

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members, Community and Protective Services Committee Meeting
From: Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development
Subject: Update - City of London 2021-2022 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals
Date: April 20, 2022

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development the following report Update - City of London 2021-2022 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals **BE RECEIVED** for information purposes.

Executive Summary

This report provides an update of the actions taken as part of the Winter Response for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This report highlights the outcomes achieved and challenges.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

2019-2023 Strategic Plan for the City of London

The City of London identifies 'Strengthening Our Community' and 'Building a Sustainable City' as strategic areas of focus.

Londoners have access to the supports they need to be successful.

Londoners have access to the services and supports that promote well-being, health, and safety in their neighbourhoods and across the city.

Housing Stability for All: The Housing Stability Action Plan for the City of London (2019-2024)

London's Homeless Prevention and Housing Plan, Housing Stability for All: The Housing Stability Action Plan for the City of London (Housing Stability for All Plan), is the approved guiding document for homeless prevention and housing in the City of London and was developed in consultation with Londoners.

Links to Community Recovery

The City of London is committed to working in partnership with the community to identify solutions that will drive a strong, deep, and inclusive community recovery for London as we move out of and beyond the global COVID-19 pandemic. This report, and the items within, are linked to supporting Londoners experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic to attain and retain permanent housing. This work supports recovery efforts through a coordinated COVID-19 Response that will support the transition of homeless individuals and families.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals (November 2, 2021)
- Homeless Prevention COVID-19 Response (SSRF Phase 3) – Single Source Procurement - #SS21-29 (June 22, 2021)
- Municipal Council Approval of The Housing Stability Plan 2019 to 2024 as Required Under the Housing Services Act, 2011 (CPSC: December 3, 2019)
- Core Area Action Plan (SPPC: October 28, 2019)

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Background

The Winter Response was implemented as a response to the continuing impact of COVID-19 on individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Despite the significant response to support those experiencing homelessness in 2021, London saw a continued increase in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness including those sleeping unsheltered. The Winter Response was put into place to support those experiencing unsheltered homelessness over the coldest months of the year.

The Winter Response provided shelter from the elements, basic needs, connections to services and supports and access to life saving measures. The Winter Response program met the needs of individuals requiring various types of spaces during the day and night while focusing on moving towards housing stability. Spaces included low barrier daytime and overnight drop in spaces and two decentralized winter shelters: one using peer-based supports with lived experience and another using Indigenous led programming with traditional cultural healing supports.

Program locations and dates of operation:

- **Day Drop In/Warming Space** - YMCA Centre Branch, 382 Waterloo St, December 1st, 2021, to March 31st, 2022. Open 8:00am to 8:00pm, 7 days a week, including holidays (Extended hours to 9:00pm for two weeks to assist with Cold Weather in January-March). This program included 50 rotational drop-in spaces.
- **Night Drop In/Warming Space** - First-St Andrew's United Church, 350 Queens Ave, December 6th, 2021, to March 31st, 2022. Open 9:00pm to 8:00am, 7 days a week, including holidays This program included 50 drop-in spaces.
- **Fanshawe Winter Shelter** - Fanshawe Golf Course, 2835 Sunningdale Rd East, December 1st, 2021, to March 4th, 2022. This program included 29 emergency shelter spaces for individuals who were focusing efforts on securing housing.
- **Wiigiwaaminaan Winter Shelter** - St. Joseph's Health Care, 550 Wellington Road Building J, December 10th, 2021, to March 31st, 2022. This program included 29 spaces for Indigenous people.

The Winter Response spaces maintained provincial and local COVID-19 measures as recommended by the Middlesex London Health Unit, inclusive of screening, cleaning protocols, mandatory wearing of masks, and social distancing. These programs participated in the community COVID response, ensuring that referrals to Isolation and Monitoring Spaces were made as appropriate.

Day Drop In/Warming Space

Day Spaces were focused on providing a warm space for individuals to get in out of the cold, access basic needs and build a sense of community in a socially distanced environment. Location was staffed by the Ark Aid Street Mission and community volunteers.

- 50,000 cups of coffee and snacks and 12,000 meals (lunch and dinner) provided
- Direct referrals to other supporting social services, health providers and shelters
- Teams worked with individuals on paper-readiness, health, and housing

- Twice weekly visits from the H.O.M.E team to site to assist participants with health care needs
- Participants were also able to connect with a variety of support workers from community support agencies

Night Drop In/Warming Space

Supported by the Ark Aid Street Mission and community volunteers, overnight resting spaces were low barrier spaces for individuals who were sleeping unsheltered to rest, access basic needs and feel a sense of stability while getting in out of the cold.

The overnight resting space beds were made possible through the collaborative partnership established between the Ark and First Saint Andrews Church, where 50 beds were set up and provided each night in their basement. Services provided to the participants included access to washrooms, showers off site, and basic needs items within a community setting.

- 5750 overnight stays by over 400 unique individuals
- 6000 meals served
- 9 nights the Ark provided an average of 32 overflow beds on site in buses, or at an alternate location.

