



Greater Vancouver Cold/Wet Weather Strategy
2003-2004 Evaluation

Prepared by James Pratt Consulting

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Part 1: Executive Summary

This evaluation provides qualitative evidence suggesting that, with one exception, the intended direct outcomes of the CWWS were achieved in the 2003-2004 year. The following table summarizes focus group findings on these outcomes.

Intended direct outcome	Summary of focus group opinion
Improved access to emergency shelter and related services	Created seasonal shelter services outside the Downtown Eastside, and strengthened support for permanent shelters. Increased shelter services for women.
Improved planning and coordination of shelter resources	Increased formal and informal information sharing among shelter providers. Increased sharing of resources, working together, sense of community.
Increased awareness of cold/wet weather shelter openings and closings	Partially achieved. Limited achievement of increased awareness among homeless people on the street.
Increased community preparedness for extreme weather	Response plans and services in place in Langley, New Westminister, Richmond, and Surrey; and expanded response in Vancouver. More work to be done in other communities.
Improved understanding of seasonal shelter needs	Increased collective ability to articulate changing needs. Strengthened understanding among government bodies. Increased collaboration in systematic needs assessment (i.e. through the Joint Task Group on Shelter Service Planning).

Focus group findings suggested that the CWWS has achieved several indirect outcomes:

- Improved health and reduced risk of homeless people;
- Prevention of crime and reduced risk to the general population;
- Improved shelter service provider access to in-kind resources.

Participants confirmed that having access to administrative support services and planning and evaluation services enables the CWWS to:

- Be cohesive;
- Stay focused;
- Communicate and coordinate more effectively;
- Carry out ongoing planning activities and conduct annual evaluations.

Participants suggested that CWWS priority setting and action planning should consider:

- Communicating to raise public awareness of seasonal shelter openings and closings;
- Making recommendations to government and multi-stakeholder bodies concerned with homelessness;
- Exploring the needs of child homelessness and initiating appropriate action;
- Working collaboratively to support the development of sustainable solutions, i.e., affordable and supportive housing.

Part 2: Introduction

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this evaluation is to support ongoing accountability of the Greater Vancouver Cold/Wet Weather Strategy (CWWS) and to provide input to annual planning.

The three primary objectives are to:

1. Present a summary of qualitative input on how the group makes a difference (outcomes) and the benefits of having access to contracted professional services;
2. Identify action ideas for consideration in action plans for 2004-2005 and beyond;
3. Provide analysis that will inform the development of the CWWS logic model and future evaluation strategies.

Background and Rationale

Each year since 1998-1999 the CWWS has conducted an evaluation of its performance, including statistical analysis of seasonal shelter services provided by member agencies. In 2003-2004 the CWWS presented this statistical analysis as part of the *2004-2006 Service Plan*.¹ To complement the service plan, this evaluation presents qualitative evidence and analysis.

Scope

This evaluation focuses on outcomes, looking primarily at the 2003-2004 year (September through August).

Methods

The evaluator worked with members of the Planning and Evaluation Task Group to develop a set of focus group questions. The substance of these questions began with the outcomes listed in the logic model. A question about the impact of having consultant services was intended to provide feedback to funding partners about how their investments have made a difference to the performance of the CWWS.² Eight CWWS members participated in the focus group.

¹ In addition, M. Ninow Consulting prepared *Extreme Weather Response, Evaluation of the 2003-2004 Year* (May 2004).

² The question on impact of consultant services was discussed in camera, without the facilitator, to help ensure open, honest input.

Part 3: Focus Group Results

3.1 Direct Outcomes

Participants addressed the question “do you feel that the CWWS made a difference in terms of the following outcomes? If yes, how?”

Improved access to emergency shelter and related services

- “Less people turned away, less frustration.”
- “However, the number of turn-aways has increased – because homelessness has doubled since 2001.”
- “You can’t underestimate the value of developing resources outside the Downtown Eastside. [e.g. North Shore].”
- “Referring someone downtown from a community like Richmond can be a death warrant.”
- “Increased services to women, and particular need groups, have come out of this Committee’s effort.”
- “Having to turn people away leads to anger and frustration. Shelter staff repeatedly speak of increased violence, and pushing and shoving, caused by desperation. For people coming in to beds we say ‘beds are available’ but they’re full. This leads to more conflict within shelters. A strain on staff.”
- “Linked to aggressive panhandling in the Downtown Eastside – when they are hungry, tired and explosive.”
- “For Surrey the CWWS table has been really good.”
- “We said we wanted to improve, and provide services outside of the Downtown Eastside, so we strategized. That’s where the support for the permanent shelters came from: North Shore, Hyland House, Tri-Cities.”

