

Winter Emergency Response Final Report 2014-2015

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1.1 HIGHLIGHTS

- Total funding allocated for the Winter Emergency Response (WER) Program 2014-15 amounted to \$1,427,000 for six drop-in locations and a winter warming outreach bus service. These projects were funded from November 1, 2014 to April 30, 2015. An additional \$250,000 was allocated for WER Contingency Funding to supplement capacity of emergency shelters and other emergent situations on an as needed basis.
- Resources for WER were provided by Homeward Trust through the resources of the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Government of Alberta's Outreach Support Services Initiative to implement *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in Ten Years*, and the City of Edmonton's annual donation to Homeward Trust.
- The seven main projects that were funded included:
 - Bissel Centre Drop-In
 - Boyle Street Community Services: Drop-In
 - Boyle Street Community Services: Winter Warming Bus
 - Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre Drop-In
 - Mosaic Centre Drop-In
 - The Neighbour Centre (Edmonton Do-Likewise Society) Drop-In
 - Salvation Army Crossroads Community Church Drop-In
- A total of 92,514 visits were recorded by WER agencies over the 2014-15 season, which is a significant increase of 57% over the previous 2012-13 WER season.
- 78% of all visits were by men, 22% were by women, and less than 1% were by transgender individuals. These proportions are consistent with those observed in previous WER seasons.
- Individuals of Aboriginal descent accounted for 55% of all visits, whereas 37% of visits were by Caucasian individuals. Individuals of other ethnicities accounted for 8% of visits. This differs from the 2012-2013 season where individuals of Aboriginal descent accounted for 67% of all visits.
- 43% of visits reported accommodations the previous night at emergency shelter or domestic violence shelter, while 20% of visits reported sleeping rough, and 16% staying in own home. "Other" was reported at 12%.

INTRODUCTION

Collaborating with Edmonton service providers to prevent harm and address the unique challenges of homelessness during Edmonton’s winter months.

2.1 ABOUT HOMEWARD TRUST

Homeward Trust is a community-based, comprehensive coordinating organization that provides leadership and resources towards ending homelessness in Edmonton. We lead initiatives and programs, engage community and government, conduct research and share knowledge, create awareness, and fund housing and support projects. The core of our work is helping people secure housing and supporting them to keep it. We fund, coordinate and deliver a range of housing and support programs that achieve this.

Homeward Trust manages implementation of the 10 Year Plans to End Homelessness. Since 2009, Homeward Trust and our funded agencies have housed over 4000 homeless adults and children through the Housing First program.

2.2 WINTER EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Homeward Trust has implemented the Winter Emergency Response (WER) Program since 2008 in order to address the added challenges and safety issues inherent to homeless individuals due to Edmonton’s harsh winter weather. As the seventh WER season, the 2014-2015 WER Program mobilized community partners to help alleviate these challenges and to prevent harm from coming to Edmonton’s homeless population during the cold winter months from November 2014 to April 2015.

Key components of the WER program include the provision of additional funding to several of the city’s drop-in centres, thereby allowing them to extend their hours of service to bridge periods of the day when emergency shelters are closed. Additionally, transportation is provided via the Winter Warming Bus to assist homeless people “sleeping rough” in accessing drop-in centres or shelters and to have their basic needs met. The WER program acts as an access point for people at risk of harm due to the harsh winter weather and facilitates linkages to housing and support services.

Homeward Trust provides funding for the WER program through the resources of the Government of Canada’s Homeless Partnering Strategy, the Government of Alberta’s Outreach Support Services Initiative to implement A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in Ten Years, and the City of Edmonton’s annual donation to Homeward Trust. The 2014-2015 WER program received a total of \$1,478,422 in funding, including \$1,340,178 for the following six drop-in programs: Boyle Street Community Services, Bissell Centre, Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre, Mosaic

INTRODUCTION

Centre, The Neighbour Centre, and Salvation Army Edmonton Crossroads Community Church; as well as the Boyle Street Community Services Winter Warming Bus.

In addition to the seven WER projects, Contingency Funding was allocated in order to be prepared to provide supplemental shelter overflow and respite space on nights of extreme cold or when emergency shelters were operating at or near capacity. As a result of high shelter usage, Hope Mission collaborated to provide additional Shelter Overflow space out of the former Remand Centre building, and on an as needed basis the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre and the George Spady Shelter added additional cots/mats. On nights where the temperature was forecasted to drop to -20 degrees Celsius, the Bissell Centre opened its drop-in as an overnight Respite space. A total of \$250,000 in WER Contingency Funding was made available.

Homeward Trust assumed responsibility for coordinating data collection, analysis, and reporting of the WER program, as well as organizing meetings of the WER Committee.

2.3 FUNDED PROJECTS: 2014-2015

Drop-In Centres	Location
Boyle Street Community Services	Inner City
Bissell Centre	Inner City
Jasper Place Health & Wellness Centre	South Central
Mosaic Centre	West Central
The Neighbour Centre	North East
Salvation Army Crossroads Community Church	North Central

Winter Warming Bus	City-wide
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Drop-In Centres

The WER Program enables agencies running drop-in centres to extend their hours of service in order to provide Edmonton's homeless community a safe, warm place to stay during the critical hours when emergency shelters and other agencies in the city are not open. The 2014-2015 WER Program administered funding to two drop-in centres in the inner city, with \$508,303 allocated to Boyle Street Community Services (BSCS) and \$228,492 to the Bissell Centre, for a total of \$736,795 provided for the coordinated operation of the Downtown Core WER drop-ins. The

Bissell Centre drop-in counted an average of 134 visits per day, including non-unique registration data collected in the morning and evening. BSCS reported an average daily total of 170 visits.

In addition to the Downtown WER drop-ins, Homeward Trust also provided funding to drop-in programs located throughout the city, including the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre, Mosaic Centre, The Neighbour Centre, and Salvation Army Edmonton Crossroads Community Church. A total of \$384,567 was provided for the operation of these four drop-in centres.

Winter Warming Bus

The Winter Warming Bus fills a unique role in ensuring the safety of homeless individuals in Edmonton. At its core, the main function of the Winter Warming Bus is to ensure the safety of homeless individuals, particularly those who “sleep rough” in the city’s river valley and parkland areas, and to provide them with transportation to drop-in centres, shelters and other service providers. The Bus is a strategic service that provides information and referrals to resources, in addition to providing basic needs items such as food, clothing, blankets, winter gear, first aid, and hygiene items.

The Winter Warming Bus circulated on a regular route of stops; however, it maintained flexibility in its schedule to respond to calls from individuals not along the route who required the Bus’s services. Homeward Trust provided \$218,816 in funding for operation of the Winter Warming Bus by Boyle Street Community Services.

WER Contingency Funding

Due to increased usage of emergency shelters during the previous WER season and leading up to the 2014-2015 season, Homeward Trust recognized the need to be prepared for additional emergency shelter space when needed, in order to mitigate the risk of having to turn away people from shelters on the coldest nights. As such, contingency funding was allocated for the addition of emergency Shelter Overflow space and an Overnight Respite space for vulnerable individuals, particularly those who have active bans or bars from inner city agencies or those who may be intoxicated.

Through coordination with emergency shelters, WER contingency funding enabled shelters to operate additional Shelter Overflow space when they were operating at or near capacity, and for the Bissell Centre to provide Overnight Respite space out of its drop-in centre on nights where the temperature dropped to -20 degrees Celsius.

Homeward Trust allocated a total of \$250,000 for the respite and overflow shelter spaces in the 2014-2015 WER season.

WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA

3.1 DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS PROCESS

The provincial 10-year Plan to End Homelessness identifies the need for obtaining better information as a priority area in efforts to end homelessness. The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is an electronic, community-wide system used for the collection of client-level information on individuals and families experiencing homelessness. It collects data on what services and housing have been accessed by individuals who are homeless or those at risk of homelessness. Homeward Trust uses the Efforts to Outcomes™ (ETO) case management software for the Housing First teams, and as the platform for Edmonton's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The collection of information on how and where an individual enters the homeless system, and the services and agencies accessed by that individual, is an essential element to effective case management.

Starting in the Fall of 2012, Homeward Trust began integrating WER program data into the HMIS. This integration of data provides a clearer full-scale picture and understanding of the supports and services a client accesses, and will inform approaches to better track and engage individuals who continue to depend on drop-ins and other support services.

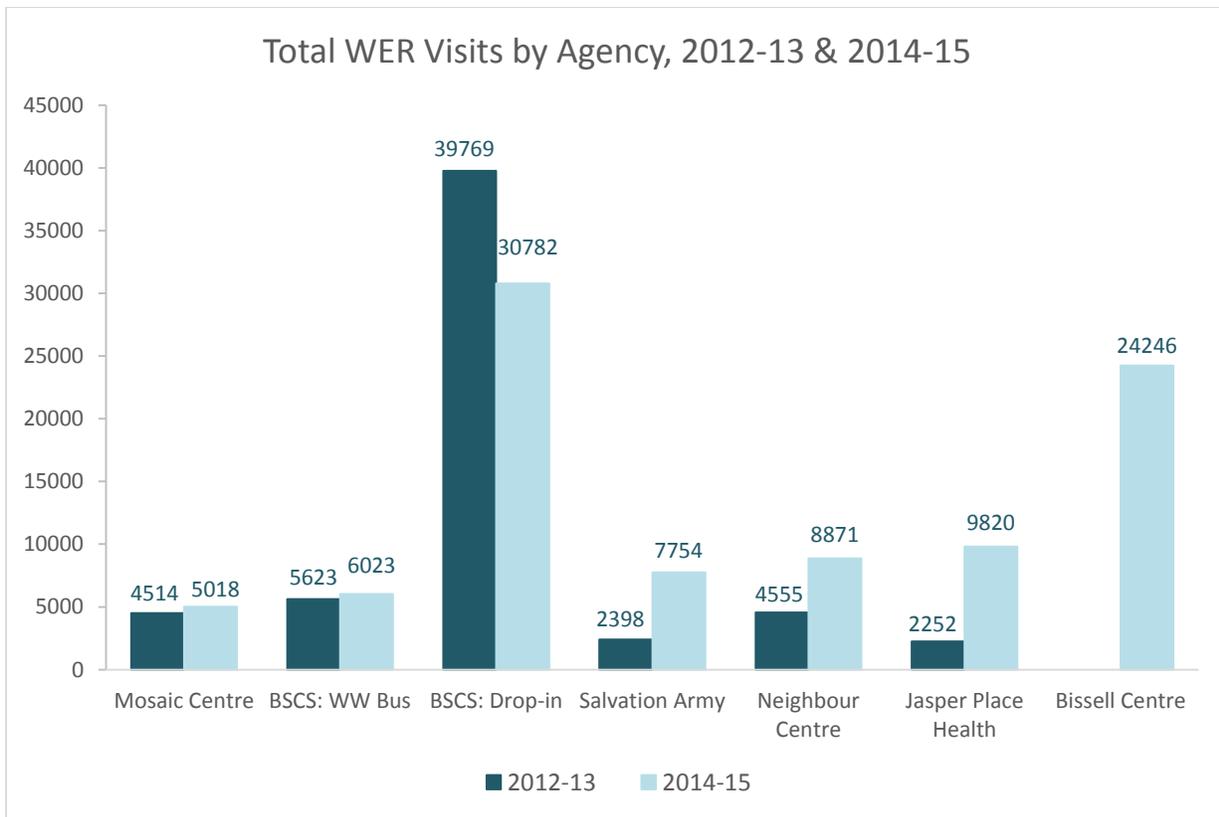
During the 2014-2015 WER season, all drop-in centres and the Winter Warming Bus were able to collect WER program data in ETO. Use of ETO to capture WER program data enabled the drop-in centres and the Winter Warming Bus to provide data on winter warming visits, demographics, and emergency needs provision for individuals accessing services, as well as a tally of total daily visits. This information will provide critical insight into the design, implementation, and coordination of rehousing and prevention interventions.

Despite the benefits of ETO and the strides made to ensure accurate and consistent information collection, there are real challenges to completing comprehensive data collection during the WER season. The busy downtown drop-in centres noted that program participants were sometimes reluctant to provide personal information each time they entered the building, especially when they entered more than once per day. Additionally, the manual entry of data can pose an additional challenge to agency staff members already balancing a full workload, particularly in the Downtown Core drop-ins that serve a high volume of clients each day.

WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA

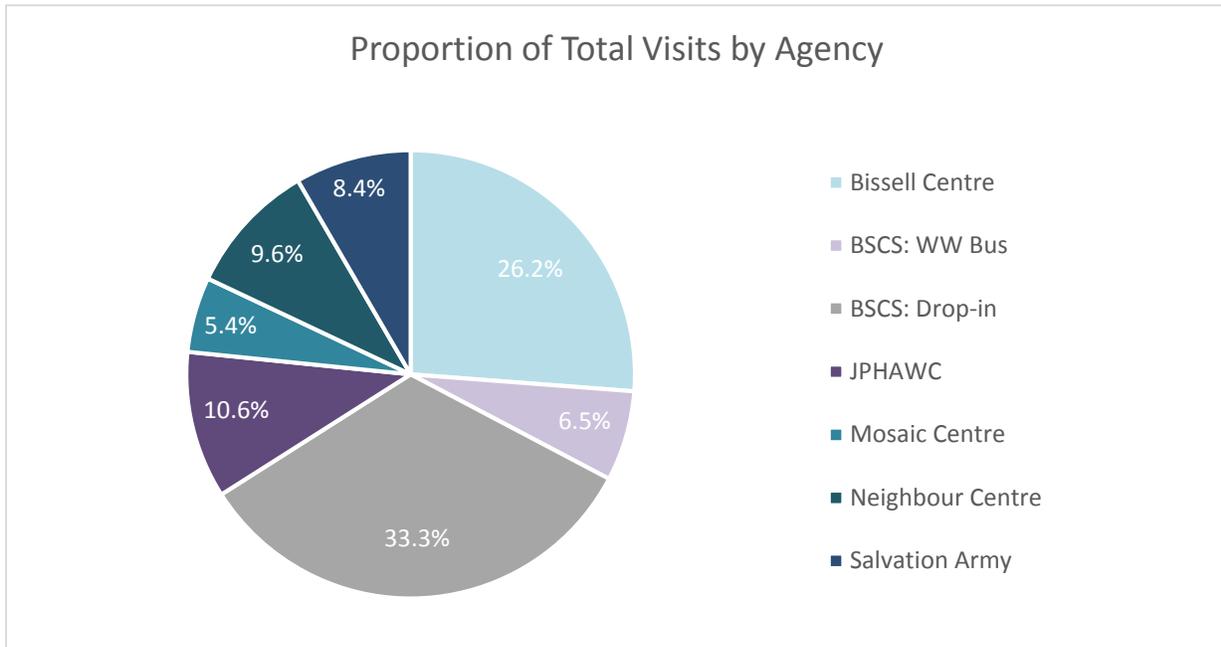
3.2 VISITS BY AGENCY

The 2014-15 season recorded increases in visits in each agency save the Boyle Street Community Services (BSCS) Drop-in, which saw an overall decrease of approximately 9,000 visits, as compared to the 2012-13 season¹. Of all visits to WER for 2014-15, the highest proportion and number of recorded visits were to BSCS Drop-in (33.3%, n=30,782), followed by Bissell Centre (26.2%, n=24,246), Jasper Place Health & Wellness Centre (10.6%, n=9,820), and The Neighbour Centre (9.6%, n=8,871). On average, there were 511 visits to WER per day. Boyle Street Community Services had the highest average number of visits per day at 170, followed by Bissell Centre at 134 visits per day. The Mosaic Centre had the lowest number of visits per day at 28.