Winter Shelters

Winter shelters provided temporary support to unsheltered individuals over the winter months. Individuals matched to Winter Shelters through a joint effort between the City's Coordinated Access system and Coordinated Informed Response program using defined eligibility criteria for each location and the City's By Name List. Participation from all participants was optional. All individuals referred to Fanshawe were those who were actively engaged in obtaining housing. Referral to the Wiigiwaaminaan site was for individuals who identified as indigenous only and focussed supports on cultural reconnection and traditional cultural healing.

Fanshawe Winter Shelter

The physical set up of the site at Fanshawe was integral to creating a safe, welcoming, and productive environment. This supported those who were experiencing unsheltered homelessness so they could work towards their health and housing goals. The site was staffed by individuals with lived expertise, from Impact London and London Cares, who worked closely with City of London staff to deliver client centered services. The setup of this site was an enterprise-wide approach led by Housing Stability Services. Many individuals successfully secured housing and met personal goals while staying at the Fanshawe Winter Response site.

- Dwellings were spread-out providing 29 private rooms equipped with individual lockable door, window, lighting, heat, bed, and mattress
- The shelter ran as 24/7 residence
- 3 meals per day, snacks and beverages were provided to the residents (provided by London Area Food Bank)
- A dining area, kitchen, 2 washrooms, a reception, lounge for relaxation, 24/7 security and other basic amenities were provided on site.
- Transportation for medical, financial, and other appointments was coordinated to support individuals.

The Fanshawe Winter Response was successful in assisting residents transition from the street into stable housing programs in a very short amount of time. Many participants thrived being away from the pressures of the downtown core and were able to use this time as a stabilization period: receiving necessary support and treatment, addressing mental health or addiction concerns, connecting to healthcare, community partners, and ultimately housing.

- 18 individuals were housed directly to apartments during the 3-month program
- 5 individuals were housed in pay to stay transitional housing
- 4 individuals were successful with addiction treatment
- 1 healthy baby born, and mother connected to supports and services
- 12 individuals obtained Birth Certificate's (secondary ID required by most landlords)
- 20 individuals completed applications for Rent-Geared to Income (RGI) housing
- 4 individuals had several years of taxes completed
- 1 individual now receives OAS and CPP
- 4 individuals reconnected with biological family
- 1 individual went back to previous employment
- 1 individual started employment
- 1 individual returned to school
- 4 individuals reconnected with physicians
- 1 individual had and recovered from surgery while on site
- 6 individuals visited dentist for first time in years
- 19 individuals reconnected to healthcare supports

The Fanshawe Winter Shelter demonstrated that there can be great success when individuals are provided an environment that allows them to focus all their efforts on housing stability.

Wiigiwaaminaan

The indigenous led temporary winter shelter provided for individuals who identify as indigenous experiencing homelessness under the name "Wiigiwaaminaan" (Anishinaabe for *the house that we collectively look after*). Wiigiwaaminaan was led by Atlohsa Family Healing Services in collaboration with the City's Housing Stability Services and St. Joseph's Health Care London. The location was secured following an incident of arson at the original proposed site, the River Road Golf Course.

Atlohsa operationalized Wiigiwaaminaan, a culturally safe and trauma-informed space for Londoners who identify as indigenous and who were also experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The site erected a Teepee, where a community fire was maintained by traditional fire keepers throughout most of the project. Additional cultural ceremonies were conducted, and traditional medicines and meals were prepared and offered on site. These activities helped to promote healing for individuals experiencing the effects of multi-generational Indigenous homelessness. From the safety of Wiigiwaaminaan several were able to secure permanent housing and many more were able to move forward with the work necessary to secure future housing placements.

- 20 units were spread-out across the site with the remaining 8 beds being hosted inside Parkwood's J building including a family residential suite
- Hosted ongoing fire in the Teepee including 2 for community ceremonies
- 13 individuals moved to housing (7 permanent housing, 1 transitional housing, 4 reconnected with family and 1 reconnected to community)
- One individual was accepted into long term care at Parkwood Hospital
- Others were supported with improved health outcomes and worked towards housing stability.
- 3 Identification clinics were held on site with a total of 19 people applying for identification.
- 38 individuals were supported with Rent Geared to Income (RGI) applications and completion of taxes.
- 7 individuals began or sustained employment, training, or education programs.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

The projected budget for the 2021-22 Winter Response Program was \$1,590,000, which was 100% funded by government COVID Relief Funding. The Winter Response Program came in under budget, with total spending of \$1,320,000. Expenses included \$450,000 to support the Ark Aid led day and overnight drop in spaces, \$500,000 to support the Fanshawe temporary shelter response and \$370,000 to support the indigenous led Wiigiwaaminaan response.

Conclusion

The Winter Response program supported individual who sleep unsheltered through the provision of a range of options, including day/night spaces and Winter Shelters. Although the city experienced a sizable increase in its By-Name list of individuals experiencing homelessness, the approach applied at the Fanshawe Winter Response location was untested and resulted in several positive housing stability outcomes for the individuals who accessed the program. The lifesaving and housing success stories of many participants of the Winter Response speak to the efforts of the community coming together to support the most vulnerable Londoners.

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