

## **Review of Current Winter Respite Services and Planning for the 2017/18 Winter Season**

**Date:** May 24, 2017

**To:** Community Development and Recreation Committee

**From:** General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report provides an overview of the Winter Respite Services provided over 2016/2017 winter season and recommends a number of pilot actions to increase capacity and improve effectiveness of the services available next winter including extension of the dates for continuous operation of Winter Respite Services, increasing capacity of Winter Respite Programs by adding additional locations, as well as expansion of Out of the Cold program.

The report also recommends a number of improvements to Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's (SSHA) Winter Respite Services approach, including enhancing coordinated referral processes, data collection and measurement, increased housing access and support services for service users and enhancing winter respite service planning.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to increase capacity of Winter Respite Services that focus on people experiencing homelessness who do not traditionally access shelter beds;
2. City Council approve continuous operation of Winter Respite Services for the duration of the winter season, November 15 to April 15;
3. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to hire 0.9 full time equivalent (FTE) temporary staff for the amount of \$64,000 for 2017 and 2 FTE temporary staff for the amount of \$136,000 for 2018 to provide additional housing access services for Winter Respite Service clients;

4. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to enter into agreements with community agencies to operate Winter Respite Services, and access up to \$6.094 million from the Social Housing Federal Reserve XR2105, as generally set out in Attachment 1:

- i. from November 15 to December 31, 2017 for up to \$2.695 million; and
- ii. from January 1 to March 31, 2018 for up to \$3.399 million;

5. City Council increase the 2017 Approved Operating Budget for Shelter, Support and Housing Administration by \$2.695 million gross, zero net, and an additional 0.9 FTE. The funds to be withdrawn from the Social Housing Federal Reserve XR2105; and

6. City Council direct the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to include a business case in the 2018 budget process which includes the remaining \$3.399 million and 2 FTE to be funded by Social Housing Federal Reserve XR2105.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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The estimated cost for the recommended increases to Winter Respite Services is \$6.094 million. This includes the following:

- The cost to operate a continuous 24-hour Winter Respite Services for approximately 50 overnight guests is estimated at up to approx. \$190,000 per month. Therefore, the estimated cost for 5 sites operating continuously from November 15 to April 15 is \$4.75 million.
- Costs for additional Out of the Cold spaces and Extreme Cold Weather Alert surge capacity beds within the shelter system will be dependent on capacity of those systems to expand. Each additional night of service provided through Out of the Cold for up to 50 people is estimated at \$50,000.
- Providing enhanced housing support and data reporting capacity is estimated at \$350,000.
- Up to \$1 million in start-up costs and improvements to open the additional sites may be required.

Existing funding of \$656,000 is available in SSHA's existing operating budget to offset some of these costs, subject to 2018 Budget approval.

Additional funding of \$6.094 million is available in SSHA's Social Housing Federal Reserve Fund (XR2105) for 2017 and 2018. Future financial impacts will be considered through the 2018 budget process.

The City's actual costs and investments made will be contingent on interest from the community organizations to operate a Winter Respite Program and the ability to expand Out of the Cold services. These are not known at this time. SSHA will report through the 2018 and future year budget process with an update on actuals and any future year impacts.

The Deputy City Manager & Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its meeting of May 10, 2016, Community Development and Recreation Committee passed a motion requesting the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee, as part of the 2017-2018 winter season, on flex bed capacity.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.CD20.6>

At its meeting of April 13, 2017, Community Development and Recreation Committee passed a motion requesting the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee, on increasing the number of 24-hour low barrier drop-ins for the 2017-2018 and successive winter seasons.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.CD20.6>

At its meeting of November 8, 2016, City Council adopted CD15.7, *2016-17 Winter Readiness and Update on Shelter Occupancy*. The report outlined a number of actions to expand available service for the 2016/17 winter season.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD15.7>

At its meeting of October 5 and 6, 2016, City Council adopted CD14.11 *2017/18 Community Grants to Address Homelessness* and approved recommendations to run continuous 24-hour drop-ins services starting on December 15, 2016 to February 28, 2017.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD14.11>

At its meeting of November 3 and 4, 2015, City Council adopted H7.3 *Update on Toronto's Cold Weather Protocol*, which on an interim basis, authorized the Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer to provide funding from the Property Tax Stabilization Fund, in order to implement continuous 24-hour cold weather drop-in services for January and February 2016.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.HL7.3>

