

2013  
/14



# Annual Report

GREATER VANCOUVER SHELTER STRATEGY SOCIETY



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## Message from the President

The past year has been one of substantial change for the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society (GVSS). After 15 years operating as an informal community entity we became an incorporated Society in May 2013. Our elected Board of Directors has established the organization as one that can actively collaborate in the many and varied issues that impact our sector by including representation from aboriginal, youth, seniors, co-ed services, women's services, shelters and outreach providers. We have also seen the successful transition of the first staff member of the organization, with the hire of our new manager, Rebecca Bell, thanking James Pratt for his faithful service in the provision of contract services.

GVSS has been proud to build on its culture of collaboration within the sector and its desire to provide effective coordination of homelessness services in Greater Vancouver through its many partnerships. These have included partnership with Shelter Net BC to support service providers across the province in improving the process of referrals from hospitals to shelters, partnership with Simon Fraser University on homeless seniors and partnership with the Vancouver Urban Core Community Workers Association regarding transit issues. We recognize that our work is strengthened by these partnerships and will continue to seek opportunities to use partnership to effectively serve our members.

GVSS is also grateful to our funders for their ongoing support and faith in our ability to deliver high quality services. BC Housing has provided extended agreements for our core services and Extreme Weather Response Vancouver and Surrey coordination work. The Vancouver Foundation has also supported our core services work. The United Way of the Lower Mainland has provided an extended agreement for the work of the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice and the Real Estate Foundation has joined as new funding partner for this work. Service Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy also provided funding for Extreme Weather Response coordination services for Metro Vancouver. GVSS remains committed to providing valuable service in the eyes of our funders and hopes to build these relationships to further enhance our support of the community.

In this year of transition for GVSS, we also look to a substantial transition in the homelessness sector as we farewell Karen O'Shannacery from our Board. Karen was the founding member of the original inception of GVSS as the Greater Vancouver Cold/Wet Weather Strategy. She has served as chair of the Executive Committee of GVSS for more than five years and has contributed invaluable to its work. We will miss Karen and wish her much deserved rest and fulfillment as she steps into her new journey of retirement.

We thank our members for their willingness to join us in this venture as a fully-fledged Society. We see a future with much opportunity for growth while remaining true to the values that have established us. We hope that you are as excited as we are!

Respectfully,



Peter Fedos, President  
Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society

# GVSS Strategic Foundation

## Purpose

The purposes of the society are:

- a) To work toward a vision of accessible, high quality emergency shelter and outreach services as part of a continuum of housing and supports.
- b) To coordinate responses among shelter providers, all levels of government, and other organizations to meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and to prevent people from sleeping on the street.
- c) To improve and enhance shelter and outreach services through research, education, and information sharing between shelter providers, all levels of government, and other organizations working to address homelessness.

## Mission

The Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy is a network of organizations responding together to meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk, and to advocate for systemic solutions.

## Vision

We envision accessible, high quality temporary shelter and outreach services, connecting people with appropriate housing and supports.

## Goals

### 1. Co-operative planning

Maintain a responsive, effective, and accountable partnership.

### 2. Emerging issues management

Identify emerging sheltering, outreach and housing issues, and facilitate a coordinated response.

### 3. Communication

Communicate service availability to the homeless, service providers and the larger community.

### 4. Sustainability

Demonstrate evidence of need to support coordinated funding and service delivery.

### 5. Service development

Coordinate and enhance services, through planning, mentorship, stakeholder engagement, and policy recommendations.

