



Homelessness Society of the Bow Valley

HSBV Program Review
June 2022

"Having a shelter makes homelessness more humane"

-Shelter Guest 2022

Acknowledgments

The Homelessness Society of the Bow Valley (HSBV) would like to acknowledge and appreciate that our lives, work and recreation take place on the traditional territories and home of the Stoney Nakoda Nations (Bears paw, Wesley, Chiniki), the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Pikani) the Tsuut'ina Nation and the Region 3 Metis Nation.

HSBV is committed to advancing Truth and Reconciliation and to working with Indigenous peoples to reflect their voices and imbed their experiences within HSBV's programs and supports. We recognize the impact that historical trauma, oppression, racism and discrimination has and continues to have on Indigenous peoples lives and we commit to honouring all life as we share this space and land with respect.

HSBV would also like to thank the shelter guests who took the time to share their experiences with us. It is through these conversations that we as an organization and as a community can continue to learn and grow.

HSBV would finally like to acknowledge the staff and community partners who supported the shelter program in 2022. Thank you for your patience, your passion and your support. We are stronger as a community.

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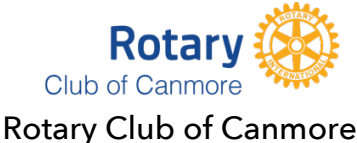
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 St. Michael’s Anglican Church
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 YWCA Banff

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Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing.

-Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

Executive Summary

The HSBV Outreach and Emergency Shelter Programs are local, seasonal, highly collaborative projects originally developed in partnership with the Homeless to Housing Coalition (H2HC), St. Michael's Anglican Church, and the Town of Canmore.

The 2021/22 Outreach Program provided temporary hotel/hostel accommodation and basic supports until the Emergency Shelter Program opened for the season. The Emergency Shelter Program offered a low barrier, inclusive shelter space. Both programs provided a warm, safe place to sleep for any individuals in the Bow Valley who did not have access to alternate shelter during the coldest months of the year.

HSBV programs emphasise local solutions based on community partnerships and work closely with organizations such as Hospitals, RCMP, YWCA Banff and the Towns of Banff and Canmore (Municipal Enforcement, FCSS and Administration).

HSBV recognizes and emphasizes the need for an inclusive and diverse space. This includes working with an Indigenous Advisor to ensure the programs were trauma-informed, welcoming and incorporated traditionally guided practices. HSBV believes in harm reduction and meeting guests where they are at.

The HSBV Program Review is based on information collected through a guest feedback session, a staff evaluation and data collected throughout program operations. This Program Review addresses the Outreach Program from December 2021 to March 2022 and the Emergency Shelter Program from February to March 2022. The review aims to better understand community need, shelter need and usage in the Bow Valley.

Key Findings

Key findings of the program review indicate that through the use of existing resources and strong partnerships, the Homelessness Society of the Bow Valley successfully provided warm, safe shelter to individuals in need.

During the 116 nights that the outreach and shelter programs operated, 28 unique individuals accessed a combined total of 366 bed nights.

The programs focused on providing shelter and support to individuals experiencing challenges and multiple barriers to service.

HSBV's programs met a community need by providing a space where partnering community service organizations could refer individuals for shelter and support. 3 individuals were referred by partnering organizations to the Outreach Program and another 8 individuals were referred to the shelter program. Countless other individuals were self-referred or received referrals from community partners that were not captured in the data for 2021/22.

Need for the Program

There is a clear need for a local, collaborative, community-based solution to homelessness in the Bow Valley. Data from the program review indicates a substantial increase in usage of the Outreach and Shelter programs in 2022.

The Emergency Shelter Program was open for 11 nights longer in 2022 and saw an increase of 16 unique individuals over 2021 (a 160% increase). The shelter provided 280 more bed nights and had an average of 5.6 guests per night, up from 0.4 guests per night in 2021. This translates to a 1,300% increase in the average number of guests served per night in shelter in 2022.

