



Greater Vancouver Extreme
Weather Response (EWR):
2014-15 Evaluation

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Acknowledgements

Each year, the Extreme Weather Response (EWR) across Greater Vancouver is made possible through the commitment and work of hundreds of community volunteers and shelter staff. Their dedication and nights of lost sleep have assisted thousands of homeless people to be safe and warm during times of extreme weather. In addition to those who work directly in the shelter sites, there are many people who spend hours planning and preparing for the EWRs in their communities. Many do this work in addition to their regular tasks. Their commitment helps the EWR sites operate as smoothly as possible.

The EWR program has been facilitated with operational funding from BC Housing since 2005 (<http://www.bchousing.org/Partners/Operating/EWR>). Despite the pressures and complexity of this program, BC Housing has proven their dedication to this area of their portfolio with flexibility and support to all communities involved in the EWR program. The Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society (GVSS) is grateful for their support in funding the EWR coordination for Surrey and Vancouver and to Metro Vancouver through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy for funding the EWR coordination of Metro Vancouver until December 2014.

The local EWR programs across Greater Vancouver have been supported through the Extreme Weather Task Group (EWTG) of GVSS (<http://gvss.ca/ExtremeWeather.html>). It was the EWTG that originally developed a community planning template, and secured the federal funds to develop EWR plans. The EWTG has also provided support and guidance to the contractors serving as EWR coordinators.

Extreme Weather Task Group Members, 2013-2014

- Maria Rodrigo, *BC Housing*
- Peter Fedos, *Surrey EWR Coordinator*
- Jonquil Hallgate, *Surrey Urban Mission Society*
- Fraser Holland, *Stepping Stone Community Services Society*
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- Rebecca Bell, *Greater Vancouver EWR Coordinator*
- Les McAusland, *The Salvation Army Gateway of Hope*
- Ali Gailus, *Vancouver Police Department*

Introduction

Purpose and Objectives of Evaluation Report

2014-15 was the twelfth season of implementation for the GVSS EWR program. Past annual evaluation reports on the EWR program are available on the GVSS website: <http://gvss.ca/ExtremeWeather.html>. This year's report includes information from the nine sub-regional communities that developed and carried out EWR shelter plans.

The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the provision of EWR across Greater Vancouver, and to support continuous improvement and evolution of EWR programs.

The evaluation has four objectives:

1. To provide an overview of the EWR planning and implementation;
2. To identify EWR inputs, outputs and outcomes;
3. To analyze the strengths and challenges of the EWR program;
4. To provide recommendations for consideration in ongoing development of the program.

Scope

This evaluation covers the period from April 2014 through to March 2015. It includes statistical summaries of EWR sites throughout Greater Vancouver. The primary focus is on the regional and sub-regional levels, and detailed evaluation of specific sites is outside the scope.

Methodology

This evaluation was created in collaboration with members of the Extreme Weather Task Group. Research methods were designed to be consistent with the objectives stated above.

The preparation of this report drew upon a number of sources, involving both qualitative and quantitative analysis, including: GVSS Extreme Weather Task Group documents; EWR program documents; service statistics collected and tabulated by BC Housing; responses from service users regarding EWR programming; and post-season debriefing sessions with local EWR committees.

Overview of Extreme Weather Response in Greater Vancouver

Background

Grassroots and informal extreme weather responses began in and around Greater Vancouver many years ago. For the most part, activities were based on individual agencies responding to people standing and lying outside their doors on the coldest winter nights. Over the years, the City of Vancouver joined in and the ability to offer extra shelter sites during cold snaps was noticed in communities across the region.

Local steering committees in Surrey, Langley, Richmond, and New Westminster developed EWR plans by 2003, and Vancouver's response was documented. The community members involved in this planning process represented a broad array of organizations and agencies. These plans set the framework for

expanding community resources for homeless persons during the winter months to prevent hardships from extreme winter weather conditions.

In 2004-05, the second year of operation, Richmond, Surrey, Langley and New Westminster continued to fine tune their EWR plans and these four communities, as well as Vancouver, implemented their plans. In addition, planning began in the North Shore (City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver and District of West Vancouver), and Tri-Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody) as initial discussions on EWR planning started up in Burnaby.

