



City of  
**Peterborough**

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**To:** Members of the Joint Services Steering Committee

**From:** Ken Doherty, Director of Community Services

**Meeting Date:** June 12, 2014

**Subject:** Report CSSSJSSC14-004  
Winter Weather Response Program

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## **Purpose**

A report to provide the Joint Services Steering Committee with an update on the Winter Weather Response Pilot that operated from November 2013 to April 2014, and to provide recommendations for next winter.

## **Recommendations**

That the Joint Services Steering Committee endorse the recommendations outlined in Report CSSSJSSC14-004 dated June 12, 2014, of the Director of Community Services, as follows:

- a) That the report on the pilot be received for information;
- b) The plan to provide some form of Winter Weather Response program on an annual be approved; and
- c) That in 2014-2015, the Winter Weather Response Program be provided through an agreement between the City and St. John's Anglican at a cost of \$50,000.

## **Budget and Financial Implications**

The original approved budget for the Winter Response pilot was \$12,000. Additional costs of the program in 2014 are able to be covered through the existing homelessness budget.

The total cost to the City to deliver the program as recommended with a combination of staff and volunteers is \$50,000. If approved, recommendation c) results in a precommitment of the 2015 municipal budget in the amount of an additional \$25,000.

## Background

In September 2013, Report C55513-007 recommended that a pilot project operate from November 2013 to March 2014 for the provision of a Winter Weather Response Program for residents that cannot or will not access the current system of shelter services.

On November 17, 2013 the Warming Room opened. This program was the result of collaboration among several community partners including:

- St. John's Anglican Church
- All Saints Anglican Church
- Murray Street Baptist Church
- George Street United Church
- CMHA-HKPR
- City of Peterborough Social Services Division

The Warming Room pilot ran using a volunteer-led model that involved 130 dedicated volunteers as well as a paid part time volunteer coordinator. All Saints and Murray Street Baptist church provided the space. At first the intent was to open a warming room space based on temperature. As the pilot evolved, and before opening, it was established that the program would be able to open every night, no matter the temperature.

## Warming Room Report

In accordance with item 17.2 of the ten year Housing and Homelessness Plan, an evaluation of the Winter Weather Response Program was conducted. A report from the program Director and Volunteer Coordinator for the 2013-14 winter season is attached as Appendix A. Input from volunteers and those using the program was obtained. The report highlights that an average of 10.5 people per night used the program, with 25 individuals being frequent users and 8 people using the program most nights.

### i. Program Operation Highlights

The report highlights the success and challenges associated with the operation of a warming room, especially the challenges associated with using a volunteer-led operating model. Based on these findings, one of the recommendations going forward includes having a combination of volunteers and paid staff (for consistency, program development, and to liaise with community agencies). It is clear that one of the reasons for the success of the program in getting people inside from the winter weather was the volunteers – no

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attachment necessarily to the “system” of services where trust is an issue, not a lot of questions asked, and being non-judgemental.

The experience at the Warming Room this past winter demonstrated clearly the individuals using this program need extensive physical and mental health supports and supportive housing in order to be successful in their housing attempts. Warming Room volunteers and coordinators saw a cycle of a few people that would obtain housing, lose housing, come back to the Warming Room, obtain housing, and again lose housing. Reasons for losing housing primarily relate to behaviour and relationship issues.

Any future model of a Winter Weather Response requires better collaboration and support from community partners, including mental health supports and physical health supports. The Housing and Homelessness plan identifies in action item 15.3 the need for service system provision outside of the Monday to Friday 8:30-4:30 model. The Homelessness Support Services Coordinating Committee continues the dialogue with community partners on improving outreach and coordination of supports.

A small number of people accessing the Warming Room do not want to connect with the formal system of services. This number is estimated at about 5-8 people. These people will return to the Warming Room in the winter months for a safe, warm place to sleep and during the remaining months will “live rough” on the streets, or couch surf.

To truly assist individuals that are falling through the cracks of the current service system requires the coordination of multiple partners and agencies to work together with the individual to find suitable housing, ensure all necessary supports are in place to maintain the housing (mental health, physical health, landlord relationship management, etc). As set out in Commitment 17 of the Housing and Homelessness plan, a working group is currently meeting with the goal of developing a Housing First model in Peterborough – a model that would have community partners adopt a “housing first philosophy” that speaks to housing not being a condition of treatment or sobriety, but is about housing choice and support. The key to the success of this model is the necessary support system that must be in place for people to succeed in maintaining housing.

The Housing First working group is working to develop a “housing first” model, and will develop a funding proposal document for any potential funding sources and will determine what can be done with current resources. This will require partnership of health and social services partners and private landlords.

## ii. Client and Volunteer Feedback

As set out in Commitment 1 in the Housing and Homelessness plan, the Warming Room coordinators engaged both users of the service and the volunteers to obtain feedback and input into the strengths and areas for improvement for the warming room program. It seems clear, based on responses that users of the service prefer the volunteer-led model with little to no attachment to the system of services and their experiences with the volunteers and coordination staff was very positive.

Volunteers for the most part enjoyed their experience and saw a huge benefit in seeing consistent, paid staff in order to ensure consistent enforcement of rules, clear communication to volunteers and visitors and improved coordination of the program.

Through the winter, the Social Services Division received only a few calls about the program and people hanging around either outside or in the neighbourhood. Ongoing work with neighbours to address such concerns will need to continue in future years.

### iii. 2013-14 Warming Room Budget

St. John's Anglican Church received \$9,000 from the City to operate the Warming Room program for the 2013-14 season. The Social Services Division expended \$10,903 for the Warming Room – these costs related primarily to set up items (mats, supplies, etc). Initially it was thought that the space would be provided free of charge. In addition to the program costs an honorarium was given to each of the two hosts, taking the total cost of the program to \$20,000.

## **2014-15 Winter Response**

Based on the experience of this past winter's pilot, Staff recommends that a winter warming program continue. The model recommended by St. John's Anglican Church in Appendix A suggests a combination of paid staff and volunteers, continued training from CMHA-HKPR and one location. The increase in cost is associated with the addition of some paid staffing. St. John's Anglican Church would also look to apply for other sources of funding and grants to help support the program.

The Social Services Division will continue dialogue with community partners, including St. John's, to secure a location, expand community partner engagement and links to individual case planning through existing case conferencing opportunities. It is important that this program continue to focus on meeting the needs of a few extremely vulnerable individuals who have difficulty connecting with other services and not expand to become a more permanent alternative night time shelter. Working on the development of the Housing First model and having staff and volunteers of the Winter Weather Response Program make referrals for individual case planning for people using the program on a regular basis will help achieve that.

## **Summary**

The 2013-14 Winter Weather Response Program was very successful, but did not go without some major challenges related to client supports and staffing. There is an advantage in providing this service outside of the formal system to get people connected that may not otherwise connect to the shelters or other health and social service organizations. Formalizing this service with an organization and trying even harder to connect people to other services may impact the response the program receives in 2014-15.

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In order for the program to proceed with consistency and connections to other programs and services, paid staffing is recommended. A total budget of \$50,000 annually is requested to support the recommended combination of a staff - volunteer model.

Submitted by,

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Attachments:

Appendix A - The Warming Room Annual Report