During the 53 nights of operation, the shelter was accessed by guests every night. The highest number of guests to access the programs in one night was 10. When the shelter reached capacity (7 beds), additional guests were redirected to the Outreach Program for a hostel or hotel bed.

Shelter guests shared that if they were not staying in the outreach or shelter programs, they would find accommodation by couch surfing, accessing businesses open 24 hours, sleeping in stairwells, garbage bins or camping outside. All guests attending the feedback session rated the Emergency Shelter Program as 10 out of 10 for being helpful to them and expressed unanimous appreciation for the program in the form of "Thank you".

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations identified through the program review include:

- Create more robust data collection methods based on program logic models.
- Increase staff during intake (check-in) and discharge (check-out) daily.
- Review and expand the existing policy manual including procedures, protocols, guidelines and staff training requirements.
- Locate a more appropriate shelter space.
- Continue to run the Outreach Program in concert with the Shelter Program to ensure a more robust support service.
- Due to interest in the program and guests reporting that they were sleeping outside both before and after the programs were operational, it is recommended that the Shelter and Outreach Programs operate year-round.

HSBV Program Review

Introduction

The Homelessness Society of the Bow Valley (HSBV) is a community-based organization with a mission to support and advocate for individuals who are without shelter in the Bow Valley by providing low barrier shelter and programs with the goal to build trust and facilitate individuals' access to the local system of care.

In February 2022, HSBV incorporated as a Society under the Government of Alberta Society's Act and elected a board of directors and committee members to operationalize the organization's vision and mission.

Background and Context

HSBV began a winter outreach program on December 6th 2021, and reopened the Emergency Shelter Program for a second season on February 7th 2022.

The need for a cold weather shelter program was initially identified based on data collected in two separate Rural Housing and Service Needs Assessments. Based on these findings, a community group launched the REST pilot program, which included both an outreach (launched in February 2021) and shelter program (launched in March 2021).

These programs were the first of their kind in the Bow Valley and were designed to support individuals who experienced challenges and barriers when accessing existing services. The findings of the 2021 pilot program demonstrated a clear need in the Bow Valley. In addition, the REST pilot evaluation helped inform other rural, provincial shelter programs and was referenced in the Rural Development Network “Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Temporary Emergency Mat Programs”.

HSBV programs are important given the unique Bow Valley context. The inventory of affordable and appropriate housing in the Bow Valley is limited. In addition, Canmore has the highest living wage in the province of Alberta at \$37.40 per hour (Canmore 2021 Living Wage report: Town of Canmore - Living Wage), and an average advertised job wage of \$20.70 (The Job Resource Centre Bow Valley). There are also unique risks for individuals sleeping outside in the Bow Valley. Including an increased risk of human-wildlife encounters.

Program Overview

Outreach Program

From December 6th 2021 until February 6th 2022, HSBV operated an Outreach Program designed to provide basic shelter and support until the Emergency Shelter Program opened. Four community outreach workers provided daily coverage of a phone line, email and social media account (checked three times daily) and they responded to queries for individuals who were without shelter. Outreach workers provided basic supports which included cold weather planning, referrals to food and clothing, and access to temporary, short-term shelter through a local hotel and hostel. Outreach workers also referred individuals to other community supports such as Family Community Support Services (FCSS) and YWCA Banff.

Through the Outreach Program, individuals without access to warm safe shelter could access emergency accommodation when temperatures dropped below -20 with a wind chill. Outreach workers had discretion and would provide accommodation on a warmer night if individuals were referred to the program by a local service provider such as the hospitals or if the individual was struggling and could not manage sleeping outdoors. Emergency accommodation spaces through the Outreach Program were booked one day at a time. Regardless of temperature, outreach workers provided information on community resources, referrals and transportation.

From February 7th to March 31st 2022, the Outreach Program operated in concert with the Emergency Shelter Program. During this time, the Outreach Program was staffed by the Emergency Shelter Program staff and provided support for individuals when the shelter program had reached capacity.