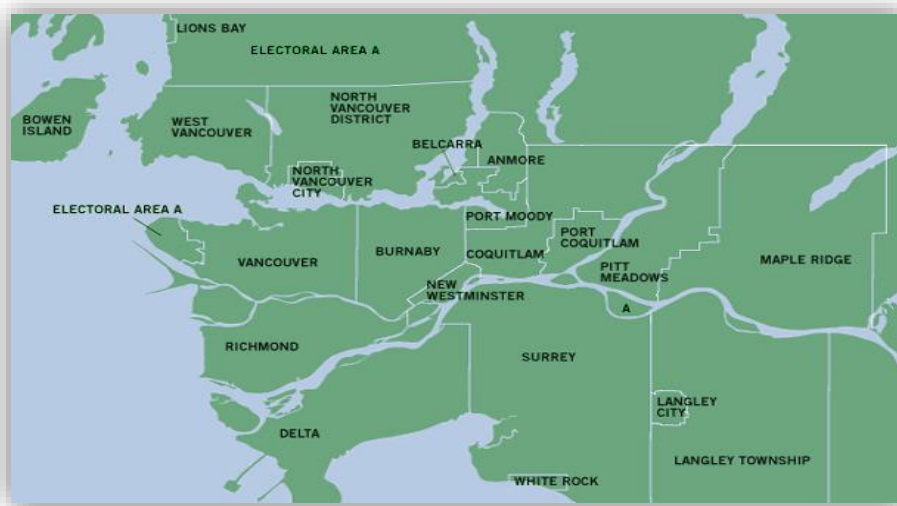
During 2005-06, the North Shore implemented an EWR Plan. Burnaby and the Tri-Cities both finalized their plans, each with a critical difference: Burnaby required an appropriate shelter site, while the Tri-Cities required an organization that would supervise and schedule volunteer staff for their EWR shelter.

In 2006-07, formal agreements were developed, through EWR policy requirements from BC Housing – developed in consultation with, and input from, the GVSS/EW Task Group. The EWR now had structured funding and supports, and the communities were required to meet BC Housing Policies and Procedures to access funds.

In 2007-08, the GVSS worked with the eight sub-regions to meet BC Housing’s policy requirements. In 2009-10 the GVSS worked with BC Housing and the sub-regions to implement the *Assistance to Shelter Act*, and undertook a major revamping of the EWR training manual. It also developed draft standards for EWR sheltering sites.

In 2010-11, Delta developed and implemented an EWR plan. This was the first ever homelessness service based there. In 2013-14 Delta discontinued the EWR program due to low uptake.

In 2014-15 Maple Ridge operated an EWR shelter and developed an EWR plan for the first time in a number of years due to a loss of funding of their Cold Wet Weather shelter.



Communities of Greater Vancouver

Purpose and Objectives of the Program

The overall purpose of the EWR is to protect homeless people in Greater Vancouver from contracting a critical illness, becoming hypothermic, or dying due to exposure to extreme winter weather.

The central objectives for the region's EWR program have been to:

1. Provide safe and adequate temporary shelter to homeless people during periods of extreme weather;
2. Coordinate community-based collaboration for all aspects of the EWR including shelter and meal provision, transportation, and communication;
3. Coordinate communication among communities implementing EWR;
4. Foster increased public awareness about homelessness in Greater Vancouver and the potential impacts of extreme weather on the homeless;
5. Develop trained volunteers to support the EWR;
6. Increase the sustainability of the EWR through further community development;
7. Provide daily updates during EWR implementation.

Program Logic Model

The following logic model chart shows inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes for the regional EWR.

Inputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Funding provided by BC Housing - and the Government of Canada, Homelessness Partnering Strategy.2. Planning time given by staff and volunteers from non-profit service agencies, faith groups, municipalities and others - with organizational support provided by a contracted consulting firm.3. Community donations from individuals, corporations, service clubs, faith groups and others.4. In-kind contributions, including facility space, food, blankets, winter clothing, hygiene kits, and volunteer time.
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Review and revision of the nine EWR plans.2. EWR staff and volunteer training.3. Coordination of EWR implementation during periods of extreme weather.4. Statistical tracking through BC Housing.5. Media relations.6. Communication among EWR communities.7. Communication with funders.8. Development of information resources and tools for community partners.

Outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of EWR shelter spaces available. 2. Number of nights EWR shelters opened, by site and by community. 3. Number of nights of EWR usage, by community, by gender and by age group. 4. Number of occupants of EWR, by site.
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced street homelessness during extreme weather. 2. Reduced health and safety risks to homeless people related to extreme weather. 3. Improved coordination of sheltering services during extreme weather. 4. Improved understanding of local and regional needs during extreme weather. 5. Increased public awareness of homelessness and extreme weather.

Inputs: Resources Invested

Funding

EWR coordination costs were a total of \$62,994.63. BC Housing provided \$52,800 for sub-regional coordination in Surrey / White Rock and Vancouver, while Service Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy provided \$10,194.63 for Greater Vancouver regional coordination.

In-Kind

The EWR program relied heavily on in-kind contributions, for an estimated total value of almost \$60,000. Implementation of community EWR plans continued to rely upon volunteers and donated services and resources, including everything from facility costs to food, clothing, blankets and volunteers.

Volunteer time as calculated by EWR site budgets and EWR site operating nights was used to evaluate the value of volunteer contributions. More than 1,800 volunteer service hours, were valued at over \$26,000. Additional in-kind contributions included blankets from Red Cross, food, facility rental, laundry, volunteer appreciation and cleaning supplies.