¹ Data from the 2013-2014 WER season for Boyle Street Community Services was unavailable. Because historically BSCS has accounted for a substantial proportion of overall WER visits, a total for 2013-14 could not be estimated.

WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA



Agency	Average number of visits/day
Bissell Centre	134
Boyle Street Community Services: WW Bus	33
Boyle Street Community Services: Drop-in	170
Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre	54
Mosaic Centre	28
Salvation Army	43
The Neighbour Centre	49
Total daily average	511

WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA

3.3 TOTAL VISITS

The total number of recorded visits during the 2014-15 season among all the WER agencies was 92,514. The 2014-15 season reversed the trend of annual decreases in total WER visits since 2008-09, with a significant increase of 57% over the 2012-13 season. This number, however, remains below the 2008-2009 baseline by 26%. The table below presents the change in the total recorded WER visits by season.

SEASON	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2014-15
Total WER Visits by Season	124,639	102,316	81,421	79,335	59,111	92,514
% Change from previous season	N/A	-18%	-20%	-3%	-25%	+57%
% change from 2008-09 baseline	N/A	-18%	-35%	-36%	-53%	-26%

The 2014-2015 WER included the addition of the Bissell Centre as a second downtown drop-in centre with a high volume capacity. This addition in capacity is one factor that could help account for the increase in overall visits compared to the 2012-13 season.

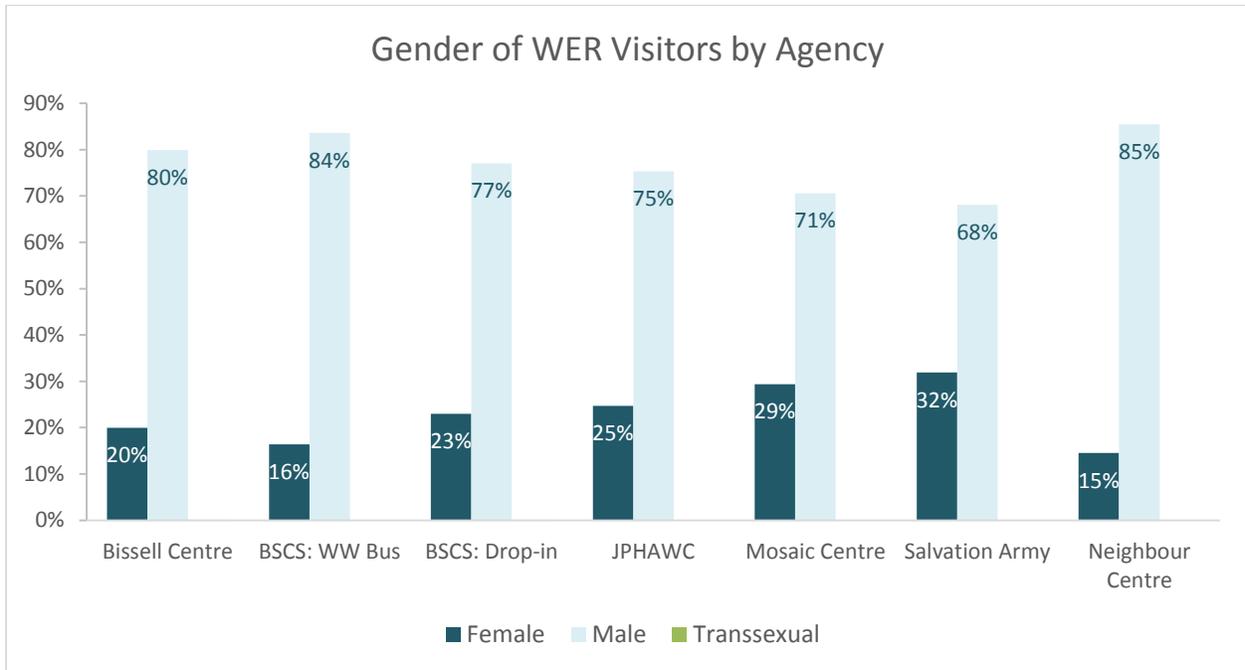
3.4 DEMOGRAPHICS OF VISITORS

The WER projects served some of the most vulnerable populations within Edmonton during the harsh winter months. This included not just individuals currently experiencing homelessness, but also those who are at risk of, or have previously experienced, homelessness.

3.4.1 Gender

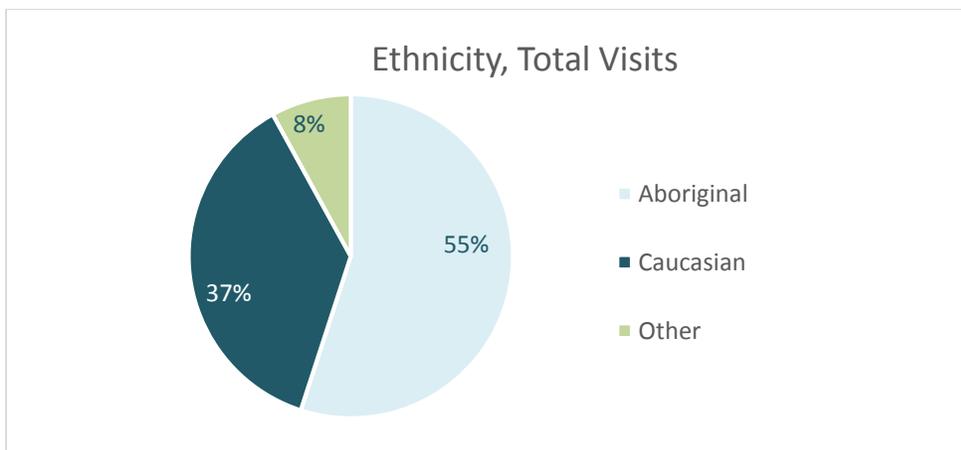
Of the visits for which gender was recorded, 78% were made by males and 22% were made by females. Forty-nine visits were made by individuals who identified as transgender, accounting for less than 1% of all visits. Salvation Army experienced the highest proportion of visits by females at one-third of all visits, while the Neighbour Centre and the BSCS Bus had the fewest visits by females at only 15% and 16% respectively. The agencies at which the greatest proportion of visits were by males also experienced the highest proportion of visits by individuals who were sleeping rough. The linking of data to specific individuals will provide opportunities for more detailed cross-analysis of demographic characteristics in the future.

WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA

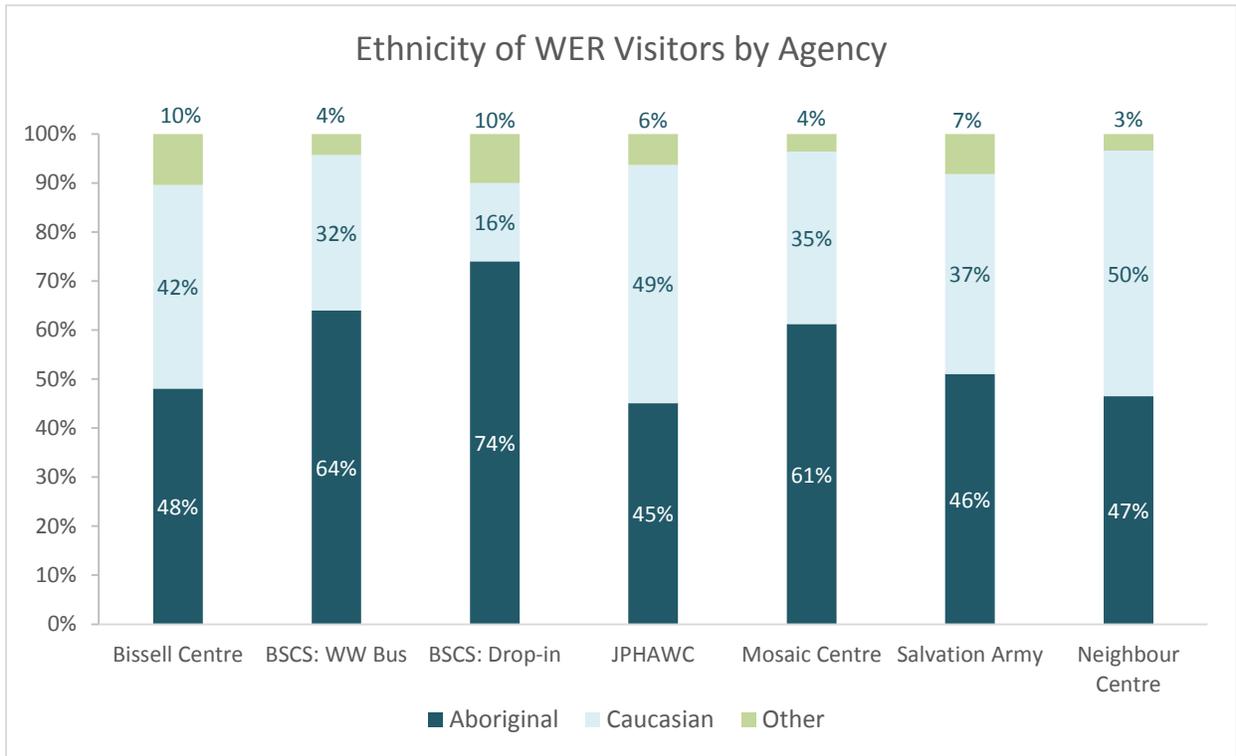


3.4.2 Ethnicity

During the 2014-15 season, individuals of Aboriginal descent accounted for 55% of all WER visits, Caucasian individuals for 37%, and individuals of other ethnicities for 8%. Client ethnicity was unreported for 22% of all visits. Aboriginal individuals were using WER services more frequently than people of other ethnicities, particularly at the BSCS Drop-in, where they accounted for almost two thirds of all visits, and the BSCS Drop-in, where they accounted for three quarters of all visits.



WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA

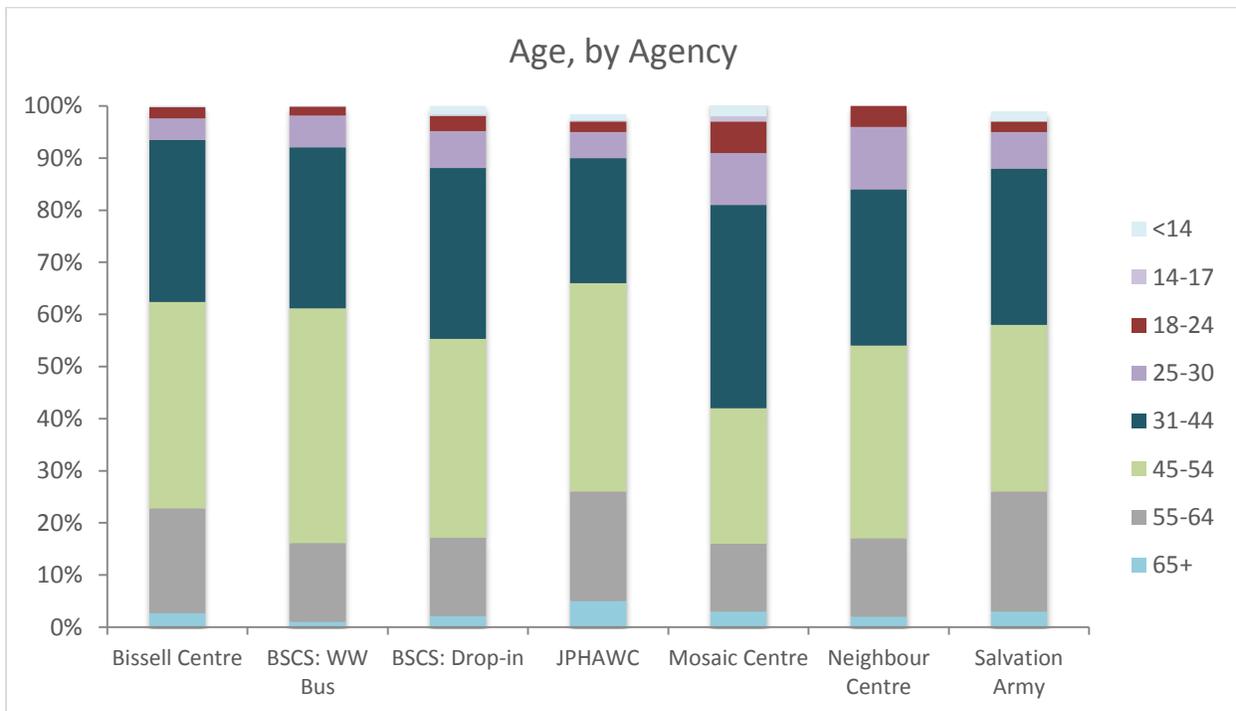
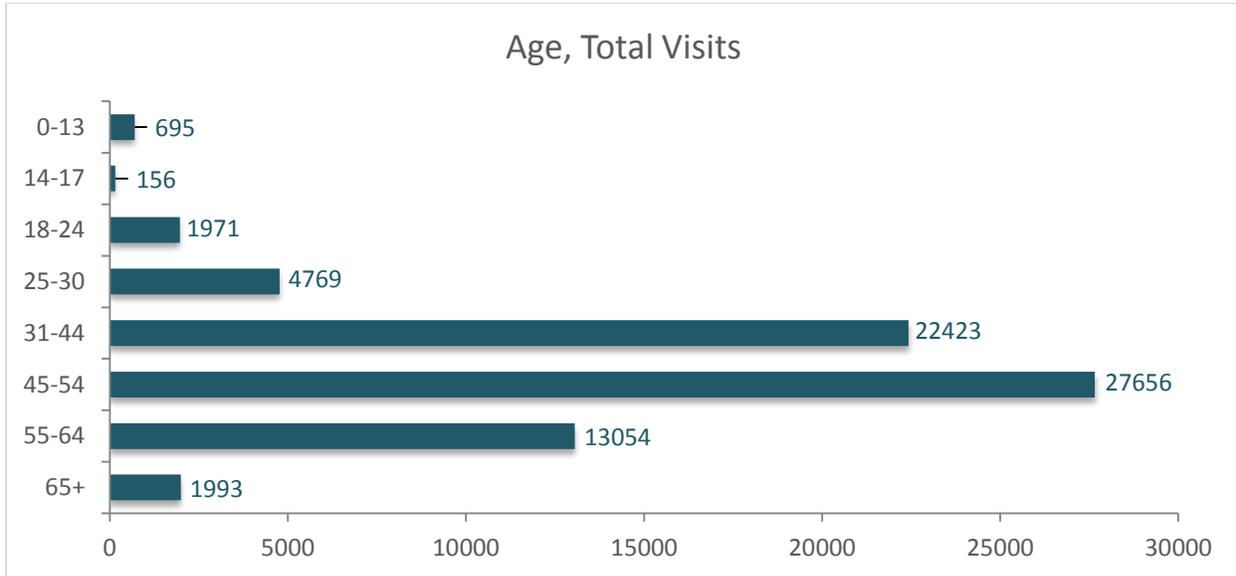


3.4.3 Age

Of those visits that reported age, approximately 40% were made by individuals between the ages of 45 and 54 years, followed by 31% between the ages of 31 and 44 years of age. A minority of visits (1%) were from individuals under 14 years of age (695 visits), as well as those aged 14-17 (156 visits). Similarly, approximately 3% of visits were made by youth (14 to 24 years old).