Emergency Shelter Program

The Emergency Shelter Program opened its doors on February 7th, 2022 at St. Michael's Anglican Church. The program ran until March 31st, 2022 for a total of 53 nights. The program's design included 5 beds with an additional 2 overflow beds available as needed. The use of hotel and hostel beds (through the Outreach Program) continued throughout the shelter program. These additional beds were used to address overflow (if all 7 beds in the shelter were full); respite (if a guest did not feel safe in the shelter space) or for isolation (if a guest reported experiencing covid symptoms). The program was a diverse and welcoming space, open to all genders and backgrounds.

Intakes took place nightly between 8:30pm and 11:00pm with referrals from community partners (hospitals, RCMP) accepted until 1:00am. The shelter space closed each morning at 8:00am. Quiet time was in place from 11:00pm to 7:00am in accordance with the Good Neighbour Policy.

Upon check-in, guests were provided with their rights and responsibilities in the program and asked to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms. Anyone exhibiting symptoms would be placed in a hotel in order to isolate. After intake, guests were offered food and basic hygiene products. As the program is considered low-barrier, guests were not asked for identification or proof of vaccination and there were no sobriety requirements. Respect for staff and fellow guests was required.

Each morning, guests were woken at 7:15am and provided with a gift card for coffee and/or a warm meal if the temperature outside fell below -10 degrees. If the temperature was mild, guests could access a gift card once per week. Before leaving the shelter, guests and staff would thoroughly clean and disinfect the shelter space.

Program Security

The Emergency Shelter Program contracted the services of a security company, which included 5 nightly check-ins. Check-ins were conducted in person. The security company could also be contacted in the event that an incident occurred in the shelter space during the night. There was always on-call support available to shelter staff including the Shelter Manager, Director or a member of the board.

HSBV connected regularly with local RCMP to ensure the program was a safe space and that guests could make a smooth transition into the program when referred by RCMP.

Staffing Model

The Emergency Shelter Program began operation in February 2022 with a single staffing model based on shelter usage data from the previous season. There was one Outreach Worker for each of the 3 shifts per night including intake from 8:00pm to 12:00am, awake overnight from 11:30pm to 7:30am and discharge from 7:00am to 9:00am with an additional one hour of community work during the day. An on-call position was available throughout the night to assist Outreach Workers as needed.

In March, 2022 the Emergency Shelter Program changed the staffing model to include double staffing for both intake and discharge. This change was based on an increase in shelter usage and the complexity of guests presenting in the program. Shifts included: two intake shifts from 8:00pm to 12:00am and 8:30pm to 1:00am, awake overnight from 12:00am to 8:00am and discharge from 6:00am to 9:00am.

A Shelter Manager provided support, feedback and training for Outreach Workers with support from the Shelter Director and the Board of Directors.

Referring Partners

The Emergency Shelter Program accepted referrals from agencies throughout the Bow Valley including Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore, Exshaw, Mini Thni and Kananaskis.

The majority of referrals to the Emergency Shelter Program came through FCSS, YWCA Banff, Canmore General Hospital and Banff Mineral Springs Hospital.

Results

The goal of the Outreach and Emergency Shelter Programs was to ensure that individuals in the Bow Valley experiencing challenges and multiple barriers to service were able to access safe, warm nights during the coldest months of the year. The Outreach Program operated from December 6th 2021 until March 31, 2022 for a total of 116 nights. The Outreach Program ran concurrently with the shelter program for 53 nights. The Emergency Shelter Program operated from February 7, 2022 to March 31, 2022 for a total of 53 nights. In all, emergency shelter from the cold was available to the Bow Valley community for 116 nights during the winter of 2021/22.

Program Data

Outreach Program

From December 6th, 2021 to February 6, 2022 (63 nights), 10 unique individuals accessed the Outreach Program and found safe accommodation in hotel or hostel for a total of 57 bed nights.

From February 7th to March 31, 2022 (53 nights), 6 unique individuals accessed the Outreach Program and found safe accommodation in hotel or hostel for a total of 13 bed nights. On separate occasions, 4 of these individuals also accessed accommodation through the Emergency Shelter Program.

