



# ANNUAL REPORT

Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society

**2014-15**

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## Message from the President

Looking back on 2014-15, I am pleased to report that by building on the strengths of the members and partners of the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society (GVSS), there were a number of achievements that I believe will increase the quality of services for those needing the supports and services offered by emergency shelter and outreach services. Working collaboratively with member agencies and key partners, the GVSS has been instrumental in the development and implementation of valuable research, education and information sharing between shelter providers, government and funders over the past twelve months.

At the beginning of this fiscal year, the GVSS was selected by Service Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy to conduct the information and training sessions related to the Housing First funding stream. Rebecca Bell, the Manager of GVSS, conducted a number of sessions regionally for the various population groups to ensure that applicants for the Housing First funding stream understood the Housing First Model and funding requirements in order to apply for Housing First funding.

The GVSS also continued its collaboration with Shelter Net BC, health authorities and service providers across British Columbia to sort out the issues related to referrals from hospitals to shelters. The development of processes that were piloted to strong reviews by stakeholders will work to ensure that referrals from hospitals to shelters will be appropriate and well managed.

The Homeless Seniors Community of Practice work that was funded by The United Way of the Lower Mainland and the Real Estate Foundation resulted in a set of documents "Serving Homeless Seniors: Tools and Checklists". These documents are available on the GVSS website ([www.gvss.ca](http://www.gvss.ca)). Additional research was initiated that will increase the understanding of service provision to seniors by soliciting feedback directly from seniors who access shelter services.

I would like to thank my fellow board members for their time and efforts in supporting the GVSS to meet its ambition. Peter Fedos stepped away from his role as President to allow himself more time to focus on challenges arising within Surrey. Peter graciously made himself available as needed and the Board would like to thank Peter for his contributions to the GVSS and his continued participation.

On behalf of the board, I would also like to thank Rebecca Bell for her excellent work in keeping the business of the agency on track and meeting the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan. The achievements that were realized this year were made possible by Rebecca's professionalism and focus on results.

Lastly, I would like to thank our members for their participation and involvement. I want to assure the membership that we are always looking for ways to improve our services to our members and ensure that the needs of our membership are always our priority.

With Respect and Appreciation,



John Harvey, 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	John Harvey	Covenant House Vancouver	2013
Vice-President	Bonnie Moriarty	Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver	2013
Treasurer	Trudi Shymka	The Bloom Group	2014
Secretary	Scott Small	Catholic Charity's Men's Hostel	2014
Member at Large	David Brown	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	2015
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	2013
Member at Large	Susan Tatoosh	Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre	2013

## GVSS Membership 2014/15

### Voting Members

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

The 2014/15 GVSS membership was comprised of the following organizations:

Catholic Charities	Senior Services Society
City of Vancouver – Gathering Place	Stepping Stone Community Services Society
Covenant House BC	The Salvation Army Belkin House
Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver	The Salvation Army Caring Place
Fraserside Community Services	The Salvation Army Gateway of Hope
Hollyburn Family Services Society	The Salvation Army New Westminster
Keys: Housing and Health Solutions	The Salvation Army Richmond House
Lookout Emergency Aid Society	Union Gospel Mission
Lower Mainland Advocacy and Outreach Group	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 2014/15 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
- Service Canada
- Shelter Net BC
- Vancouver Police Department
- Vancouver Urban Core Community Workers Association