## Core Values

We share the following six core values:

- ❖ All people should have access to permanent, appropriate housing
- ❖ When people become homeless, rapid re-housing is a priority
- ❖ People should be able to be sheltered or housed in the community of their choice
- ❖ When required, people should have supports to maintain their housing
- ❖ When needed, people should have access to temporary shelter that is safe and healthy
- ❖ People using shelters deserve respect and dignity, including opportunity to make own choices
- ❖ Commitment to service excellence

## Operating Principles

We operate in accord with the following five principles:

- ❖ Collaboration among funders, service providers, and communities
- ❖ Representation and participation of diverse communities, interests, stakeholders and perspectives
- ❖ Maintaining a safe forum for dialogue
- ❖ Consensus decision-making
- ❖ Transparency

# GVSS Management and Board

## Management

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Commencement Year</b>
Manager	Rebecca Bell	2014

## Board of Directors

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Member Society</b>	<b>Commencement Year</b>
President	Peter Fedos	Options Community Services Society	2013
Vice-President	John Harvey	Covenant House Vancouver	2013
Treasurer	Karen O'Shannacery	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	2013
Secretary	Shayne Williams	KEYS Housing and Health Solutions	2013
Member at Large	Anna Truong	Senior Services Society	2013
Member at Large	Bonnie Moriarty	Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver	2013
Member at Large	Fraser Holland	Stepping Stone Community Services Society	2013
Member at Large	Kevan Oxley	Advocate and Outreach Program	2013
Member at Large	Pastor Norman Oldham	Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness, Vancouver Urban Core Community Workers Association	2013
Member at Large	Susan Tatoosh	Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre	2013

# GVSS Membership 2013/14

## Voting Members

GVSS members are organizations that provide homeless shelter and/or homeless outreach services.

The 2013/14 GVSS membership was comprised of the following organizations:

Atira Women's Resource Society	Senior Services Society
Catholic Charities	The Salvation Army Belkin House
City of Vancouver – Gathering Place	The Salvation Army Caring Place
Covenant House BC	The Salvation Army Gateway of Hope
Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver	The Salvation Army New Westminster
Hollyburn Family Services Society	The Salvation Army Richmond House
Keys: Housing and Health Solutions	Union Gospel Mission
Lookout Emergency Aid Society	Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
Options Community Services Society	Vi Fineday Family Shelter Society

## Non-Voting Members

Government agencies, health authorities, local governments and provincial or regional networks addressing homelessness are designated as non-voting members.

The 2013/14 GVSS non-voting membership was comprised of the following organizations:

- BC Housing
- City of Vancouver - Housing
- Fraser Health – Mental Health and Addictions
- Ministry of Social Development & Social Innovation
- Shelter Net BC
- Vancouver Police Department
- Vancouver Urban Core Community Workers Association

## Community Initiatives

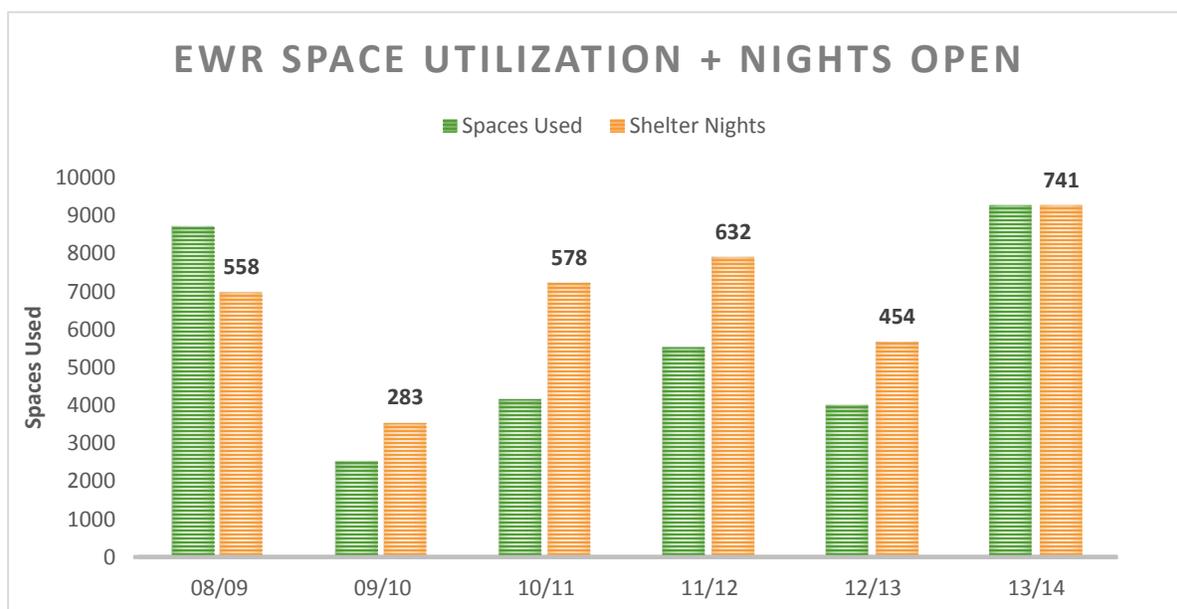
### Greater Vancouver Extreme Weather Response