It is important to note that individuals accessing the Outreach Program from February 7th to March 31st accessed the program by attending the Emergency Shelter facility and speaking with the Outreach Workers there. Staff time from the Shelter Program was used to run the Outreach Program. All 6 guests were unable to stay in the shelter program due to a limited number of beds. The Outreach Program ensured that despite limited capacity in the Shelter Program, guests still had a warm, safe place to sleep.

In total the Outreach Program from December 6th to March 31st (116 nights) served 16 unique individuals for a total of 70 bed nights. * It was not possible to compare the data from the 2021 outreach program as the 2021 data was not collected using the same method.

Of the 16 unique individuals who accessed the Outreach Program, 3 individuals were referred to the program by a community partner (hospital, FCSS). In addition to emergency accommodation, the Outreach Program also provided 4 emergency taxi fares to individuals in need.

Emergency Shelter Program

From February 7th to March 31st, 2022 (53 nights) 26 unique individuals accessed the Emergency Shelter Program for a total of 296 bed nights. In 2021, from March 1 to April 11 (42 nights) 10 unique individuals accessed the Emergency Shelter Program for a total of 16 bed nights.

The Emergency Shelter Program was open for 11 nights longer in 2022 and saw an increase of 16 unique individuals over 2021 (a 160% increase). The shelter provided 280 more bed nights and had an average of 5.6 guests per night, up from 0.4 guests per night in 2021. This translates to a 1,300% increase in the average number of guests served per night in shelter in 2022.

The total number of stays (defined as one or more consecutive nights in shelter, accessed by the same guest) in the Emergency Shelter Program in 2022 was 76. The length of stay in the program ranged from 1 night to 36 nights. Open for only 53 nights, the Emergency Shelter Program did not impose a limit on stays.

During the 53 nights of operation, the shelter was accessed by guests every night. The highest number of guests to access the program in one night was 10. When the shelter reached capacity (7 beds), additional guests were redirected to the Outreach Program for a hostel or hotel bed. No individuals were turned away from the Outreach Program.

The reason for the increase in bed nights and unique shelter guests accessing the program in 2022 is likely multifaceted and has not been determined within the scope of this program review.

Of the 26 unique individuals who accessed the shelter program, partnering community service organizations referred 8 individuals to the program. In addition, the staff organized a total of 9 taxi rides to the shelter.

Guest Feedback

On March 28th, HSBV held a guest feedback session to learn more about guests' experiences in the program. Guests accessing the shelter between March 25th and March 28th were invited to participate. A small breakfast and coffee were provided.

6 out of 28 or 21% of unique individuals accessing the outreach or shelter programs from December 6 to March 25th participated in the feedback session. All 6 participants rated the shelter as 10 out of 10 for being helpful to them and expressed unanimous appreciation for the program in the form of "Thank you".

Guests shared that in addition to a warm bed, for them the program successes included access to food, coffee and gift cards for groceries and coffee shops. Guests also appreciated having access to WIFI and reported building good relationships with staff.

The only program challenge guests shared was the need for more comfortable beds (the shelter program uses camp style cots).

Guests provided suggestions for the shelter program going forward including but not limited to:

- The addition of more beds
- Warm socks
- An option to launder clothing
- An area to relax, separate from the shared sleeping area
- Help with system navigation
- Support with housing location
- More flexible hours for the shelter
- Double staffing at all times

Guests reported that the most helpful supports they received, apart from a warm bed were referrals to FCSS, gift cards and referrals for a shower.

Guests shared that if they were not staying in the outreach or shelter programs, they would find accommodation by couch surfing, accessing businesses open 24 hours, sleeping in stairwells, garbage bins or camping outside. After the programs closed, participants in the feedback session said they would consider returning to Mini Thni, accessing staff accommodation or return to sleeping outside.