The age distribution of visits across all agencies is variable. The Salvation Army (26%), JPHAWC (26%), and Bissell Centre (23%) reported the highest percentage of their total visits as seniors aged 55+. Whereas all agencies reported a relatively small proportion of visitors aged 30 and under, one-fifth (20%) of reported visits to the Mosaic Centre were by individuals aged 0-30, followed by the Neighbour Centre (16%), BSCS Drop-in (12%), Salvation Army (11%), BSCS Bus (8%), JPHAWC (8%), and Bissell Centre (7%).

WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA



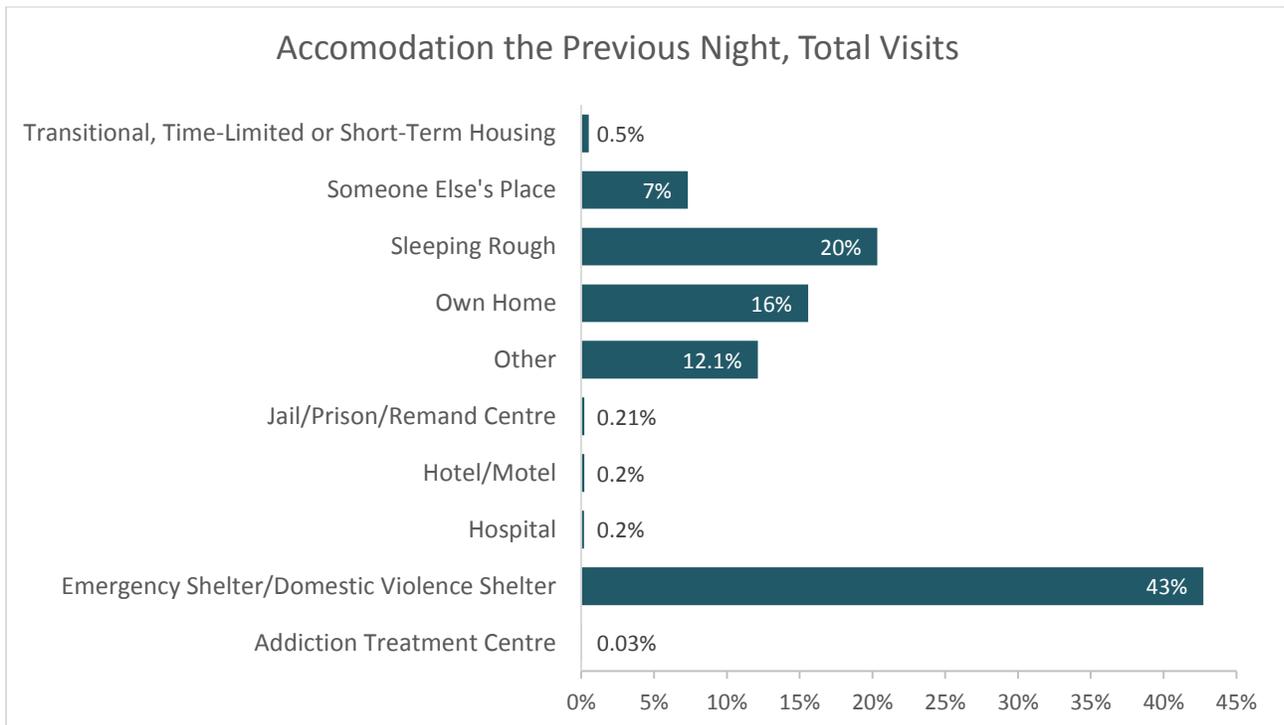
WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA

3.4.4 Accommodation the Previous Night

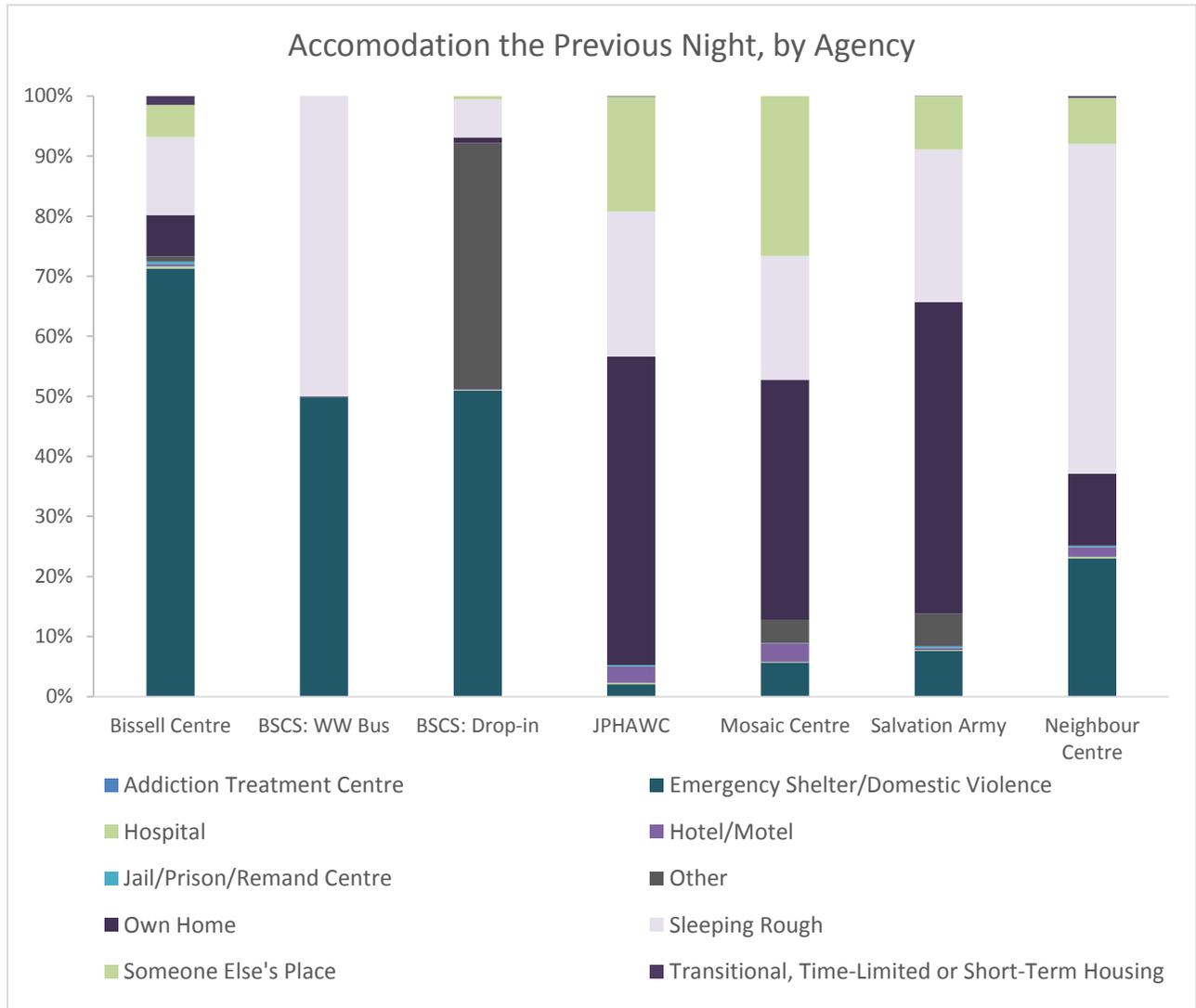
Of the total visits with a recorded response, 43% reported spending the previous night at emergency shelter or domestic violence shelter, followed by “sleeping rough” at 20%, “staying in own home” at 16%, “other” at 12%, and “someone else’s place” at 7%.