Further supports for the EWR program came from communities as they developed EWR plans and the GVSS Extreme Weather Task Group, members of whom contributed approximately 80 hours of professional services in the form of committee attendance and related participation and GVSS Board supervision.

Activities

Activities at the community level continued to include EWR service planning and budget development, recruitment and training of volunteers and staff, preparation of site logistics and supplies, fundraising and collection of donated goods, monitoring weather and calling alerts as required, communicating service availability to homeless people and relevant agencies, delivery of overnight shelter and food services, responding to local media inquiries, collection and reporting of statistics, and end of season debriefing.

The GVSS continued to provide sub-regional EWR coordination in Vancouver and Surrey/White Rock/Delta, as well as regional coordination covering Burnaby, Langley, Maple Ridge, New Westminster, the North Shore, Richmond and the Tri-Cities.

Coordination services included:

- Planning support – assisting the sub-regions to update their EWR plans and prepare for the coming season;
- Needs assessment – documenting the needs of each community, such as for training, mats, blankets and other materials;
- Provision of EWR training – EWR training sessions delivered in Surrey (sites in other communities provided their own training, as needed). This training included guidelines for handling conflicts, protocol for ensuring a healthy environment, and guidance on the importance of genuine listening.
- Media relations – including wide distribution of a pre-season media briefing document; revision and updating of the ‘key messages’ document; and participation in numerous incidences of television, radio and print media interviews / information gathering;
- Coordination and information sharing during EWR implementation – including preparation and circulation of daily written updates on available services, distribution of updated service statistical summaries, and communication with EWR sites as needed;
- Post- season debriefing – facilitation with members of local EWR Committees and EWR site operators, reviewing successes, challenges, and implications for the next season – and considering changes to EWR plans;
- Evaluation and reporting – analyzing and reporting out data on the EWR season, including this report and a variety of reporting activities required by Service Canada;

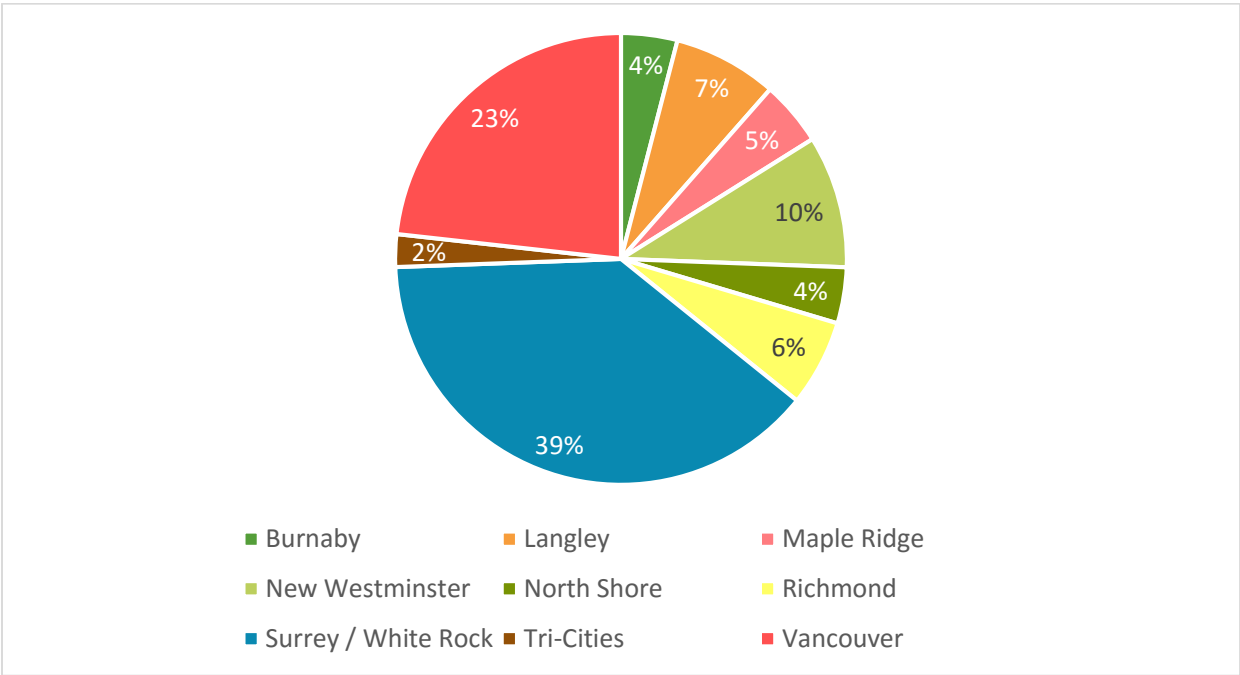
Outputs: Services Delivered

In 2014-15 Greater Vancouver had nine EWR Plans in place, with 26 sites available and a total of 634 spaces. Of these sites, 21 opened and offered a total of 514 spaces at various points in the season. It is noted that three sites opened this year that had either not operated in many years or had not been activated in a number of years. These were Caring Place, Tri-Cities EW Shelter and Belkin House (acting in an overflow capacity).