Recommendations

Following the findings of the program review, 9 recommendations have been identified:

- Create more robust data collection methods based on program logic models, including:
 - Program data
 - Guest demographics
 - Community partner referrals
- Increase staff during intake (check-in) and discharge (check-out) daily.
- Review and expand the existing policy manual including procedures, protocols, guidelines and staff training requirements.
- Continue to run the Outreach Program in concert with the Shelter Program to ensure a more robust support service.
- Continue to build relationships with various food providers and agencies in order to provide a wider variety of warm food options for guests.
- Consider the addition of support for guests with housing location and system navigation.

- Locate a more appropriate shelter space including:
 - Showers
 - Individual sleeping spaces
 - Beds for 7 or more guests
 - An area for guests to unwind that won't disturb guests who are sleeping.
 - Multiple bathrooms
 - Office space
 - A functional kitchen
 - Storage for equipment
- Provide group and individual supervision for staff to manage challenging experiences.
- Due to interest in the program and guests reporting that they were sleeping outside both before and after the programs were operational, it is recommended that the Shelter and Outreach Programs operate year-round.

Conclusion

This program review provides an overview of the HSBV Outreach and Emergency Shelter Programs in 2022, specifically the need for and usage of these programs.

The primary focus of the Outreach and Emergency Shelter Programs is to ensure that individuals in the Bow Valley experiencing challenges and multiple barriers to service are able to access safe, warm nights through a local, collaborative, low barrier shelter program. These programs also aim to meet a community need by providing a safe, warm space, where partnering and referring agencies can refer clients without alternate, safe accommodation.

The findings of the program review confirm that there is a real and ongoing need for emergency shelter and supports for homelessness in the Bow Valley and that the community would benefit from the programs being open year-round.

References

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List of Acronyms

HSBV: Homelessness Society of the Bow Valley

H2HC: Homelessness to Housing Coalition

RCMP: Royal Canadian Mounted Police

FCSS: Family and Community Support Services

Appendix A - Methodology

Methodology

For the 2022 program review, multiple methods were used to collect data on the programs.

Program Data was collected and reported on throughout the program including but not limited to: number of stays, number of nights, taxi rides and reportable incidents. Partnering community service agency referrals were also recorded.

A **Guest Feedback Session** was conducted on March 28, 2022, two days before the closure of the shelter program. Beginning on March 21st, guests attending the shelter were notified about and invited to the feedback session. The feedback session took place from 8:00am to 9:00am. Discharge was extended to 9:30 to allow space for existing shelter guests to depart after the information session. The feedback session took the form of a round table discussion with eight guiding questions. Breakfast sandwiches and coffee was provided for participants.

Guests attending the feedback session were not obligated to share information. No personal or identifying information was recorded. Responses were aggregate and non-identifiable to the extent that was possible with a small group.

Staff Feedback Surveys were provided to shelter staff from March 25th to 31st to be completed during paid time. Surveys included 11 questions with multiple choice and written answers.

Data Analysis

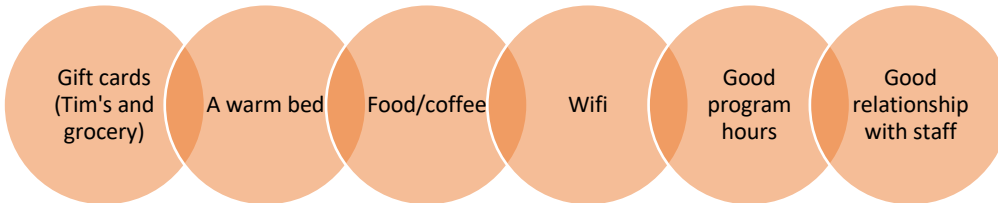
Data was analyzed and synthesized by the Shelter Director and a consultant. When comparing data from winter 2021, the REST Evaluation 2021 document was used.

Limitations

The Emergency Shelter Program is low barrier program. As such, only basic data was collected. Demographic information was not collected from guests.