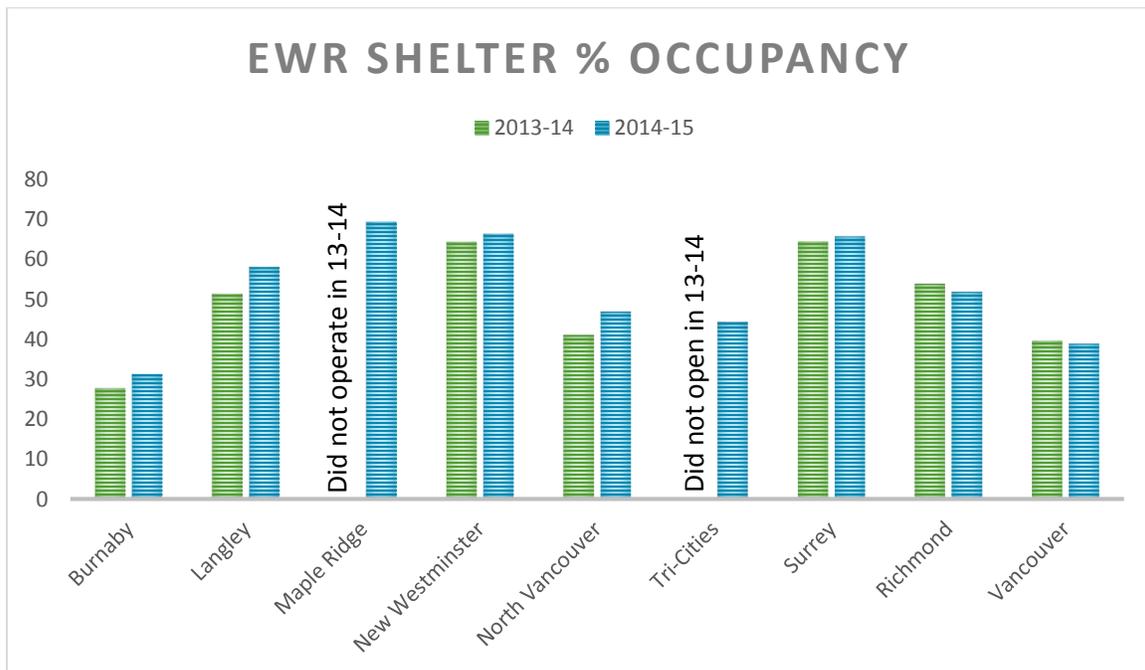
# Community Initiatives

## Greater Vancouver Extreme Weather Response

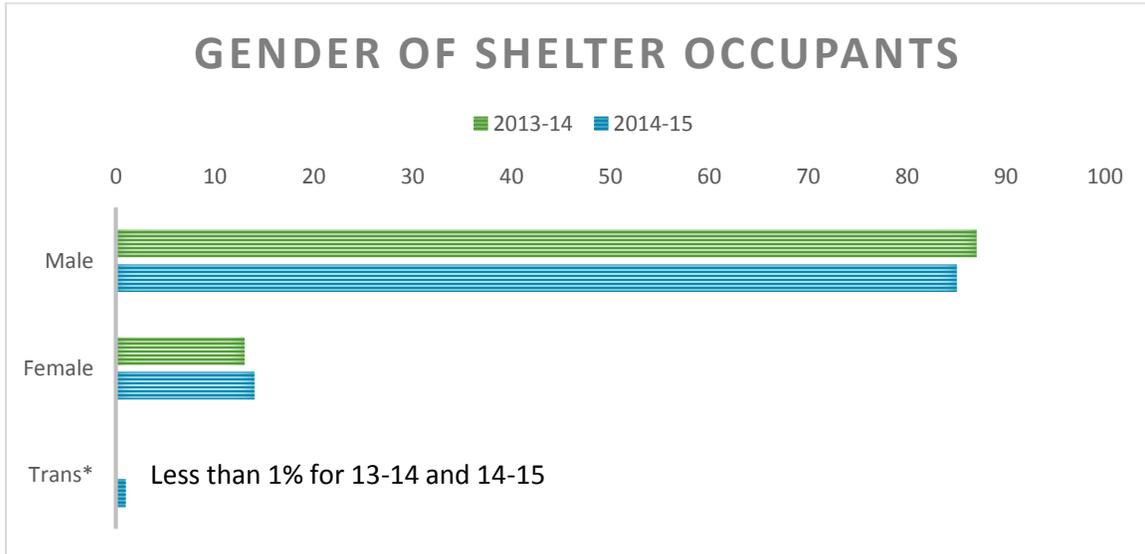
This year, GVSS Extreme Weather Response (EWR) coordination was supported by funding from BC Housing (\$52,800) and the Homeless Partnering Strategy (\$10,194.63) and almost \$60,000 in in-kind contributions. GVSS EWR coordination served the Metro Vancouver area with sub-regional coordination in Vancouver and Surrey/White Rock, covering additional communities of Burnaby, Langley, Maple Ridge, New Westminster, North Shore, Richmond and the Tri-Cities.