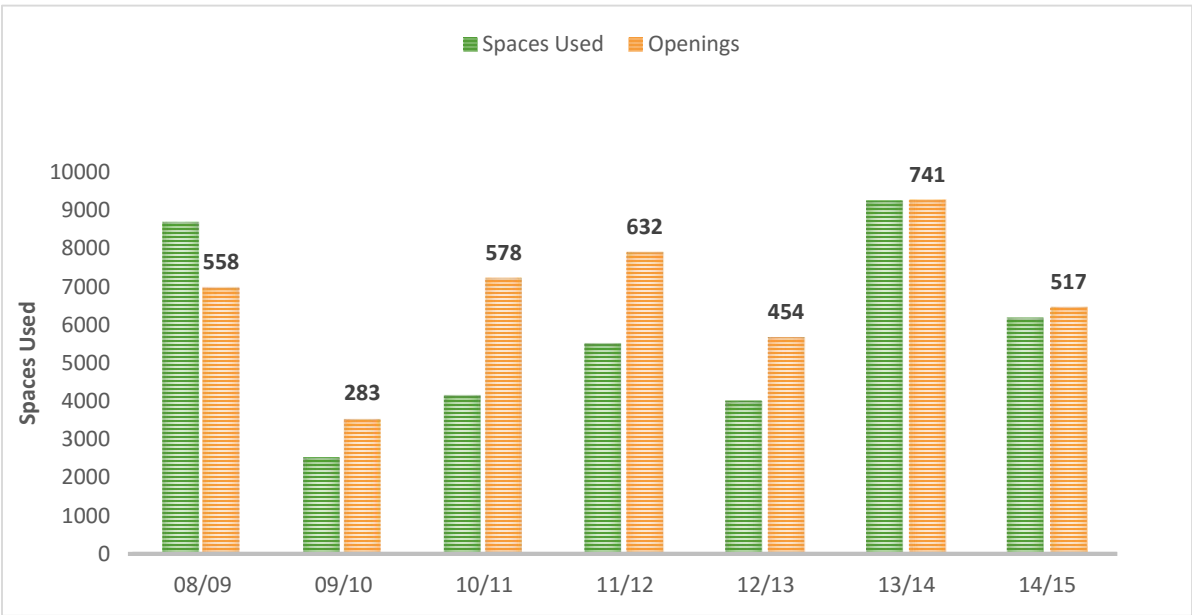
EWR Capacity in Greater Vancouver: 2014-15

Community	Sheltering Site <i>(Sites shown in italics were not activated in 2014-15)</i>	Address	Intake/closing	EWR spaces
Burnaby	Burnaby EW Shelter	7540 6 th Street	7pm – 7am	27
	<i>Burnaby Alliance Church (alternate)</i>	<i>8585 Armstrong Street</i>	<i>7pm – 7am</i>	30
Langley	Gateway of Hope	5787 Langley Bypass	7pm – 7am	30
Maple Ridge	Caring Place	22188 Lougheed Highway	8pm – 8am	15
New Westminster	New Westminster EW Shelter	606 Clarkson Street	7pm – 7am	30
North Shore	North Shore EW Shelter	705 W 2 nd Street	Opens at 8pm	20
	<i>North Shore Neighbourhood House (alternate)</i>	<i>225 E 2nd Street</i>	<i>8pm – 8am</i>	25
Richmond	Inn from the Cold EW Shelter	7260 St Alban's Road	7pm – 8am	16
	Richmond House	3111 Shell Road	Open 24/7	6
Surrey	Cloverdale Church	17802 66 th Avenue	7pm – 7:30am	15
	<i>Hyland House</i>	<i>6595 King George Boulevard</i>		15
	Legacy, Church of the Nazarene	9012 160 Street	10:30pm – 6:30am	20
	Surrey Urban Mission	10776 King George Boulevard	7pm – 7:30am	60
	<i>Gateway Shelter</i>	<i>10697 135A Street</i>		10
Surrey/White Rock	First United White Rock/South Surrey	15385 Semiahmoo Avenue	11pm – 7:30pm	15
Tri-Cities	Tri-Cities EW Shelter	2211 Prairie Avenue	10pm – 7am	20
Vancouver	10 th Ave Alliance Church	11 W 10 th Avenue	10pm – 7am	25
	Catholic Charities	828 Cambie Street	4pm – 8am	20
	Directions Youth Services Centre	1138 Burrard Street	10pm – 7am	15
	<i>Evelyne Saller Centre</i>	<i>320 Alexander Street</i>	<i>12pm – 7am</i>	40
	First Baptist Church	969 Burrard Street	9pm – 7am	25
	St Mark's EW Shelter	1805 Larch Street	Opens at 9.30pm	25
	The Gathering Place	609 Helmcken Street	12pm – 7am	40
	Union Gospel Mission	601 E Hastings Street	9pm – 6am	20
	Belkin House	555 Homer Street	11pm – 7:30am	20
	Harbour Light	119 E Cordova Street	Opens 11:30pm	50
Total				634

