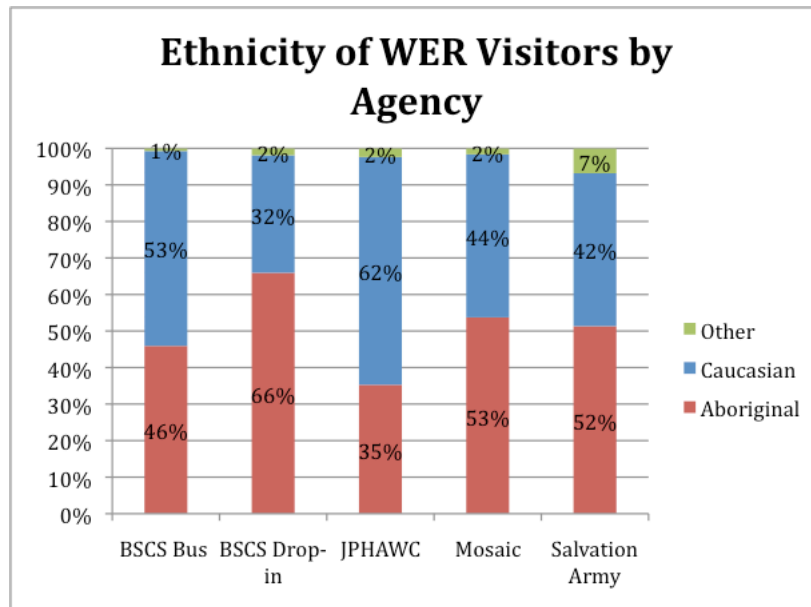


Figure 12



Services, referrals & requests

Summary

Boyle Street Community Services (BSCS) reported that this year the WER Bus was able to connect individuals who were sleeping rough with the Street and Parkland Outreach team for follow-up and vice-versa. In the event that the Street and Parkland Outreach team knew of individuals who were sleeping rough during the coldest days they would have the Bus check on those individuals and offer them a trip to emergency shelter in the evenings. This served as a valuable collaborative resource for some individuals who were sleeping rough.

Overall, total numbers of meals served and bus riders recorded by agencies decreased compared to the 2010-11 WER season. Referrals to other agencies increased very slightly, and trips to hospital and calls to EMS increased substantially. There are data discrepancies between how agencies record “bus riders” as Salvation Army counts individuals transported in the Salvation Army van, Mosaic and JPHAWC record individuals picked up or dropped off by the BSCS Bus, and BSCS Drop-In does not record Bus riders separately from the BSCS Bus (see figures 13 & 14). This section of data will be clarified next season so accurate data can be collected.

There are discrepancies amongst agencies on what constitutes a meal. It could include anything from a self served cup of soup to a roast beef dinner offered up by a local church group. The total number of meals served showed proportionate decreases to the total number of visits-- these totals predominantly reflect reduction in the Boyle Street Drop-In numbers (see figures 6 & 13).

In 2010-11, agencies recorded the number of requests received for key supplies: first aid supplies, winter gear, footwear/boots, and food. Requests for all four categories of items increased this season (see figures 15 & 16). In 2011-12 agencies also recorded requests for clothing and for personal care items. As in 2010-11, food hampers or emergency food supplies were the most requested items followed by winter gear. This may be indicative of issues of poverty rather than homelessness, given the significant number of individuals using WER while reporting sleeping in a home of their own.

Figure 13

Agency	# of Services Provided (% change from 2012-11 season)				
	Meals Served	Bus Riders	Referrals to other Agencies	Trips to Hospital	Calls to EMS
BSCS Bus	6,149	1,533	270	6	0
BSCS Drop-In	100,545	N/A	2,808	128	232
JPHAWC	2,880	380	11	1	1
Mosaic	3,791	345	101	4	4
Salvation Army	11,776	373	875	11	8
Total	125,141 (↓13%)	2,632 (↓13%)	4,065 (↑3%)	150 (↑53%)	245 (↑113%)