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, 26 sites were available, with a total potential capacity of 634 spaces for a single night. Of these, 23 sites were utilized, providing a capacity of 564 spaces for a single night. The weather for this year's EWR season was quite warm, resulting in a decrease of openings across Metro Vancouver, with only 449 shelter nights. However, occupancy rates for this year were sustained with an average of 51.15% (6,189 spaces used) compared to 51.56%, with the majority of communities seeing an increase in occupancy compared to last year. In addition, two previously available shelters that had not been utilized in 13/14 received EWR guests. An additional community, Maple Ridge, also operated this year due to a change in funding that saw the loss of alternative services. These figures demonstrate, at minimum a sustained demand for services, even with fairer weather.



Of those who occupied the EWR shelters, 85% were males, 14% were females and less than 1% were trans\*, less than 1% of those served were under the age of 19.



While EWR services are limited in capacity, their impact on those who are served remains substantial. EWR guests identified

- Reduced risk of sickness
- Increased access to warm and safe spaces that allowed them to sleep soundly
- Limiting the need for long travel at night in the cold to gain access to warm shelter
- Attention to hygiene needs
- Provision of food

as areas of support given by EWR service providers. As one guest stated, “It has given me hope and made me realize that there are still people left in this world who are nice and helpful. Hard to find these days.”

*It has given me hope and made me realize that there are still people left in this world who are nice and helpful. Hard to find these days.*

- EWR Guest 2014/15 Season

Further details regarding EWR outcomes will be available in the upcoming GVSS EWR Report.

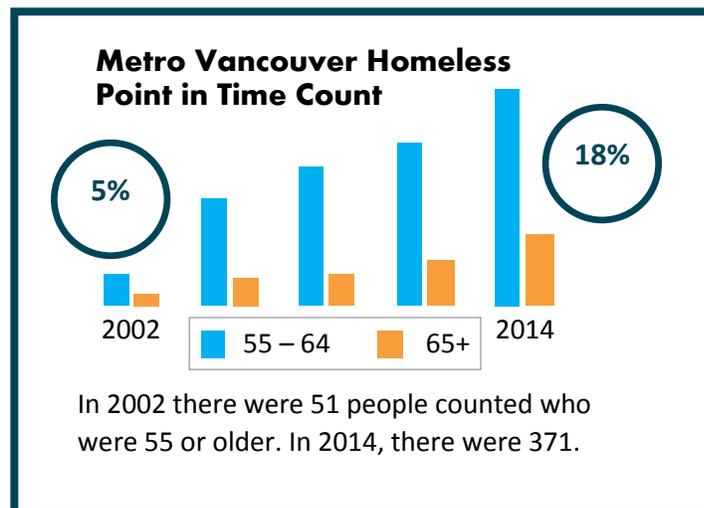
## Homeless Seniors Community of Practice

The work of the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice (CoP) recognizes the need for homelessness services to effectively serve the growing homeless seniors population. This work was once again generously supported by the United Way of the Lower Mainland (\$42,500) and the Real Estate Foundation of BC (\$20,000).

The work of the CoP has continued in great strength. Four community dialogue sessions were held on topics of mental health and elder abuse, with a total of 80 attendees. Presentations of the work of the CoP were also held at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference 2014, the Canadian Alliance for Policy Alternatives 'System Change for Seniors Care' forum and at the West End Community Planning table. The partnership that was developed with the Simon Fraser University School of Gerontology has continued and planning is ongoing to examine the impacts of built design in the Kiwanis Towers project. A new partnership with the University of British Columbia School of Social Work led to the placement of two practicum students with GVSS, supporting CoP projects.