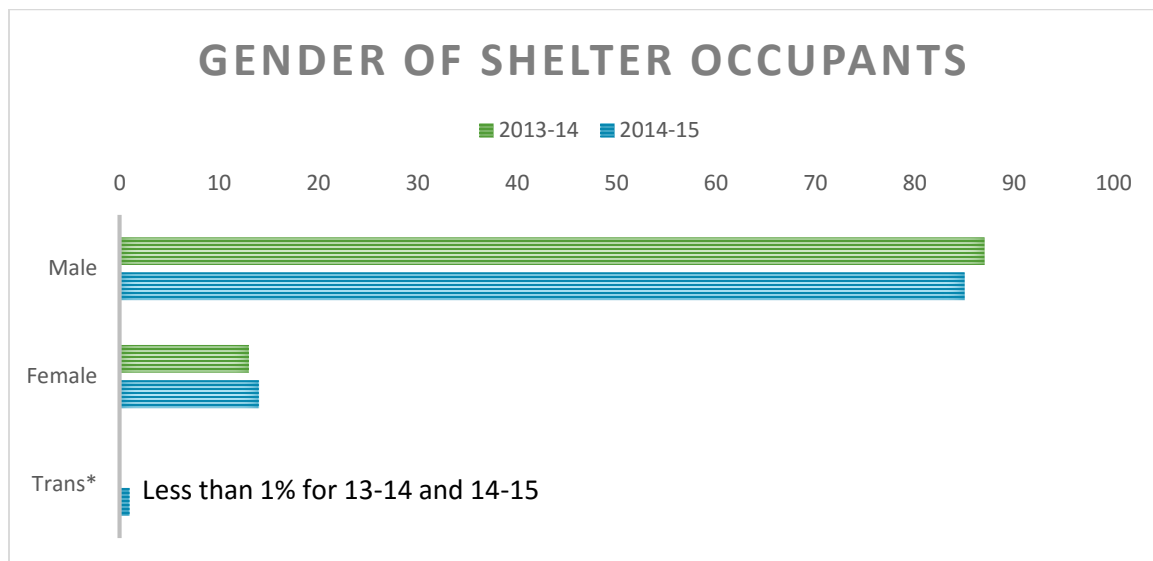
During 2014-15 across Vancouver, a total of 6,189 spaces were used, with distribution across Metro Vancouver as shown in the chart below.



Due to few openings, as a result of more favourable temperatures, the number of EWR spaces used in Metro Vancouver was lower than the previous year (9,260), as shown below.



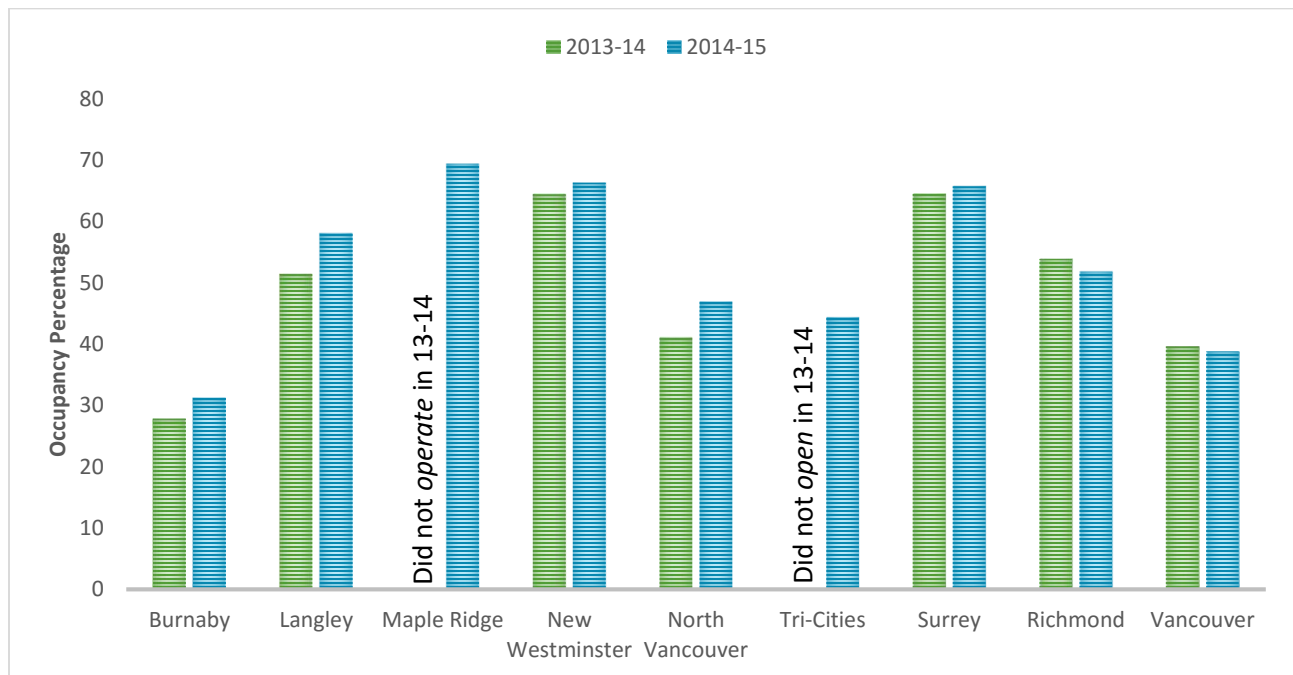
Of those who occupied the EWR shelters, 85% were males, 14% were females and less than 1% (4) were trans*, a slight change in proportions from the previous year, less than 1% (30) of those served were under the age of 19. One family was reported as being served compared to 24 families in 2013-14.