Through funding provided by BC Housing (\$52,800) and the Homeless Partnering Strategy of the National Homelessness Initiative (\$34,100), and supported by more than \$237,700 in in-kind contributions, GVSS provided Extreme Weather Response (EWR) coordination services to the Vancouver and Surrey/White Rock areas and regional coordination of services across Metro Vancouver. This included involvement the Burnaby, Langley, New Westminster, North Shore, Richmond and Tri-Cities communities. Coordination services included planning support; needs assessment; coordination and provision of training; development of tools and resources; media relations; coordination and information sharing during EWR implementation; post-season debriefing; evaluation and reporting.

Throughout the EWR season, 24 sites were available, with a total potential capacity of 604 spaces for a single night. Of these, 19 sites were utilized, providing a capacity of 474 spaces for a single night. A total of 9,260 of these spaces were used throughout the season; a record number for the history of EWR services in Metro Vancouver. Of these 87% were males, 13% were females and less than 1% were trans. Less than 1% of those served were under the age of 19.

Outcomes of the EWR services included:

- reduced street homelessness during extreme weather due to the availability of additional spaces,
- reduced health and safety risks to homeless people related to extreme weather; as identified by service users, this included reduced risk of hypothermia, increased access to warm and secure places and sufficient sleeping opportunities
- improved coordination of sheltering services during extreme weather through daily updates and coordinated information sharing that supported more consistent alert calling and greater understanding of weather conditions
- improved understanding of local and regional needs during extreme weather particularly around need for beds, clothing and cash donations
- increased public awareness of homelessness and EWR through a pre-season media briefing and 29 media stories, compared to 23 in the previous season



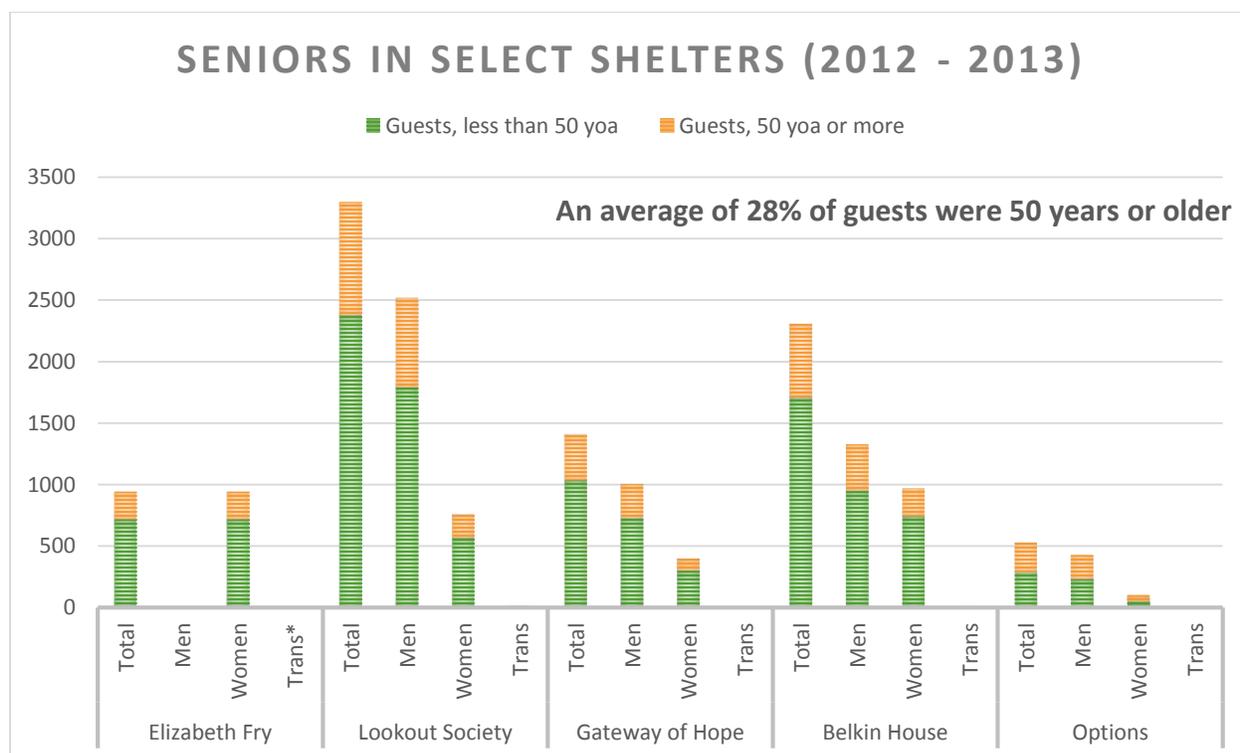
## Homeless Seniors Community of Practice