The findings of the pre-feasibility study on seniors specific sheltering that was developed last year led to a substantial research project that engaged 15 staff and 15 seniors from 5 shelters. The results of these interviews were prepared to be presented at CoP dialogue sessions and with key funders. Results will also be developed into a number of reports and info pages.

The pilot of Serving Homeless Seniors: Tools and Checklists was completed with the final documents published on gvss.ca. In addition, an introductory infographic was developed to support the understanding of seniors homelessness.

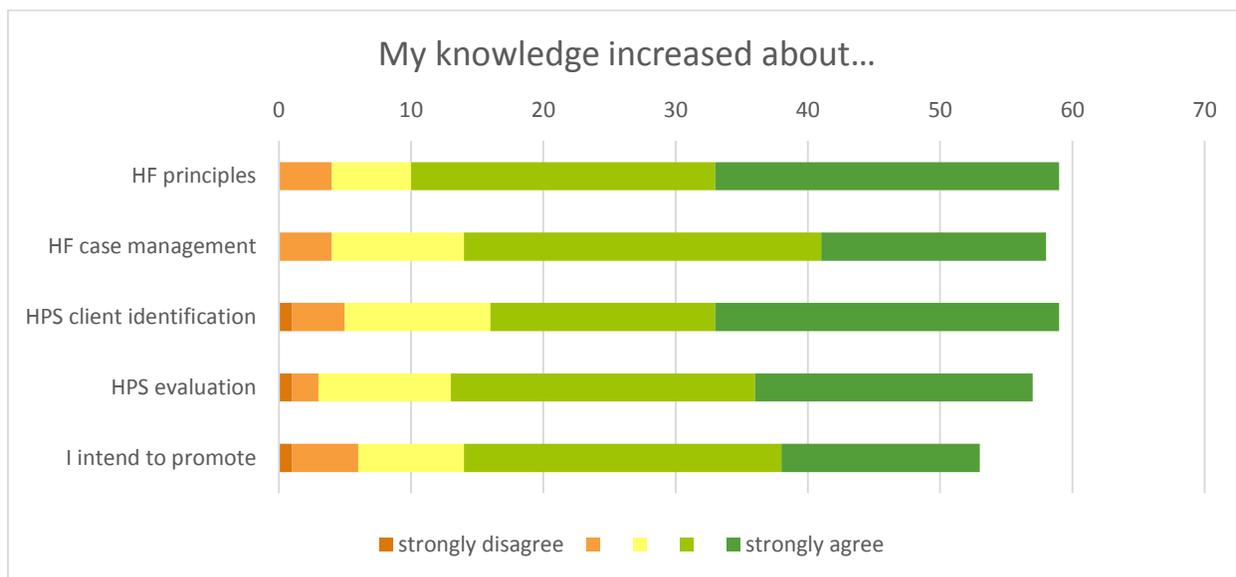


Projected activities for the CoP include supporting shelters to enhance their capacity to serve seniors that have been discharged from hospital, identifying strategies to prevalent homelessness in seniors and identifying projects that can implement recommendations of the Housing Framework for Accommodating Older Adults Who Have Faced Homelessness.

## Housing First Readiness

GVSS sought to shelter and outreach providers in responding to the impact of the Housing First paradigm by providing capacity building sessions within Greater Vancouver that prepared organizations to respond to the Call for Proposals that came from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) through Metro Vancouver. HPS provided GVSS with the funding (\$20,407.39) to complete these sessions.

The Housing First Readiness sessions provided GVSS with an opportunity to partner with a number of organizations and individuals including Shelter Net BC, RainCity Housing, the Housing First Speakers Bureau, Brian Dean Williams and the Youth Housing First Taskforce. GVSS now has a repository of resources regarding Housing First available on our website (gvss.ca) that can support organizations as they consider and prepare to implement Housing First in their own context.