Across agencies, the pattern of accommodation the previous night is variable, highlighting the differences in the populations served. The two agencies in the downtown core reported the highest percentage of accommodation the previous night at “emergency shelters,” with the Bissell Centre at 71% and BSCS drop-in at 51%. The BSCS Bus followed at 50%. Conversely, the citywide drop-in centres reported much higher percentages of individuals reporting “staying in own home,” with Salvation Army at 52%, JPHAWC at 51%, and the Mosaic Centre at 40%. Although the Neighbour Centre and the BSCS Bus reported the highest percentage of those “sleeping rough”, all agencies reported at least some, including Neighbour Centre (55%), BSCS Bus (50%), Salvation Army (25%), JPHAWC (24%), Mosaic Centre (21%), Bissell Centre (13%), and BSCS drop-in (6%).

The low percentage of rough sleepers reported in the BSCS drop-in data raises questions of data quality and fidelity, given the proportion of BSCS visits out of the overall total of all visits, as well as the high percentage of those reported as “other” by the BSCS drop-in (41%).



WER PROGRAM USAGE DATA



SERVICE DELIVERY DETAILS & AGENCY REPORTS

4.1 OVERVIEW

This section provides summaries of the Winter Emergency Response program reports provided by the participating agencies to Homeward Trust.

Program	Budget Amount	Claimed Amount	Drop-in Capacity	WER-Funded Hours of Operation	Total Recorded Visits
Bissell Centre Drop-in	\$302,676	\$228,492	125	Monday-Friday 6:00-7:00am and 4:30-9:00pm; Saturday 6:00am-noon and 4:30-9:00pm; Sunday 6:00am-9:00pm. Total of 54 hours per week	24,246
Boyle Street Community Services Drop-in	\$519,000	\$508,303	200	Monday-Friday 6:00-9:00am, and 5:30pm-9:00pm. Weekends and statutory holidays 6:00am-9:00pm; total of 62.5 hours per week	30,782
BSCS Winter Warming Bus	\$228,000	\$218,816	N/A	Monday-Saturday 2:00-10:00pm and Sundays 1:00pm-9:00pm; total of 56 hours per week	6,023
JPHAWC Drop-in	\$83,000	\$83,000	120	7:00-10:00pm Monday-Friday and 5:00-10:00pm weekends and holidays; total of 25 hours per week	9,820
Mosaic Centre Drop-in	\$103,000	\$103,000	55	Monday-Friday 5:00-9:00pm; and 4:00-9:00pm on weekends and holidays; total of 30 hours per week	5,018
The Neighbour Centre Drop-in	\$86,000	\$82,607	60	Monday 2:00pm-8:00pm; Tuesday and Thursday 2:00pm-5:00pm; Wednesday and Friday 5:00pm-8:00pm; 5:00pm-8:00pm Sunday; total of 21 hours per week	8,871
Salvation Army Crossroads Drop-in	\$116,000	\$116,000	50	Monday-Saturday 7:00am-3:00pm; total of 48 hours per week	7,754
Total	\$1,437,676	\$1,340,218	640		92,514

4.2 DOWNTOWN CORE DROP-INS

4.2.1 Bissell Centre

This winter marked the second year that the Bissell Centre participated in the WER program. The Bissell Centre's WER drop-in program worked to ensure the basic needs of vulnerable or marginalized individuals in the inner-city were met by providing them with a safe place to receive

SERVICE DELIVERY DETAILS & AGENCY REPORTS

respite from the cold. Individuals received support in basic needs provisions, as well as the means to link with other Bissell Centre programs and external agencies and support services. The WER program enabled Bissell Centre staff to connect with participants, keep them safe, and work with them to meet their basic needs.

Successes:

The majority of those who accessed the Bissell Centre's drop-in service were some of the most marginalized and vulnerable, including a large portion of individuals who normally "sleep rough", individuals who were intoxicated or using drugs, sex trade workers, and persons with disabilities.

In addition to providing daily meals, showers, washrooms, laundry facilities, winter clothing and many other services to community members, Bissell's drop-in staff worked to make deeper connections with these individuals and to connect them to the variety of services offered by Bissell Centre, including the Homeless to Homes housing first team. Referrals were also regularly made to the 24/7 MAP outreach team.

Partnerships:

In addition to referring individuals to the other internal programs at Bissell Centre, partnerships with external agencies and service providers, such as the Food Bank, allowed Bissell Centre staff to maximize the opportunities for homeless individuals to receive needed services.

4.2.2 Boyle Street Community Services

The Boyle Street Community Services (BSCS) WER drop-in program aims to help people to use personal and community resources to meet their daily needs, to promote opportunities for individuals to realize their potential, to strive for policies and programs that support dignity and well-being, and to foster the development of healthy inner city communities. Using a health promotion and harm reduction framework, the BSCS Drop-in program provides a lifeline for people living on the streets. Regularly scheduled BSCS programming and activities were offered throughout the day and evenings, including assistance with basic needs through the provision of basic survival items, first aid supplies, personal hygiene items, light meals, and winter gear, as well as referrals to other BSCS services and external support services.

Successes:

The WER drop-in program serves people living on the streets who face physical limitations, legal constraints, addictions and mental health challenges that may prevent them from accessing services at other social services agencies. The BSCS drop-in ensures the provision of basic needs, as BSCS staff regularly referred clients to other Boyle Street Community Services

SERVICE DELIVERY DETAILS & AGENCY REPORTS

programs, as well as to external support services, such as George Spady Society and other detox services, Hope Mission's intoxic services, mental health supports and housing.

For a third year in a row, a number of the staff hired for the BSCS WER program had experience or were employed with other agencies, such as Hope Mission, George Spady Centre, and the Mustard Seed. Having staff members working in the BSCS drop-in who were also familiar with these other agencies provided the added advantage of previously established relationships and expert knowledge of resources in the inner city. It also eased the process of client referrals to other agencies and support services.

Partnerships:

BSCS has many partnerships with organizations such as Streetworks, the Bissell Centre (Victim Services and Inner City Recreation Program), Kahkiyaw and Bent Arrow. The BSCS drop-in also established partnerships with the Edmonton Public School board for donations such as winter supplies, clothing and snacks, and the Amiskwacy Academy provided additional aboriginal programming for the community. Partnerships with several religious and community groups have also benefited the drop-in; Victory Christian Centre donated a Christmas dinner and led Christmas caroling over the holiday season, the Edmonton Korean Women's Association provided lunch twice a month, and the Islamic Family Social Services Association provided a roast beef dinner during the winter.