Figure 14

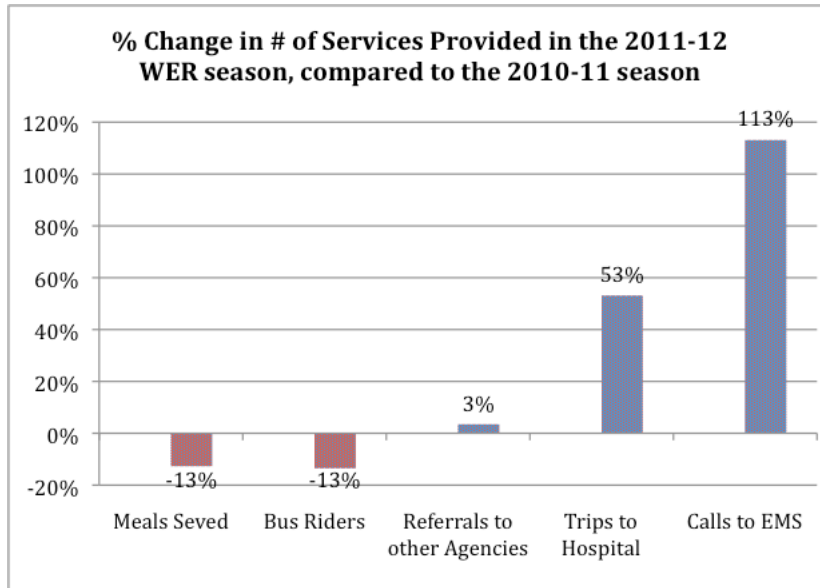
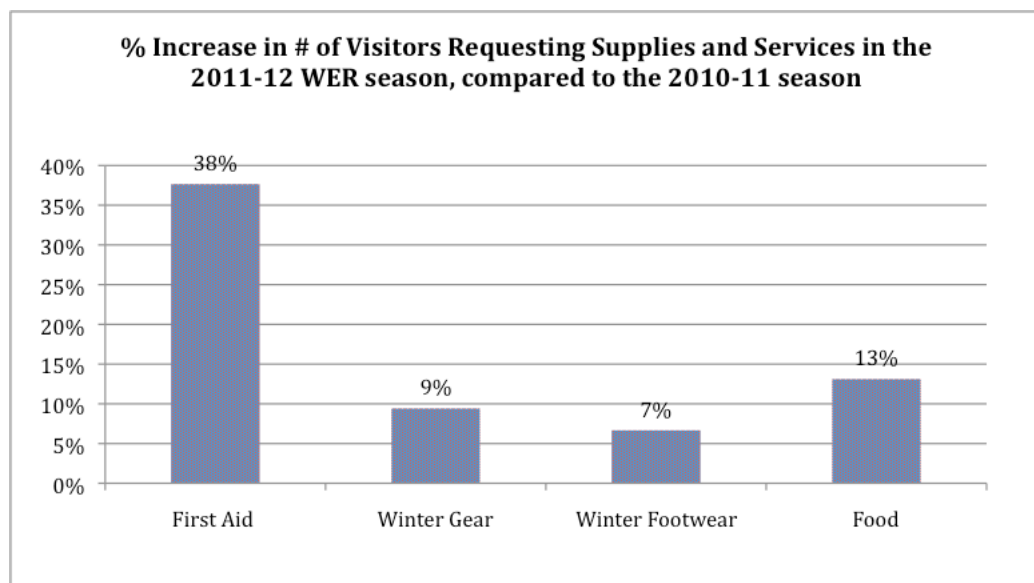


Figure 15

Agency	# of Requests for Supplies and Services (% change from 2010-11 season)					
	First Aid Supplies/ Assistance	Winter Gear	Clothing	Personal Care Items	Footwear/ Boots	Food Hamper/ Supplies
BSCS Bus	45	762	1,609	184	212	5,962
BSCS Drop-In	1,313	5,199	2,655	623	1,121	2,353
JPHAWC	74	163	253	189	24	27
Mosaic	54	272	381	272	163	272
Salvation Army	445	847	986	615	195	615
Total	1,931 (↑38%)	7,243 (↑19%)	5,884 (N/A)	1,883 (N/A)	1,715 (↑7%)	9,229 (↑13%)

Figure 16



Cost per visit

Summary

Cost per visit was calculated based on the ratio of total funding claimed by each agency for the season, to the total number of visits recorded. Therefore, the cost per visit includes budget lines such as staffing, and is not the same as the marginal cost of each visit.

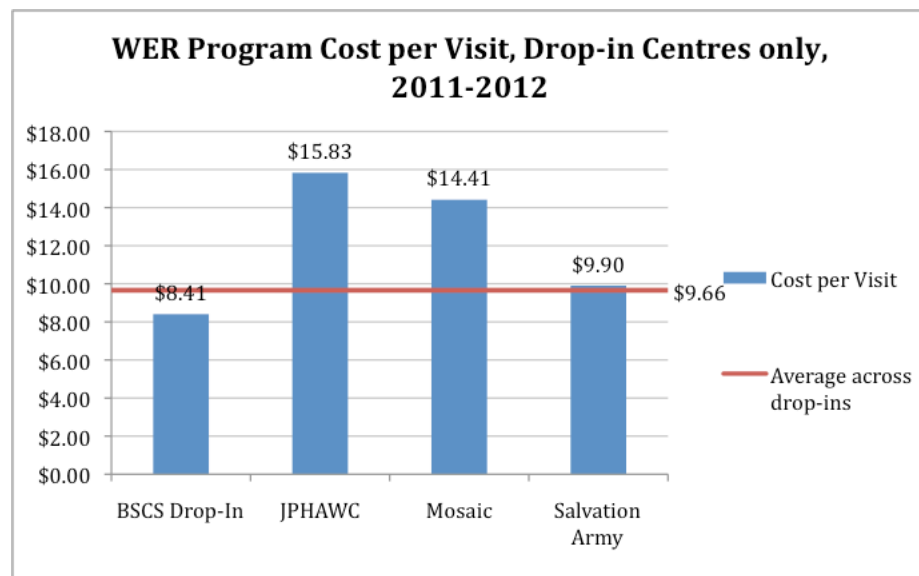
The average cost per visit across all WER agencies, including the BSCS Bus, is \$11.55. The BSCS Bus has the highest cost per visit, \$32.12. This is likely due to being the only service in WER programs that is not funded based on additional costs as this service only runs during the winter months of WER. Drop-ins are asked to include only incremental operational costs as a result of WER.