This training was well received within the community with the majority of participants identifying that these session had improved their knowledge on key Housing First issues. Further, engagement in this project raised the profile of GVSS within the community, with Metro Vancouver and with Vancity. This creates a platform for GVSS to grow its role in community collaboration and coordination in responding to homelessness.

The impact of Housing First is also being within the context of seniors homelessness. Currently most implementations and analyses of Housing First have targeted the general homeless population and there is need for attention to the specific considerations of sub-populations. Information from the interviews conducted in the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice will inform discussions on the specific needs of seniors within a Housing First context.

GVSS also expects that Housing First will remain a key issue within the homelessness sector for the years to come and expects to provide ongoing support to members to ensure that shelters and outreach are adequately equipped to respond to and engage with Housing First considerations.

## Outcomes Report

### Long term housing solutions are developed

Identify and promote strategies for successful transitioning to stable housing

The delivery of **Housing First Readiness capacity building sessions** GVSS informed its members and the wider community of homelessness services providers on the paradigm of Housing First and how it may be used by shelters and outreach to transition to stable housing.

Resources developed include:

- A webinar targeted to understanding Housing First within a shelter and outreach context
- A Housing First specific case management resource and case study
- A HPS Housing First client identification tool
- Instructions on using HIFIS for HPS Housing First data management

The interviews conducted within the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice included questions regarding successful transition of seniors to shelters. Resources to support members will be available in 2015/16.

### Shelter and outreach service accessibility is improved

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 adult sub-population. This year's **Dialogue sessions** focused on seniors mental health and elder abuse issues. **Tools and checklists** were finalized and published on the GVSS website that support more effective delivery of services to seniors. The interviews that have been conducted with facilitate the development of tools for shelters to better serve seniors from both an operational and design perspective.

The Housing First Readiness capacity building sessions provided particular **youth focused sessions** that discussed the alignment of current knowledge regarding youth service delivery with the Housing First paradigm.

GVSS also seeks to ensure that its membership is an effective representation of those who are homeless and is happy to have increased its membership composition of women-serving shelters. The ability to engage and serve specific sub-populations is an ongoing goal of GVSS.

Facilitate access to shelters that best serves individual clients' needs

GVSS Extreme Weather Response (EWR) coordination services have continued to serve communities throughout Greater Vancouver. 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 and limiting the need for them to travel out of their community for these services.

GVSS has commenced conversation with Fraser Health to **pilot a project** to enhance the ability of shelters to access existing community services to allow them to serve seniors who are considered 'medically dischargeable' but are not currently able to be serve within existing shelter capacity.

## Service effectiveness is enhanced

### Build community capacity for interagency collaboration and cooperation

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

- Extreme Weather Task Force meetings
- Engagement with Environment Canada on weather information
- Blanket distribution via the Red Cross
- Media pre-season briefing and ongoing messaging throughout the season

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

- Understanding the key trends that are facing homelessness services
- Responding to Housing First from a shelter and outreach perspective
- Finding opportunities and delivering solutions that will facilitate the sharing of training resources and knowledge within Metro Vancouver
- Sharing of program updates from shelter and outreach providers and Community Homelessness Tables across the region

GVSS once again supported the delivery of the **City of Vancouver's point in time homeless count** by actively participating in delivery. We also supported in lending our logo to the counters' badge to act as a recognizable identifier for those who are homeless.

GVSS has also supported community action in responding to homelessness by providing support letters for projects from members and other community partners. Building relationships and developing with organizations such as Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, Fraser Health, Metro Vancouver, Vancity and the City of Vancouver is increasing GVSS capacity to provide collaboration and coordination.

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

Through the work of the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice, GVSS will develop a number of resources on recommendations for stakeholders including service providers, funders and housing developers. These will include recommendations on the design and delivery of housing for seniors and the Housing First considerations for serving seniors.

