

24/7 Drop-in Service for Women:

Stakeholder Consultations Executive Summary

❖ Introduction

As per Council directive, Hostel Services undertook extensive consultations with key stakeholders to assess the need and feasibility of a 24-hour drop-in service for women. The consultations took place between January and March 2014, culminating in two public forums (one for the general public and the other for women only) designed to promote further stakeholder input and awareness of a potential addition to drop-in services. The following is a summary of the information gathered from consultations with potential service users and providers about the need and feasibility of a 24-hour drop-in service for women.

❖ Methodology

Hostel Services staff employed an extensive consultative model designed to engage service users and providers in their respective environments. This approach promoted a level of trust and comfort between Hostel Services staff and the participants conducive to meaningful discussion. The use of focus groups, one-on-one interviews, public forums and an anonymous questionnaire enhanced both the breadth and depth of the insights into the subject matter.

Consultations were conducted with service users through five focus groups, 11 one-on-one interviews and two public forums (one exclusively for women and one for the general public). The breakdown is as follows:

1. 13 participants from Sistering.
2. 12 participants from Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto.
3. 9 participants from the Adelaide Resource Centre for Women.
4. 15 participants from The 519 Church Street Community Centre.
5. 7 participants from Maggie's: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project.
6. 29 participants in an open public forum.
7. 31 participants in a women's only public forum.
8. 11 participants in one-on-one interviews undertaken at the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre (SHARC) and the Metro Hall Warming Centre.

Service users in the focus groups and interviews were also encouraged to complete a short, anonymous questionnaire prior to discussions with Hostel Services staff; this method was adopted to reduce respondents' bias toward the questions and to increase the overall response rate. 63 respondents completed the questionnaire (a response rate of 97%), the results of which are presented below. Participants were compensated for their time and effort with honoraria consisting of a Tim Horton's gift card (valued at \$10.00) and a TTC token.

For each focus group discussion, Hostel Services staff served as facilitators and note takers, their task to provide contextual and procedural guidance to the participants, and to create a written record of their verbal contributions for later analysis, respectively. In all, 63 pages of text were organized, subjected to key-word-in-context frequency analysis, and coded by theme. The thematic analysis was based primarily on three pre-determined categories: **safety, access, and service delivery**.

24/7 Drop-in Service for Women:

Stakeholder Consultations Executive Summary

These themes were generated from a review of the most common aspects of successful drop-in models in Toronto and other North American jurisdictions (Vancouver, San Francisco, New York), and further informed by pre-consultation interviews with subject matter experts from Toronto drop-ins, shelters, and City staff.

Once the coded data was completely aligned with the pre-determined themes, grounded theory was employed in an analysis of the remaining uncoded data, thereby allowing an additional theme to emerge: **community awareness**.

❖ Summary of Service User Questionnaire

The following is a summary of selected results of an anonymous questionnaire administered to *service users only*. The total number of respondents was 63; this represented a response rate of 97%. The questionnaire was designed to capture basic demographic, housing situation and service usage information to add further insight into the needs and behaviours of the target service user population.

Age Groups	% of Total Respondents
16 – 24 years	6%
25- 40 years	30%
41- 60 years	54%
61+ years	10%

Vulnerable Groups	% of Total Respondents
Aboriginal	33%
LGBT/Two-spirited	38%
With mental and/or physical health issues	73%
Chronically homeless (1+ yrs in shelter system)	35%
With service restrictions from shelters, drop-in centres and/or Out of the Cold programs	38%

24/7 Drop-in Service for Women:

Stakeholder Consultations Executive Summary

Housing Situation	Category	% of Total
Unhoused		32%
Housed		68%
	Private market	26%
	Subsidized housing	35%
	Supportive/transitional housing	14%
	Rooming house	14%
	Couch-surfing	2%
	Staying with friends/family	7%
	No response	2%

Service Use in the Past 12 Months	% of Total Respondents
Shelter	51%
Drop-in centre	98%
Out of the Cold program	32%

❖ Conclusions

The following is a summary of key findings; bold items indicate important details and/or issues for further study.

- Youth, pregnant women, sex workers, women fleeing from abuse with or without children, the chronically homeless with mental health issues, seniors and those isolated in housing are the most vulnerable populations that a 24-hour drop-in would serve. Service providers were not sure whether housed women should be allowed access to this type of service or should be referred to existing day services.
- Uniformed security is not desirable; appropriately trained staff should serve this function.
- Exterior CCTV cameras, a "buzz-in" entry system, multiple exits and a discrete entrance for police would further ensure the safety of staff and service users.
- A 1:20 staff-service user ratio is preferable.
- Rules of conduct should be posted in positive language and enforcement heavily tempered with staff discretion (e.g. the SHARC).
- A 24-hour drop-in service should be run both in the downtown East and West, in neighbourhoods known to have high concentrations of street homeless and sex workers. The most commonly suggested location was at the intersection of Sherbourne and Dundas in the East, and another toward Bathurst Street/Ossington Avenue along Queen Street or King Street in the West.

24/7 Drop-in Service for Women:

Stakeholder Consultations Executive Summary

- Service providers offered some support for a 24-hour service in Scarborough.
- Drop-in capacity should be set between 60-100 service users.
- Drop-in should be in a "house setting," situated away from high volumes of street and pedestrian traffic.
- Drop-in hours of operation should be 24-hours per day, seven days per week. Both groups offered some support for extended hours of service to cover the 8pm to 12pm period.
- A 24-hour hotline and mobile outreach/transportation unit would be a good complement fixed-location services.
- Drop-in intake should be as minimal as possible. Service providers expressed a desire for beyond-basic intake data for assessment and evaluative purposes, but tailored performance measures recognize the informal nature of the drop-in sector.
- Drop-in access should be as low barrier as possible and service users engaged through a harm reduction, trauma-informed, anti-oppression approach. The overwhelming majority of participants were not in support of supervised drug use on the premises.
- The development of every aspect of the drop-in (e.g. the space, rules, guidelines, program delivery, staffing) should include service user/peer involvement.
- Service users and providers agreed on all of the primary and secondary service offerings. Service providers added that a social enterprise component may be beneficial.
- Drop-in should not be built upon/extended from existing service; preconceived negative perception of shelters/drop-ins among service users may discourage participation.