The work of the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice (CoP) recognizes the need for homelessness services to effectively serve the growing homeless seniors population. Building on the work that was commenced in the previous year, and with funding provided by United Way of the Lower Mainland (\$42,250) and the Real Estate Foundation (\$20,000), the CoP engaged in broad and varied initiatives to support the capacity of community organizations to serve homeless seniors (categorized as those who are homeless and 50 years and older, recognizing the impact of homelessness on aging and issues associated with seniority).

This initiative has seen six half-day dialogue sessions regarding service for homeless seniors delivered for community organizations with a total of 131 attendees. In addition, seven presentations of the Homeless Seniors project were made at regional and sub-regional tables focused on homelessness and/or seniors. These were supported by six meetings of the Steering Committee.

The initiative also saw the implementation of the Older Adults Shelter Working Group that met 3 times and saw the completion of a draft pre-feasibility study on seniors specific sheltering. This study included surveys of staff working with homeless seniors as well as those seniors who have personal experience with homelessness. The feedback and insights from these discussions are informing next steps in considering the capacity for shelters to deliver senior-specific services.

The initial literature review, *Sheltering Seniors*, has been updated and a pilot of tools that were developed to support service delivery to seniors has been completed with feedback to inform a final published version of these tools. In addition, information designed to inform principles in the development of housing for seniors, in partnership with Simon Fraser University, has been developed and potential sites are being investigated to assess the impacts of this principles.



\*Not available to report due to small sample size

## Youth Homeless Voices

The work of the Youth Action Squad, funded by Coast Capital Savings and the United Way of the Lower Mainland, culminated in a report, with supporting video, informed by the voices of homeless youth on:

- pathways into youth homelessness
  - aging out of government care
  - unsupportive family life
  - growing up around addictions
  - struggling with personal addictions
  - mental health issues
  - lack of stable income
  - balancing school and work
- the experience of youth homelessness
  - rental issues
  - exchanging sex for shelter
  - completing school
  - finding youth housing
- youth generated ideas to address and prevent youth homelessness
  - Intervention*
    - youth-specific housing,
    - affordable housing and
    - housing supports
  - Prevention*
    - increasing the age cut-off for youth services
    - life-skills training
- youth-driven recommendations for policy and practice
  - *Education*: inform public and decision makers of youth issues; inform the youth of their rights and responsibilities
  - *Youth Housing*: adequate support to transition through the system; effective support for various stages of recovery
  - *Youth Social Services*: adequate and youth specific support services that aid in transition to independent living
  - *Government and Service Provider Action*: simplifying application processes and shortening waitlists; review other models of success