Occupancy rates across the EWR shelters that operated were as follows:

Sheltering Site	EWR spaces	Nights Open	Total Capacity	Occupancy #
Burnaby EW Shelter	27	29	783	245
Gateway of Hope	30	26	780	453
Caring Place	15	27	405	281
New Westminster EW Shelter	30	25	870	577
North Shore EW Shelter	20	24	520	244
Inn from the Cold EW Shelter	16	33	528	320
Richmond House	6	33	198	56
Cloverdale Church	15	37	555	201
Legacy, Church of the Nazarene	20	37	740	46
Surrey Urban Mission	60	38	2280	2102
First United White Rock/ South Surrey	15	32	480	109
Tri-Cities EW Shelter	20	16	320	142
10th Ave Alliance Church	25	20	500	248
Catholic Charities	20	23	460	374
Directions Youth Services Centre	15	23	345	166
First Baptist Church	25	14	350	210
St Mark's EW Shelter	25	23	575	202
The Gathering Place	40	9	360	93
Union Gospel Mission	20	31	620	66
Belkin House	20	4	80	11
Harbour Light	50	7	350	43
TOTAL	514	517	12,099	6,189

Average regional occupancy for the season was 51.15%, similar to 51.56% in the previous year.



This consistency in occupancy number occurred with substantially more favourable weather conditions (as shown by the comparative number of openings), and with many communities reporting increased occupancy (as shown in the chart above). This demonstrates no drop in demand for EWR spaces when they became available, despite improved weather conditions.

Outcomes

The GVSS has identified 5 EWR program outcomes. The first 2 are of primary importance, and the last 3 are means to better achieve the others:

1. Reduced street homelessness during extreme weather.
2. Reduced health and safety risks to homeless people related to extreme weather.
3. Improved coordination of sheltering services during extreme weather.
4. Improved understanding of local and regional needs during extreme weather.
5. Increased public awareness of homelessness and extreme weather.

Reduced street homelessness during extreme weather

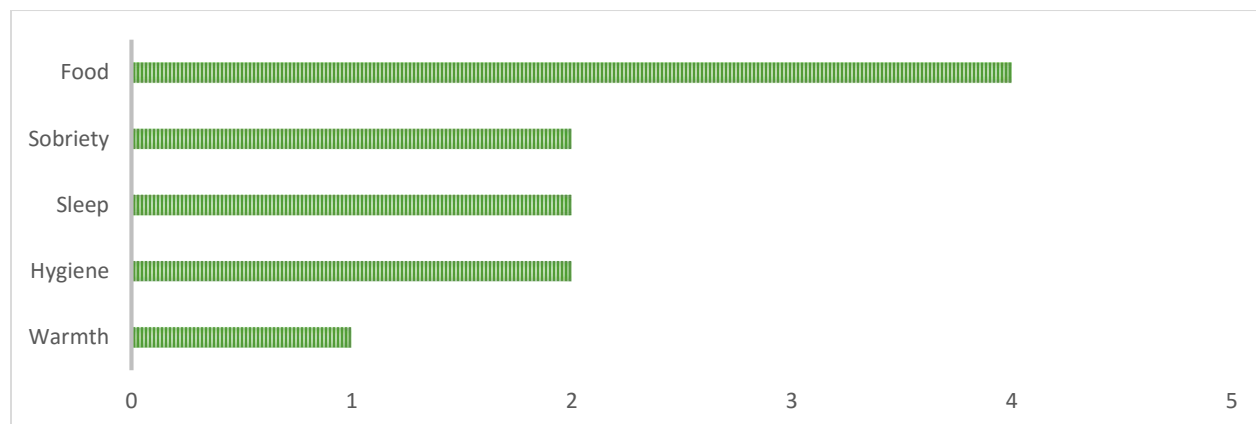
The provision of EWR shelter spaces in Greater Vancouver resulted in 6,189 incidences of people not having to remain outdoors on the coldest nights of the 2014-15 winter season.