## Operate with organizational excellence

### Develop and maintain a three year strategic plan

GVSS has continued to review its strategic plan with an update to the action plan created for 2015-16. This was presented to members in the last quarter of the 2014-15 year.

## Coordinate with other regional and provincial groups

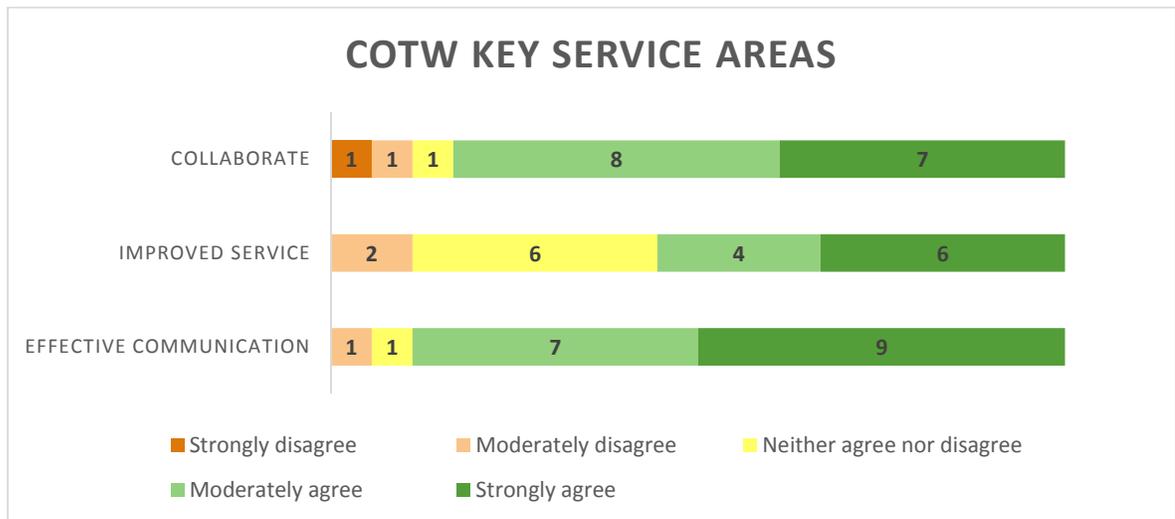
The following partnerships and collaboration activities occurred throughout the year.

Regional/Provincial Group	Coordination Activities
BC Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asuka Yoshioka 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 regarding shelter capacity to serve seniors</li> </ul>
Shelter Net BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for the Housing First Readiness sessions and webinar development</li> </ul>
Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversight of the Housing First Readiness sessions</li> </ul>
bc211	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving the delivery of key EWR information</li> <li>Development towards an outreach workers list</li> </ul>
City of Vancouver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Point in Time Homeless Count</li> </ul>
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation at the 'System change for seniors care' event</li> </ul>

GVSS also acknowledges that its operations are supported by substantial community in-kind contributions of more than \$100,000, as outlined in the financial report. These contributions also demonstrate the capacity for GVSS to effectively collaborate with other organizations within the community.