*“Some kids I know are just literally fresh thrown out on the street. Like what the heck do we do? They talk to workers and they give them a list and tell them what to do. And they just send them off. It’s like ‘okay, that’s one way I guess’. But it helps when you have actual support cause it’s kind of difficult to like being fresh on the street being like okay, they just give you a note, give you a website, and then they call them and they don’t know what to say, what to do. They didn’t have any like specific help or training on it.”*

Youth Action Squad  
Participant

## Hospital Referrals

In partnership with Shelter Net BC (SNBC), GVSS has led action to see effective referrals to shelters from hospitals. This initiative was established in response to ongoing reports from shelters that they were experiencing challenges with some of the processes surrounding hospital referrals.

A total of eight conference calls with shelter providers from around the province have been conducted. This has resulted in the development of forms supporting the capture of referral information from hospitals and also the sharing of experiences and practices that have led to success in working with the hospitals.

GVSS has also led engagement with Fraser Health (three meetings) and Providence Health (one meeting). These meetings have helped to understand the nuanced nature of working to effectively support referrals between hospital and shelters. These have included increased understanding of the pressures on hospital staff, the differences in operation between different facilities and health authorities and the limitations experienced by shelters in supporting those with high levels of medical needs.

Conversations are currently underway with Fraser Health to develop a referral protocol with the hope that this work may be transferred to other Health Authorities in the Lower Mainland and around the province.

## Transit Working Group

Through partnership with the Vancouver Urban Core Community Workers Association (VUCCWA) GVSS has supported the work of the Transit Working Group (TWG). The TWG has created a Regional Transit Proposal, endorsed by three municipalities, that includes three immediate actions to improve transit services for people living in extreme poverty:

- a discount bulk fare purchase system for homeless service providers,
- a mechanism for fare evasion fines to be waived when extreme poverty can be confirmed
- the creation of a Metro Vancouver Homeless Transit Plan by key stakeholders

The TWG has met monthly for the last year and has working with TransLink to identify obstacles for those who are homeless in accessing transit to exit homelessness. This has included travelling to Seattle to discuss their existing programs and policies, conducting a Homeless Transit Survey through seven municipalities, hosting a Transit Forum during Homeless Action Week and assisting TransLink in planning for the implementation of the Compass Card. The TWG is working with TransLink to identify the mechanism for a ticket bulk-buying program that would be accessible to service providers in the homelessness sector.

GVSS has supported the work of the TWG by providing regular updates to GVSS members, providing endorsement of the reports of TWG reports and proposals and encouraging member endorsement of the same. GVSS has also indicated its availability to provide support and coordination to the ticket bulk-buying program should the need arise.

# Outcomes Report

## Long term housing solutions are developed

- i. Identify, develop and design implementation strategies for preventing homelessness

The development of the three strategic plan will support the implementation of this strategy. At the conclusion of the 2013/14 fiscal year the strategic plan was three-quarters completed and has been finalized with the hiring of the GVSS Manager. Actions to be completed of the next two years included:

- developing protocols for utilizing shelters to maintain housing and prevent homelessness (completed by Q4 2014/15)
- developing resources to promote homelessness prevention (completed by Q4 2015/16)

- ii. Identify and promote strategies for successful transitioning to stable housing

With the establishment of the strategic plan, the following activities will be completed:

- supporting members to increase access to housing stock (completed by Q4 2015/16)
- supporting members to integrate Housing First concepts within existing services (completed by Q2 2014/15)

## Shelter and outreach service accessibility is improved

- i. Enhance capacity of member organizations to serve key sub-populations

The Homeless Seniors Community of Practice (CoP) has provided enhanced the capacity of member organizations to support the older adults sub-population. **Dialogue sessions** on matters pertaining to service delivery for older adults have addressed issues such as addictions, the importance of 'home' for seniors, current research findings on seniors issues and the challenges of displaced seniors through increasing income pressures. The **pilot of tools** to support shelters in serving older adults will allow shelters to more effectively interpret and respond to the needs of seniors. Finally, the work of a draft **pre-feasibility study on seniors-specific shelters** will provide a platform to pilot implementation of seniors-specific spaces within existing shelters and consider the capacity for shelters to provide diversionary housing to homeless seniors.