4.3 WINTER WARMING BUS

Operated by the Boyle Street Community Services outreach team, the Winter Warming Bus acts as a critical access point for people outside of the inner city who may not be comfortable coming downtown for shelter or support services. It provided basic needs items, such as warm food, beverages, clothing, blankets, socks, winter gear, first aid, and hygiene items. Additionally, the Bus provided information and referrals to individuals on the outskirts of the city who do not come downtown for services. Importantly, the Warming Bus staff provided a constant, friendly face and connection for people who may otherwise feel disconnected.

The Winter Warming Bus follows a regular route, but allows enough flexibility in the schedule to respond to calls from individuals not along the route who require the Bus's services. Regular stops remained the same as those from the 2013-14 WER season, including:

SERVICE DELIVERY DETAILS & AGENCY REPORTS

- Centennial Bottle Depot
- McDonald's at 51 Avenue
- Old Strathcona Bottle Depot
- Save On Foods parking lot at 112 Avenue
- Safeway at 118 Ave & Fort Road
- Mosaic Centre
- 7-11 on 102 Ave & 109 Street
- MACS on Jasper Ave & 114 Street
- McDonald's at Oliver Square
- Jasper Place Health & Wellness Centre
- The Neighbour Centre
- Hope Mission

Successes and Partnerships:

Many of the individuals served identified as “rough sleepers”, meaning they were sleeping outside in parkland areas. Winter Warming Bus staff provided these individuals with information about resources available through the various other Boyle Street Community Services programs, as well as other external programs and services, such as the Edmonton Food Bank. The Bus acted as an essential transportation service to connect homeless individuals with other WER service providers and shelters.

4.4 CITY-WIDE DROP-INS

4.4.1 Jasper Place Health & Wellness Centre

The Jasper Place Health & Wellness Centre (JPHAWC) WER drop-in program has several goals, including: to engage clients on the west end of the city through relationship building, to provide a safe place for those in the community to come in out of the cold, to provide information on housing options and the housing first program, and to provide information and referrals to other sources of assistance. The scope of services included shelter, nutrition, personal care, social interaction and transportation to overnight shelter, as well as regularly providing information and referrals regarding housing options and other sources of assistance, including those offered daily at the JPHWC programs and services.

Successes:

Staff worked to provide individuals a social space to gain shelter from the cold, food and snacks, personal care and winter gear, and transportation to overnight emergency shelters. A large portion of the community served by the JPHAWC included those who were “sleeping rough” or who were in high risk situations, such as spending the night on the street, in public spaces or in parks. As such, focus was given to assisting clients in finding emergency shelter and referring them to options for long-term housing.

Individuals were provided with information and referrals for many of the daytime programs offered at the JPHAWC, including income tax service, ID assistance, resume preparation, and foot care.

SERVICE DELIVERY DETAILS & AGENCY REPORTS

Participants were able to access information and referrals for programs and services offered by other agencies such as Emergency Social Services, women’s shelters, community meals, food bank connections, and addictions treatment programs.

Partnerships:

The JPHAWC drop-in has a variety of successful collaborations and partnerships used to achieve program goals, including several neighbourhood churches and schools who collected donations on an ongoing basis. Other partnerships included:

Partner	Partner Contribution
United Way Coats for Kids & Families	Ongoing donations of winter gear including coats, hat and gloves
Bubble up Marketing	Organization of Christmas “Bag of Hope” backpack distribution and holiday meal
Fusion Fellowship/West End Outreach Centre	Friday night soup and bannock
4 Churches Group (Trinity United, Spirit West United, Hosanna Lutheran & Good Shepherd Churches)	Provided weekly Saturday night meal and volunteers to serve
Groups from various neighborhood churches (West Meadows, West Edmonton Christian Assembly, Beulah Alliance)	Provided occasional meals, activities, donations and volunteers
University of Alberta Faculty of Nursing and Grant MacEwan Social Work program	Practicum students volunteered

4.4.2 Mosaic Centre

Mosaic Centre opens doors to the most vulnerable people in northeast Edmonton who are challenged by poverty, hunger, and homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. Healthy activities, aimed at building strong, cohesive community relations were offered to adult men and women, youth, children, and seniors clients, including those who are homeless, couch surfing and those at risk of losing their housing. Many of those served suffer from mental illness, physical disabilities and addictions. Staff intentionally engaged clients in conversations centered on individual housing status, needs and desires, and offered supports and referrals towards positive change. Clients were also often provided with physical assistance such as clothing, blankets, personal care items, food or transportation.

Successes:

As a result of the extended WER hours, there were many opportunities for assertive discussions around housing with clients. Mosaic staff were able to assist clients in accessing needed supports and programs through providing referrals to Mosaic Centre day programs and other external

SERVICE DELIVERY DETAILS & AGENCY REPORTS

resources, such as Alberta Works and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) for income support, Boyle McCauley Health Centre and Streetworks for health supports. In-house Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and referrals to the McCullough Rehabilitation and other detox programs were provided for mental health and addictions supports.

Social, recreational and cultural programs offered to the community included Creative Writing Workshops, Quilting Groups, Charades Night, Bingo and Board Games, Sunday evening Dinner and Discussions, Movie Nights, and “Jam Sessions”.

In the absence of a formal housing first program, Mosaic staff successfully helped 100 individuals attain housing and establish homes between November and April. The majority of these individuals came to Mosaic through WER referrals.

Partnerships:

Donations of fresh eggs and soups from Salvation Army and weekly donations of groceries from Sobey’s allowed staff to offer small meals on a nightly basis, in addition to prepackaged foodstuffs. Additionally, several church and school groups partnered with Mosaic Centre to offer hot meals and a chance to visit with and engage the clients. Community volunteers noted that positive mentoring relationships were built and strengthened and felt encouraged when they saw the effects of healthy lifestyle choices being made.

Mosaic Centre was chosen as a Bag of Hope recipient again this winter. 125 community members enjoyed a delicious turkey dinner and joined in the Christmas celebration as they were gifted with generously filled backpacks and many gifts from Santa's Anonymous.

4.4.3 The Neighbour Centre

The Neighbour Centre exists to respond to the increasing needs of homeless and marginalized people in south Edmonton. Through the WER program, the Neighbour Centre provided drop-in services 7-nights a week over the winter months, which enabled staff to build better relationships with the clients and provide services to meet the various needs of each individual in a positive environment.

Successes:

The majority of clients served at the Neighbour Centre are male adults who “sleep rough” in the river valley area; therefore, the Neighbour Centre offered a winter warming drop-in space where people could have their basic needs met, including access to showers, laundry, food, clothing, computers, phones, washrooms, foot care, and basic first aid. Clients were also offered social

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support with issues, such as help connecting with housing workers or support workers at other agencies.

The Neighbour Centre provided weekly foot care programs, as well as hundreds of showers, laundry services, and thousands of meals and snacks. Referrals to detox and rehabilitation services were provided, as well as assistance in obtaining ID.

Partnerships:

This winter, the Winter Warming Bus was an essential partner in transporting clients and connecting them to shelters in the downtown core. Because the Centre is at least a 10 block walk from a bus that goes downtown, and because many of the clients served have limited mobility or addictions issues, it can be dangerous and difficult for clients to make it to a shelter for the night. The Winter Warming Bus also provided additional food and support for clients. Additional partners included the Edmonton Food Bank, and the StreetWorks team.