Appendix B - Guest Feedback

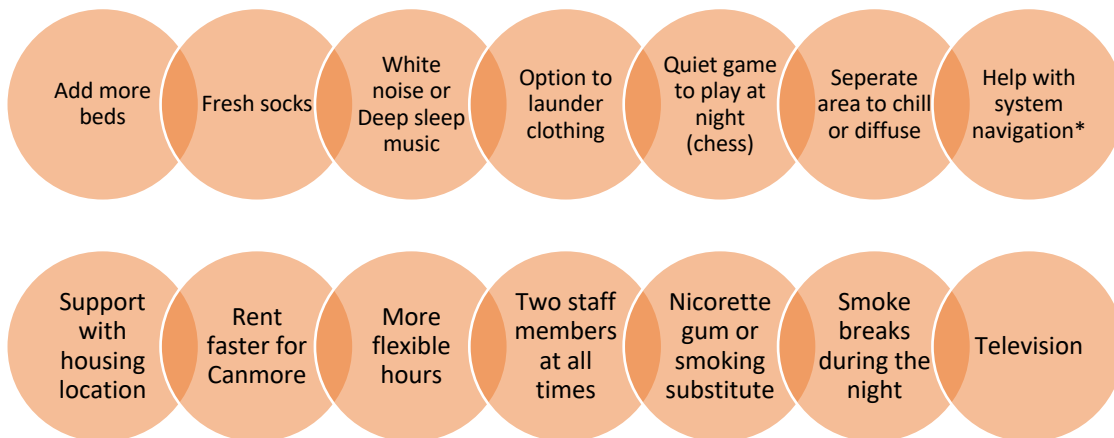
Guests identified program successes (what went well) as:



Guests identified program challenges (what did not go well) as:

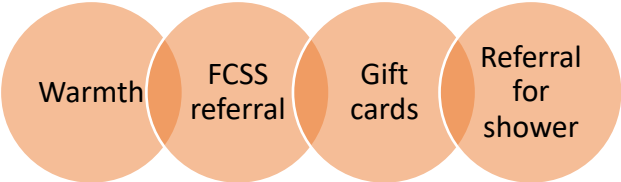


Guest suggestions for the shelter program next year included:

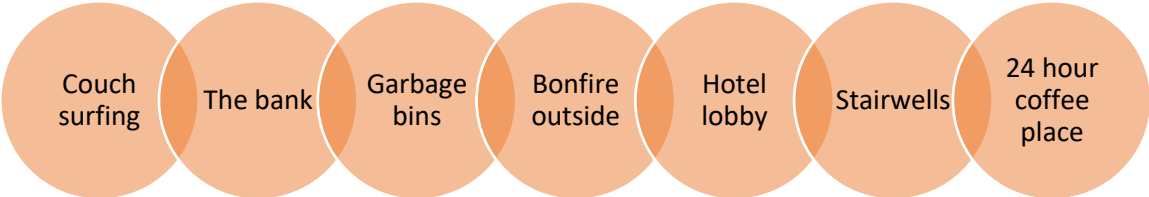


*Systems navigation: Help with acquiring identification and accessing local resources.

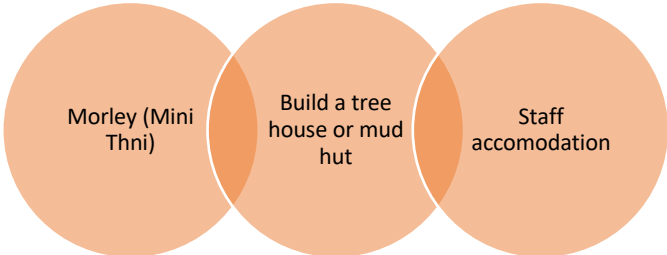
Besides a place to sleep, the most helpful supports guests shared that they received in the shelter program were:



If the shelter program wasn't operating, guests shared where they might stay instead:



Guests shared where they might stay after the shelter closure on March 31:



Participants demonstrated nearly unanimous expressions of gratitude for the shelter program in the form of "thank you" (5/6).