- ii. Facilitate access to shelters that best serves individual clients' needs

The Transit Working Group has sought to increase access to shelters by ensuring that clients remain able to **travel between shelters and also to key appointments and employment opportunities** with the implementation of the new Compass card within the transit system. GVSS has supported the Working Group through endorsement of its plan and exposure at meetings.

GVSS has also engaged in coordination of Extreme Weather Response (EWR) services throughout Greater Vancouver and also in the Vancouver and Surrey/White Rock sub-regions. Responses from focus groups of those accessing the EWR sites indicated that the availability of these spaces **increased their access to shelter** where they may have otherwise stayed outdoors, in vehicles, at a friend's house or in a vacant building. The provision of EWR spaces also allows the shelters to **respond to the needs identified** by those accessing services such as warm and secure sleeping spaces.

## Service effectiveness is enhanced

### i. Build community capacity for interagency collaboration and cooperation

EWR Coordination continued to promote interagency collaboration and cooperation. Specific results of this coordination included:

- six Extreme Weather Task Force meetings
- 2013/14 Evaluation Report
- engagement with MCFD to provide advice on youth accessing EWR shelters
- increased coordination with Environment Canada on weather information
- blanket distribution via the Red Cross
- media pre-season briefing and ongoing messaging throughout the season

Six Community of the Whole meetings continued to allow for coordination and collaboration among members. Key areas of discussion, not otherwise listed, included:

- collaboration with bc211 on developing program lists and utilizing data
- presentation on the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)
- assaults on homeless individuals
- sharing of program updates from shelter and outreach providers and Community Homelessness Tables across the region

The Outreach Worker Group also met four times this year to facilitate coordination and collaboration amongst outreach providers.

### ii. Identify and document preferred practices for service, management and organizational culture

Actions identified in the strategic plan that will address this outcome include:

- increasing sector knowledge on policy development
- creating formal client engagement practices

### iii. Provide recommendations regarding the housing continuum to government and other stakeholders

GVSS worked regularly with the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH) to inform discussions on the **relationship between GVSS and the RSCH** with the new RSCH structure. Through the Community of the Whole GVSS was also consulted for input in **developing the Regional Homelessness Plan** and provided input on the **Regional Homeless Count methodology**.

## Operate with organizational excellence

### i. Develop and maintain a three year strategic plan

A strategic plan to address the last two years of a three year agreement with BC Housing has been developed and presented to the Committee of the Whole. Action on the strategic plan will be supported by the GVSS Manager.

## ii. Coordinate with other regional and provincial groups

The following partnerships and collaboration activities occurred throughout the year.

<b>Regional/Provincial Group</b>	<b>Coordination Activities</b>
BC Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Lori Dennis representing BC Housing at Board and Committee of the Whole meetings</li></ul>
Health Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Meetings held with Fraser Health and Providence Health regarding hospital referrals</li></ul>
Shelter Net BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Provincial conference calls regarding hospital referrals</li><li>▪ Presentation of 'Towards Aging in Place' at annual conference</li></ul>
BC Society of Transition Houses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Presentation of 'Towards Aging in Place' at annual conference</li></ul>
Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Regional Homeless Plan</li><li>▪ Regional Homelessness Count</li></ul>
bc211	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Collaboration towards developing program lists and utilizing data</li></ul>
Vancouver Urban Core Community Workers Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Collaboration with the Transit Working Group</li></ul>