In an effort to understand the benefits of EWR from the perspective of those who used the service, in person interviews/surveys were conducted with EWR shelter users. When asked where they would have been in the EWR shelter had not been open, common responses included on the streets, camping and couch surfing.

Reduced health and safety risks to homeless people related to extreme weather

Many of the homeless people who stayed at the Greater Vancouver EWR sheltering sites would likely have otherwise faced serious threats to their health and safety due to extreme weather exposure. The risks of illness, hypothermia and death were greatly reduced.

Guests of the EWR shelters identified the following health benefits of being able to access an EWR shelter.



Improved coordination of sheltering services during extreme weather

During extreme weather periods, the Regional EWR Coordinator provided daily updates to BC Housing and partners across the region as needed. This timely information helped to coordinate the EWR services with the regular shelter services across the region. The Regional EWR Coordinator also met with bc211 to ensure that this communication was delivered in a manner that assisted bc211 call staff in providing accurate information to callers on EWR site openings. This year also saw a full season of EWR notifications on the Canada, Expo and Millennium Skytrain LAMAR screens informing of the EWR alert and advising to call 211 for more information.

The continued provision of the two sub-regional EWR coordinators for Vancouver and Surrey had a significant impact, through communication and action to better meet the needs of the homeless in these more populous communities. In particular, in Surrey, sub-regional coordination assisted in managing differential demands among EWR shelter sites and saw increased transportation and outreach support for those accessing EWR shelters. In Vancouver, sub-regional coordination allowed the community to effectively respond to unusual weather conditions with additional openings.

Additionally, the EWR planning groups in each community updated their contact lists and communication strategies to inform community based organizations, service providers, and others to help ensure that those in need of EWR shelters are able to access the available sites. All information about EWR plans and communities comparisons was updated on the GVSS website.

Improved understanding of local and regional needs during extreme weather

Based on a region-wide needs assessment, the program was able to secure required resources, such as blankets from the Red Cross, and coordinate distribution to local EWR sites. At the local level, communications activities helped generate increased community contributions.

Environment Canada was again consulted to best understand the calling of alerts during extended periods of rain and a number of communities included these considerations in their EWR alert criteria.

Increased public awareness of homelessness and EWR

A pre-season media briefing on EWR in the region and ongoing media relations work in response to requests for interviews and information served as a means to get the message out to the public about homelessness in Greater Vancouver, the community-based EWR program, and the opportunity to donate. Coordinator media contact included print, radio and television media across the season.

Media attention likely had multiple benefits. Most importantly, it contributed to homeless people and concerned community members being aware of, and able to find, EWR shelter sites. Furthermore, it allowed the public to learn about the immense support of the volunteers in the local EWR communities and the need for longer-term solutions such as year round shelters, as well as affordable and supported housing. It also provides an opportunity to call for additional resources such as blankets and clothing.

Additional Outcomes

While EWR service delivery is quite minimal compared to that funded in a permanent, year-round shelter, the operation of EWR continues to have considerable, unintended, positive outcomes for those who access the services.

Service users who responded to the survey indicated that accessing EWR services allowed them to engage with shelter staff for support, work on personal goals and provide care for their pets. In the words of one guest, “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.”

Sustainability

Local EWRs

The financial sustainability of local EWR programs has been addressed by BC Housing’s commitment to provide funding to communities that have an EWR Plan and that have negotiated a nightly operational budget with BC Housing. Communities have continued to complement this funding with massive volunteer time and in-kind contributions. The Canadian Red Cross has continued to provide wool blankets to meet local EWR needs.

Regional Extreme Weather Coordination

The Regional EWR Coordinator has proven to be an important position to support community EWR programs as needed. The Regional Coordinator has served as a catalyst to EWR planning, provided support to the planning groups and served as a conduit for information exchange among the communities. These functions continued this past year, including through the two sub-regional coordinators, to assist all participating communities.

In addition, the EWR coordinators continued to serve as primary contacts for news media. This has eased the strain on local EWR partners at times when their time and energy needs to be focused on serving the homeless persons in their communities.

With the conclusion of funding for the Region EWR Coordination position, GVSS must look at other opportunities for funding this service delivery in the coming seasons.