## Deliver effective services to Members

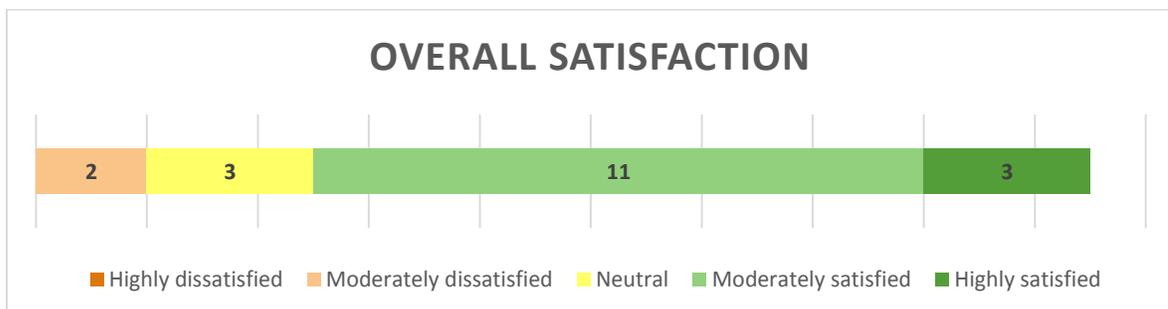
A total of 19 responses were received for the 2015 Membership survey. The majority of responses, 13, came from shelters, one from outreach and five from 'others' including a community homeless taskforce, academic, a community information resource and one who identified that they provided both shelter and outreach. Overall, members agreed that GVSS activities were operating effectively. And these figures are relatively consistent results from last year.



Almost 85% of GVSS members agreed that participation in the Committee of the Whole (CotW) helped them collaborate with other service providers and almost 90% agreed that communication from GVSS was effective in informing them of important activities. There was less agreement from members (approximately 55%) that participation in the CotW had helped their organization improve service delivery. The comments suggest that prioritizing meetings can be a challenge within a busy schedule. These comments do highlight the need for GVSS to be effective in meeting the needs of members at CotW meetings to ensure that they feel that the time spent is valuable for themselves and their organizations.

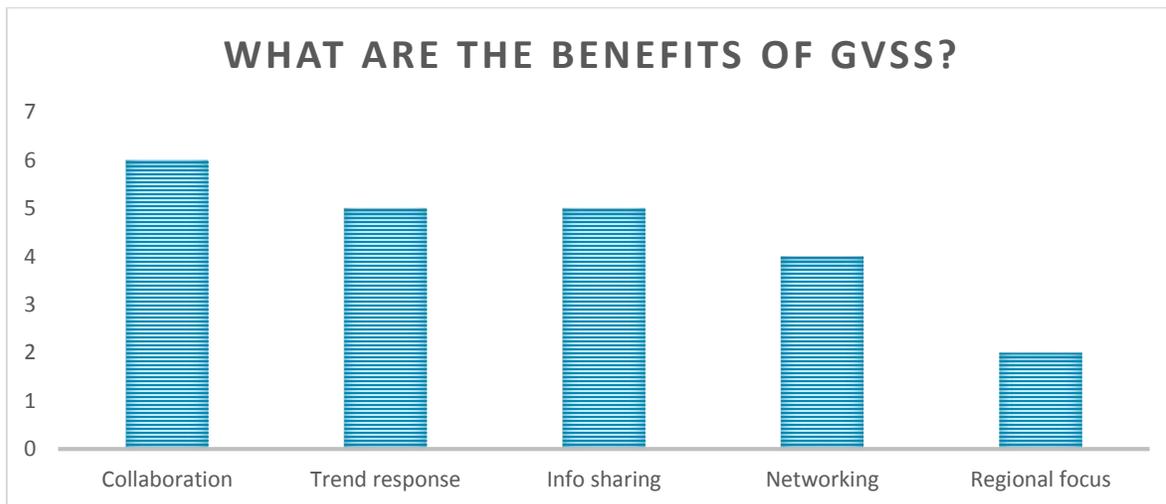


Satisfaction with the activities of the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice (CoP) have improved with all elements of the CoP that were presented this year receiving strong support. We have been particularly provide of the activities that we have engaged in with the CoP this year and continue to plan to see the upcoming last funded year of the project deliver equally strong results.



More than 70% of those who responded to the survey indicated an overall satisfaction with their participation as a member of GVSS this year. This year we specifically asked members about the value of GVSS and what they particularly valued.

Members told us that the ability to collaborate and respond together, identifying and responding to trends, information sharing from expertise and practice knowledge, networking and a regional perspective were value contributions for GVSS.



Members also highly valued the ongoing operation of GVSS with almost all members agreeing that its ongoing operation is highly valuable.