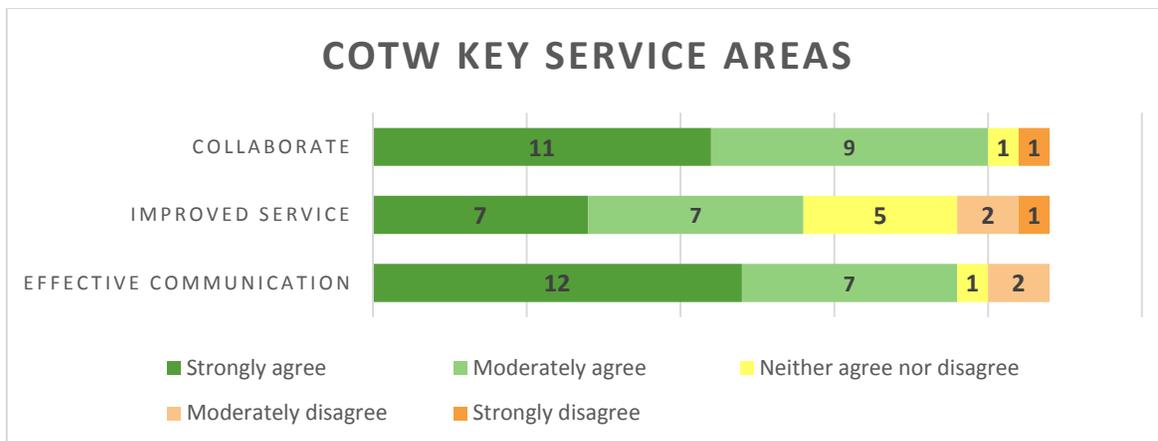
GVSS also acknowledges that its operations are supported by substantial community in-kind contributions of more than \$350,000, as outlined in the financial report. These contributions also demonstrate the capacity for GVSS to effectively collaborate with other organizations within the community.

## iii. Implement a governance model for the Society

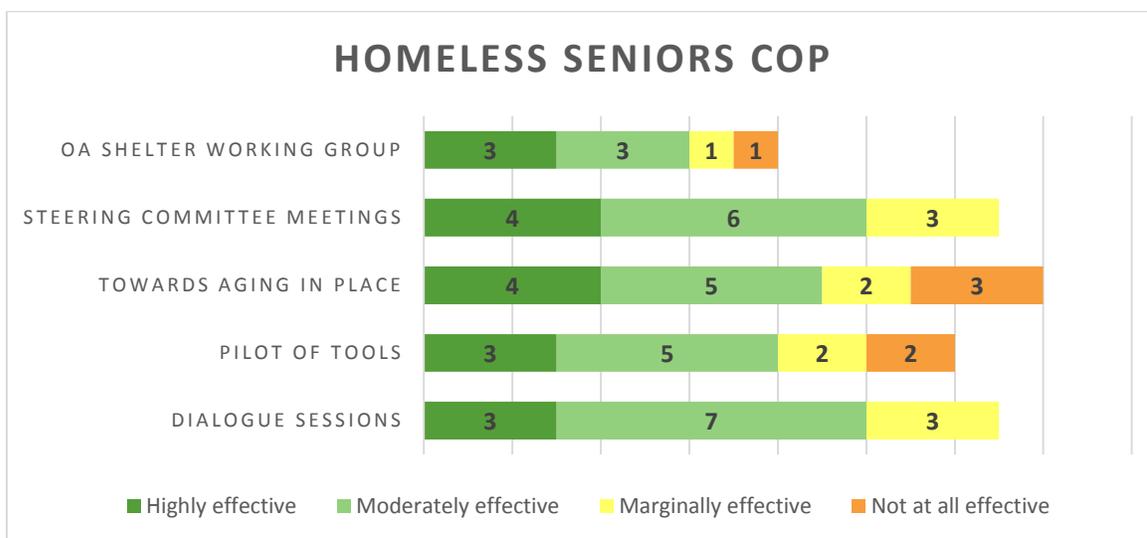
GVSS incorporated as a society in May 2013 and elected a Board and officers in June 2013. GVSS has also completed the transition from service delivery through consultant services to delivery through staff support. This process was concluded with the hiring of Rebecca Bell as GVSS Manager.