Improved planning and coordination of shelter resources

- “It’s sharing – not just official, ED to ED. Staff (of different shelters) at night talking to each other. It’s more of a community dealing with the issue.”
- “I feel Shelter Net BC was born of this Committee. More than mobilizing: consolidating with other shelters throughout the Province. Spin offs: collaboration with BC Non-Profit Housing Association members.”
- “Collaboration has helped all of us – it’s a sense of community. Often I find there’s nowhere else to share frustrations. And glean from others experience and expertise. I come out from these meetings and I feel encouraged...”

- “And we’re sharing resources. Increased working together among the agencies.”
- “Staff are now being trained totally differently. Now they’re the ones reaching out to other shelters: ‘hey, we have a bed.’”

Increased awareness of cold/wet weather shelter openings and closings

- “This is not good now... People are outraged when they learn how late (in the season) services open and how early they close.”
- “People on the street don’t necessarily hear about it. But the broadcast from [the Extreme Weather Response Coordinator] was very good. And the bulletins happened a lot smoother this year. Still, people aren’t hearing about it.”
- “We don’t even get that information to our own group. It constantly changes – we need some work on this. The Ministry sometimes adds early openings on short notice.”
- “Media are not interested in ‘a plan’. I don’t know if the message is getting out that services are open.”

Increased community preparedness for extreme weather

- “Vancouver and four other communities have response plans and services in place.”
- “Even on the North Shore, at least the seasonal beds are there.”
- “Now we have to expand it (extreme weather preparedness). This is something we have to build.”
- “In Vancouver, three churches and nine community centres are doing this – as a result - and all south of 1st Avenue.”
- “An issue: New Westminster extreme weather beds sat empty. Need to work on this... Transportation can be a problem in extreme weather.”
- “[The Extreme Weather Response Coordinator] has done an excellent job in the communities, and there’s still more work to be done in preparing people to set up responses in their communities.”

Improved understanding of seasonal shelter needs

- “Yes, for example, when [a service provider] described clients as being rougher, and there was agreement around the table – that would have taken decades [without this forum].”
- “There is more understanding from the government perspective. It seems that there is recognition of shelter needs.”
- “BC Housing’s budget for the CWWS is now always there.”

- “This table bore the Joint Task Group on Shelter Planning, and the research coming out of that.”
- “The table is great for articulating ideas and trying to make them happen.”
- “The Fraser Valley has done a 24-hour snapshot, based on exposure to the Extreme Weather Response project.”

3.2 Indirect Outcomes

Participants also addressed the question, “do you feel that the CWWS made a difference in terms of the following indirect outcomes? If yes, how?”

Improved health and reduced risk

- “You get people off the street – people coming in from the squats were at extreme risk. Getting them clean and de-loused...”
- “It’s virtually impossible to get mental health services to people who are living outside.”

Other indirect outcomes

Participants identified two additional indirect outcomes:

- “Reduced crime and risk to society. (Because of the shelter facilities provided, there is less risk.)”
- “Improved access to services in kind, such as media training from Jim Stanton and Associates and clothing, bedding, etc. from Gather and Give.”

Participants noted that the annual “Noteable Jazz” fundraiser was born out of the CWWS, and is continuing.

3.3 Benefits of Access to Professional Services

Participants commented as follows in response to the question, “what difference does it make having consultant services for CWWS administrative support, planning, and evaluation?”

- “Would not be so cohesive without [these services].”
- “Kept on track, focused.”
- “We have good people for cold/wet and for extreme weather, with the organizational skills that allow us to achieve.”
- “Our agenda is his [the Administrative Support provider’s] agenda. His personal way of leading has contributed – another consultant might not be able to...”

- “Appreciate greatly dedication to our work; reduces fees.”
- “Non-directive leadership style.”
- “Without these services we wouldn’t plan and evaluate.”

Planning and Evaluation Task Group members reaffirmed that access to professional services is a fundamental requirement to ensure the ongoing functioning and success of the CWWS.

3.4 Future Directions

Asked about how could the CWWS improve its effectiveness, participants commented:

- “The CWWS should make specific recommendations to the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, the Province, BC Housing, municipalities, Health Authorities, and others. (For example, regarding people who could be moving out of shelters. Also, to recommend that hospitals and ambulance services keep stats on homelessness.)”
- “Talk about children who are homeless, living on the streets and hiding out. Encourage resources to look at needs of this population.” (For example, the School of Social Work could conduct needs research.)
- “How to work with family members of people on the street.”
- “A concern: possible undermining of regular shelter services (Are we contributing to reduced funding for permanent shelters and affordable housing? This is the dark side of doing a good job. What do the suits in Victoria feel about seasonal services as a stop-gap?)”
- “A reminder: the CWWS is supposed to be an interim measure. So, we need to support the development of solutions: housing and housing with supports.”

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