Greater Vancouver EWR Strengths and Challenges

Strengths

Strengths of EWR programming in Greater Vancouver this past year included the following 10 areas:

1. **Community ownership.** The EWR program has remained true to its roots as a locally-driven initiative, with key organizations coming together in each sub-region to make decisions about the EWR plan and its implementation. In some parts of Vancouver, communities not traditionally served by EWR came forward to implement community specific responses.
2. **Local partnerships.** Local governments, service providers, faith organizations, community groups, and caring individuals have continued to work together as partners in each of the 9 Greater Vancouver sub-regions with EWR services. The decision by the Province not to open some of the winter response spaces was a concern for both agencies serving the homeless and the EWR program. Multiple community partners came forward to offer myriad services needed to support the EWR expansion.
3. **Massive in-kind contributions.** Partly because of its community-driven nature, the program has been able to mobilize massive in-kind support. Including local and regional in-kind support, the total in-kind in 2014-15 was estimated to be almost \$60,000.
4. **Provincial funding.** Availability of assured operational funding from BC Housing has supported communities to activate their EWR as required. Having this funding in place has enabled communities/sub-regions to respond appropriately, opening EWR sites as needed depending on local weather conditions.
5. **Regional support.** As documented in this evaluation, the GVSS provides various tools and information services to support EWR activities at the community level. For example, region-wide communication via email during extreme weather events has continued to work well and has helped to keep many people 'in the loop.'
6. **Coordinated communication.** Having centralized media relations and common key messages helped to manage requests for news regarding access to services for the homeless at times of extreme weather.
7. **Coordinated statistical reporting.** BC Housing collection and tabulation of statistics from EWR sheltering sites, using a standardized form, facilitated timely reporting regarding services used.
8. **Stakeholder support.** Support for EWR in communities remained high, among those directly involved in planning and implementing the response, as well as among the public.
9. **Inter-community support.** Communities appreciated the exchange of information and resources from other EWR communities as this helped to minimize the workload and allowed them to take advantage of lessons learned in other communities.

10. **Surprising outcomes.** Experience of EWR in several communities has contributed to positive movement towards more permanent services for homeless people, including some moving directly into housing and/or accessing addiction recovery services.

Challenges

The EWR program faced 9 areas of challenge in 2014-15:

1. Communication and outreach
2. Transportation
3. Site opening times/conditions
4. Accessibility
5. Linkages with local services and resources
6. Relationship between EWR and other shelters
7. Cost effectiveness
8. Funding
9. Inclusion of Hot Weather Response

Communication and outreach

- How effectively is word getting out on the street? What are the most effective modalities to ensure that those who need the information are able to find it?
- Do all community partners receive the new EWR plan in a timely way – and are they aware that the plan is available on gvss.ca?
- How could communication among regular shelters and EWR sites be improved?

Transportation

- Do we need to do more to assist people with getting to and from EWR sheltering sites? Are there other ways to transport people?

Opening times/conditions

- What is an ideal opening time for EWR sheltering sites?
- Does more need to be done to move opening times toward that ideal?
- How do programs manage pressure to open outside of EWR Plan conditions?

Accessibility

- How 'low barrier' are the EWR sites? Can we do more to minimize barriers?
- Can more sites add capability for storing shopping carts?
- Can more be done to include pets, or communicate that pets are welcome?
- What needs to be done to address EWR access and service issues for people with disabilities, dementia and/or other conditions?

Linkages with local services and resources

- How able are EWR sites to inform people about local services and resources they may need, and to make referrals to these?
- What needs to be done at the regional level to encourage development of these linkages?

Relationship between EWR and regular shelters

- Why do some people choose to go to EWR sites when there is space at regular shelters?
- Should EWR sites operate if there is space at regular shelters? Under what conditions / circumstances? (Example communities: Langley, Surrey)

Cost effectiveness

- Are regular shelters willing and able to reduce barriers during EWRs, as an alternative to opening EWR sites? If so, what planning and procedures are needed?
- Are we ensuring that openings in all communities balance the need for space with efficient operating?

Funding

- How will GVSS ensure that EWR Coordination is available and sustainable in the future?

Inclusion of Hot Weather Response

- How do we find partnerships to create appropriate support for hot weather conditions?

Recommendations

The evaluator offers the following 4 renewed recommendations for consideration by the GVSS and partner organizations.

1. **Continue to seek resources to develop and implement a coordinated extreme hot weather response.**
2. **Continue to explore issues of EWR accessibility for people with disabilities, dementia, and other conditions.** With an aging population, it will be important for EWR services to assess their capacity and to enhance facilities and staff training as required.
3. **Continue to strengthen linkages and referral capabilities between EWR sites and local services and resources.**
4. **Continue to review and address resource requirements to sustain strong regional and sub-regional EWR coordination.**