## iv. Deliver effective services to Members

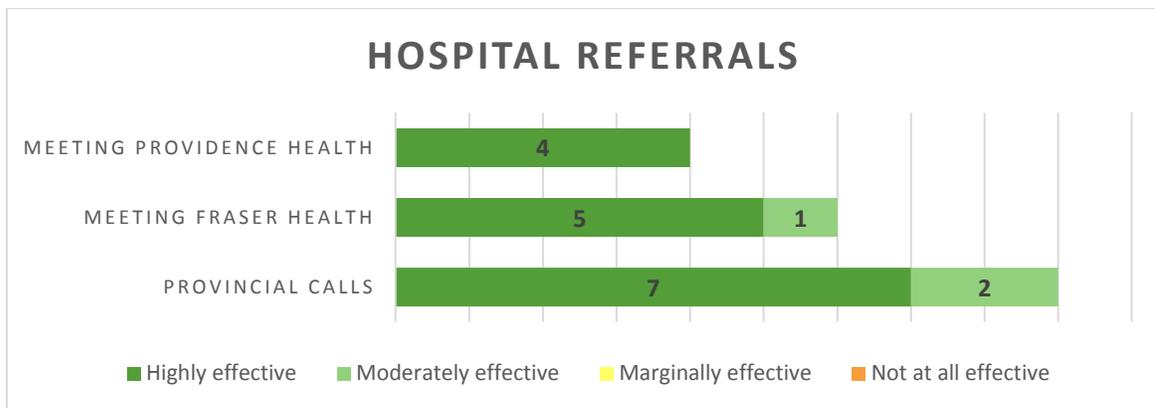
A total of 22 responses were received for the 2014 Membership survey. Almost two-thirds of the responses came from shelter providers, with 15 responses. Two responses came from outreach providers and one response came from a regional or community table. Of those who selected "Other" two providers identified as "shelter and outreach", one as "advocate and outreach" and one non-identified. Overall, members agreed that GVSS activities were operating effectively.



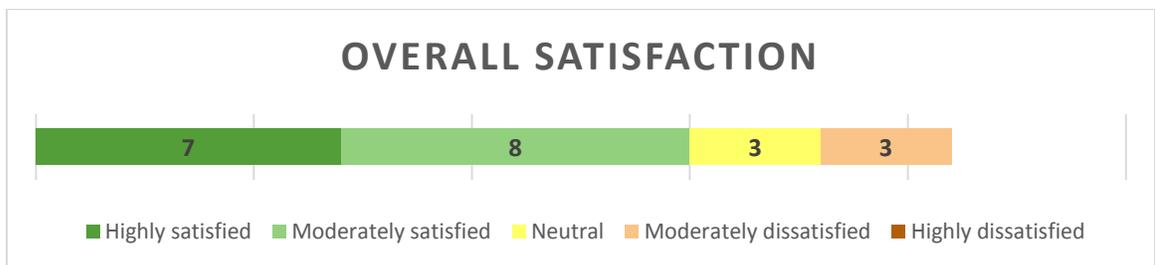
More than 85% of GVSS members agreed that participation in the Committee of the Whole (CotW) helped them collaborate with other service providers and that communication from GVSS was effective in informing them of important activities. There was less agreement from members (just over 60%) that participation in the CotW had helped their organization improve service delivery. The comments suggest that increased opportunity for smaller group dialogue is a potential area of improvement for the CotW meetings.



The dialogue sessions and steering committee meetings were seen as the most effective elements of the work of the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice (CoP). It is noted that while all elements of the CoP are identified as highly effective by some members, there has also been concern that some elements have not been effective in supporting the work of member organizations. These areas highlight opportunity for investigation to further develop the impact of the CoP. Suggestions for steps forward include promoting knowledge sharing and support between agencies with strong practices for seniors and agencies that need support.



While the work regarding hospital referrals has involved a smaller number of members, this work has been widely identified as highly effective. There is desire to ensure that there is sufficient follow up and administrative support to ensure that this work continues.



Just over 70% of those who responded to the survey indicated an overall satisfaction with their participation as a member of GVSS this year. Members continue to identify the value of engaging with each other through GVSS and there is the suggestion to increase contact with various government entities include other ministries whose work intersects with homelessness.