4.4.4 Salvation Army Crossroads Community Church

The Salvation Army provided a safe place to stay warm during the winter months, receive support, and gain a sense of community in the Norwood, Parkdale and Alberta Avenue neighbourhoods of Edmonton. The Salvation Army acts as a connecting point of contact to housing agencies within Edmonton, a link to detox and treatment facilities within the province, and a first point of contact to Salvation Army Community Support resources, including spiritual support, clothing, food, rehabilitation, and skills training.

Successes and Partnerships:

Through the network of Salvation Army services, clients were able to access service providers in the Salvation Army Community Support Resource referral-based program. As such, clients received services such as detox and rehabilitation programs, food assistance, income tax preparation, and seniors' services. Clients were also able to receive free counselling, clothing, baby and infant supplies. Drop-in staff assisted clients with applications for housing, AISH and social assistance. Additionally, several clients received furniture through the Salvation Army Thrift Store programme.

In addition to the network of services offered within the Salvation Army, the WER program worked with and received donations from the Edmonton Food Bank, the United Way's Coats For Kids, Walmart, and a number of individual community members. Additionally, several volunteers from a local university provided counselling services and Bethel Chapel ran an ESL group

5.1 OVERVIEW

Strategic planning around the Winter Emergency Response (WER) program to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of Edmonton's homeless population and integrated into existing community supports is a challenging endeavour. The harsh winter months create additional challenges that are encountered, both when coordinating the efforts of the various agencies directly implementing the WER program, and also when connecting clients accessing WER services to other programs and supports outside its scope of service.

The last two years have witnessed major WER stakeholders, including implementing agencies, community members, government, and support services, make a concerted effort to ensure that the program is operating strategically according to its purpose and scope, and in a coordinated and integrated manner. Ensuring that WER program services are operating within a comprehensive homeless-service system is essential for its success and long-term sustainability. As such, ongoing consultations with WER program stakeholders have resulted in the identification and implementation of several actions needed to facilitate a more comprehensive Winter Emergency Response program that is more fully integrated into existing community services.

5.2 SHELTER OVERFLOW & RESPITE SPACE

Anticipating the need to bridge the gap in available overnight shelter space on nights of extreme winter weather and/or when shelters were operating at or near capacity, Homeward Trust engaged in early planning to locate additional shelter overflow space for the 2014-2015 WER season. The need for additional shelter space during the previous WER season, and the continued high usage of shelters in the months leading up to winter, provided clear indication that additional overnight space would be necessary to avoid turning away those seeking shelter for the night.

Starting on the last weekend in November, Hope Mission began operation of an additional Shelter Overflow space with a 120 mat capacity out of the former Remand Centre gymnasium. Coordination with Infrastructure Alberta, which manages the facility, enabled the use of the building, with Commissionaires providing security. Due to high usage that neared and often exceeded beyond the occupancy level of the Hope Mission shelter, this additional overflow space was essential to ensuring the safety of those seeking shelter. In addition, Homeward Trust also coordinated with other emergency shelters to augment their capacity. The George Spady Detox Shelter and the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre both provided additional space on an as needed basis, with up to an additional 10 mats and 13 cots, respectively.

The Bissell Centre opened its drop-in space as an emergency Overnight Respite space when nighttime temperatures were forecasted to drop below -20 degrees Celsius (including wind chill).

Although individuals were not permitted to sleep due to zoning restraints, they were at least provided a safe, warm place to stay during nights of extreme cold. This Overnight Respite required the coordination and collaboration of many WER stakeholders and support service providers, including Boyle Street Community Services, Hope Mission, and George Spady Centre. Close collaboration with the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) was also important, as EPS conducted regular check-ins with Bissell staff and provided alternate interventions if clients posed a risk to themselves or others. Efforts were made to communicate clarification to clients using WER drop-ins and shelters that the Respite program should not be considered as an alternative to shelters, but rather as an emergency last resort respite.

This contingency planning for emergency shelter overflow and respite space is an important aspect of strategically planning for the WER program and through coordination between WER service providers, emergency shelters and other invested stakeholders, it ensured that vulnerable individuals had somewhere to go during the night when shelters were full and the temperatures were dangerously cold. Homeward Trust was able to collaborate with agencies, EPS, shelters and other support services to successfully implement this component of the WER program.

5.3 COMMUNICATION

A common concern among WER program service providers has been inadequate communication or an uncertainty regarding who key contacts are among the different WER program agencies. As individuals experiencing homelessness may access more than one agency or support service, communication between service providers is essential to ensuring the best client care. WER service providers identified that they often lacked the information needed to make a client referral to another program or service.

In response to this issue, a WER program contact list was created to identify key contact persons at each agency so that interagency communication and referrals could be more easily facilitated. This resource is updated and distributed among all agencies during the WER program and it serves as a very beneficial tool in assisting staff in conducting client referrals and in increasing communication and cooperation between service providers.

Additionally, a WER Stakeholders Planning Group was convened in early October 2014 to act as a means of communication and coordination between WER-funded service providers and other community agencies and systems providers. The group confirmed interest in and need for forming a more formal WER Strategic Planning Committee to help direct coordination and implementation of the WER program amongst city-wide stakeholders and systems. The role of the Committee was established to assist in identifying and assessing needs and gaps around homelessness and

housing challenges during the harsh winter temperatures, helping to coordinate the WER contingency funding, and discussing and strategizing around emerging issues.

Open and clear communication with Alberta Human Services Homeless Supports Division was also essential for successful implementation of the WER programs. Homeward Trust worked in collaboration to receive daily updates on emergency shelter overnight occupancy levels. Daily reporting on shelter numbers assisted in planning for overflow and respite space. Cooperation among Human Services, shelters, agencies and service providers on the collection and sharing of relevant data helped to ensure the success of the Winter Emergency Response program.

5.4 TRANSPORTATION

Transportation to and between services is an essential component to ensuring homeless individuals remain safe, free from harm, and have access to the supports and services they need. Although the WER program includes the Winter Warming Bus to provide transportation services, basic needs, and referral services to Edmonton's homeless population outside of the inner city, the Bus does not operate 24 hours a day. Transportation services to ensure a homeless individual can travel from one drop-in site or shelter to another is vitally important, especially during periods of heavy usage and extreme winter weather when shelters may reach their capacity and have to redirect clients to other shelters or agencies. Challenges further increase when individuals needing transportation have physical disabilities or mobility impairments. Therefore, having an integrated, comprehensive transportation strategy, utilizing existing and new community services, is a main focus area for future WER strategic planning.

The lack of available transportation options for Edmonton's homeless community often places undue stress on emergency services. For example, WER agencies have noted that critical incidents with intoxicated individuals often involve Edmonton Police or Emergency Medical Services to transport the individuals, regardless of the severity of the situation.

Alternative options that could be explored include engaging first responders, Edmonton Transit System (ETS), and other service providers, such as sanding trucks and snow plowing trucks, as well as facilitating greater coordination between all community agencies with mobile resources. One option could be to coordinate a pool drivers and staff amongst the outreach vans (Hope Mission Man Down Van and the 24/7 MAP outreach team) such that should one team be short-staffed than they could join the other, which would help to ensure the vans remain in operation. Another option would be to engage ETS in a more direct way to look at how to mobilize its resources to address transportation needs in extreme weather conditions.

Transportation services for homeless individuals during the winter months is an issue in need of additional coordination and collaboration among WER program stakeholders and community members, especially in order to reduce non-critical reliance on emergency services. A strategy with actionable items for WER stakeholders on transportation should be developed in time for the 2015-2016 WER season.