When the Bus is excluded, the average cost per visit for the drop-in centres is \$9.66. Of the drop-in centres, JPHAWC has the highest rate of claimed funding per visit at \$15.83, and Boyle Street has the lowest at \$8.41. With some agencies reporting costs at nearly half the amount of others, further review is required to determine if efficiencies and collaboration may reduce the overall costs.

Figure 17

Agency	Total visits (2011-12)	Total claimed funding (2011-12)	Cost per visit (2011-12)
BSCS Bus	6,661	\$214,086	\$32.14
BSCS Drop-In	50,799	\$427,023	\$8.41
JPHAWC	5,702	\$90,273	\$15.83
Mosaic	5,462	\$78,731	\$14.41
Salvation Army	10,711	\$106,078	\$9.90
Total (including Bus)	79,335	\$916,191	\$11.55
Drop-In Total (excluding Bus)	72,674	\$702,105	\$9.66

Figure 18



Recommendations

Recommendations for next season from agencies

Agencies submitted final reports for the 2011-12 season to Homeward Trust. There were several commonalities included in their findings and recommendations regarding funding, training, and needs of participants which included a request for:

- Confirmation of funding by end of August would enable agencies to hire staff and provide training in advance.
- Coordination of donations of supplies such as first aid, clothing, coats, boots, gloves and hats so there are items for everyone throughout the season.
- Recreational and social opportunities provided year round.
- An Increase to WER hours and funding.
- ETS bus pass for winter warming participants.

Recommendations for next season from Homeward Trust

The data indicates a number of trends that have emerged over the history of the WER program and highlighted a few gaps to be addressed. In the context of who is accessing the WER program and the secondary services that agencies are providing, it should be noted that the goal of *A Plan for Alberta*, the Government of Alberta's 10 year plan to end homelessness is to end chronic homelessness and that goal is not currently being maximized by WER programs. A warm, safe, temporary refuge is offered, as well as basic provisions such as food, clothing, outerwear, first aid and companionship; however few are being connected to permanent housing, and those that are have not been identified through a connection to data relative to ending homelessness. This is in part because a portion of the WER program participants have housing, and partly because the focus has been on meeting immediate basic needs, but not housing. There are also improvements to the data collection system that are required. The following recommendations are based on outcomes of the WER program as reflected in the data:

Service provision

- Utilize data to plan for the 2012-13 WER season, addressing the trending around drop-ins outside the inner city that are used during WER hours for provision of basic needs by housed individuals and families.
- Encourage coordination of donations of supplies so there is enough winter warming related items to cover the needs of those who are homeless.

Data collection

- Explore consideration of a registration system for participants for WER programs, which will assist with the enumeration of homeless individuals including those who are sleeping rough through out the community further influencing monitoring of trends through data

collection and enhance the quality of reported data. This would also be required to ensure that recommendations such as access to ETS passes made by community agencies, see above, are not abused by individuals who are not homeless.

- Explore utilization of Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database for reporting data or development of the homeless registry. This would require a transition from Survey Monkey for reporting to Efforts to Outcomes.
- Review and clarify definitions with agencies relative to reported data.
- Collect and submit data relative to WER on homeless individuals exclusively, to remove the inflation of numbers of WER program participants by people who use the sites for reasons other than the intended purpose.

Resources

- Evaluate WER resources and implement a strategic plan to maximize WER as a direct linkage to permanent housing.
- Identify a RFP process for the WER program for 2012-13 winter season, releasing an RFP to the community by July 30, 2012.

Funding for Winter Emergency Response programs was provided by Homeward Trust Edmonton through the resources of the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and the Government of Alberta.

Committee Members

WER 2011-2012 committee members

Boyle Street Community Services

David Berger, Jane Slessor, Dianne Johnnie, Christine Oldfield, Heather Bouwman

Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre

Terri Wagner

Mosaic Centre

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Photos on Winter Warming Bus by Ken Anderson



Cover photo by Wanda Dannelly