At its meeting of November 3 and 4, 2015, City Council adopted *2015 Hostels Allocations to Relieve Occupancy Pressures*. The supplementary report *Homelessness Service Planning for the 2015-2016 Winter Season* was also considered by City Council that outlined initiatives planned for the winter season as a result of high shelter occupancy.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD7.3>

At its meeting of March 31, April 1 and 2, 2015, City Council adopted an *Infrastructure and Service Improvement Plan for the Emergency Shelter System*. The report identified a mix of strategies to maintain and increase the capacity of the shelter system and reduce demand for shelter through innovative programs. In addition, the report identified the infrastructure needs over the next few years.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD2.2>

At its meeting of July 8, 9, 10 and 11, 2014, City Council adopted CD30.6, *Comprehensive Review of Cold Weather Protocols*, which requested the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing to include in SSHA's 10 year capital management and infrastructure strategy an analysis of the financial impact of delivering an additional 100 permanent shelter beds with the aim of returning flexibility to the shelter system to respond to unanticipated surges in occupancy levels.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.CD30.6>

## COMMENTS

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### 1. Overview of Winter Respite Services Provided

SSHA's Winter Respite Services (WRS) response play a significant role in supporting people experiencing homelessness during winter months and cold weather conditions. WRS, previously referred to as cold weather services, build on existing year-round homeless support services by providing safe spaces for people who are otherwise vulnerable to extreme cold and winter related events.

SSHA works with community partners to deliver a range of WRS between November 15 and April 15, with some services delivered directly by SSHA and others by community partners. Some services operate during the entire winter season, and some are activated when an Extreme Cold Weather Alert is called by the Medical Officer of Health.

On November 8 and 9, 2016, adopted CD 15.7, "2016-17 Winter Readiness and Update on Shelter Occupancy." Recommendation 4 was as follows:

*City Council authorize the addition of up to \$2 million from the Social Housing Reserve Fund as a one-time contribution to Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's Gross Operating budget, to fund additional winter services, if required, during the 2016-2017 winter season should the service needs exceed Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's ability to manage within the approved operating budget.*

SSHA did experience additional motel use and extended drop-in hours last winter. The withdrawal of \$2 million may be required for the 2017 budget if the division cannot find offsetting savings in year.

The following services are available as part of SSHA's WRS response and add additional capacity during the coldest part of the year.

## **Out of the Cold Program**

The Out of the Cold (OOTC) program is a seasonal winter program that is delivered by inter-denominational faith-based groups across the City of Toronto between November and April, and is coordinated by Dixon Hall. OOTC has been operating for over 30 years through the work of dedicated volunteers, who bear many of the costs associated with program operations. Service users report a very high level of satisfaction with the programs they use during the winter. The capacity of each location ranges from 15 to 75 spaces with up to four sites operating per night. On average each night 100 spaces are available.

## **University Settlement**

University Settlement Recreation Centre operates an overnight program that provides 85 spaces from Friday to Sunday nights during the winter. During the summer months, the agency provides overnight service on Saturday and Sunday nights with 75 spaces per night. Although it is considered part of the regular shelter system, described as 'part-time' beds, it provides expanded service during the winter, operates on a very similar service approach to OOTC sites, and serves many of the same clients.

## **24 Hour Winter Respite Drop-ins**

24 hour Winter Respite Drop-in Services provide a client centred, pet friendly, low barrier/low threshold service in a less formalized and structured environment. Services include warm food and drinks, referrals to shelter and other services. Over the past winter, the three sites had capacity for 130 people per night.

## **Additional Services Triggered by ECWA**

To support homeless and vulnerable individuals when an Extreme Cold Weather Alert is called by the Medical Officer of Health, the following additional homelessness services are initiated:

- Additional outreach teams are put on patrol to contact individuals on the street and check on their condition. Offers of service are made or transportation to a shelter, the SHARC, a Winter Respite Service, or their home is arranged.
- Shelters extend their hours of operation to allow clients to stay indoors. This is intended to ensure that clients are out of the cold weather until other services in the area are open.
- Extreme Weather beds are activated in the shelter system.
- Shelters relax admission and service restriction criteria to allow clients more access to shelter programs. This is a Shelter Standards expectation and is intended to ensure that clients are not left without shelter during extreme weather conditions.
- TTC tokens are distributed to individuals at Drop-In Centers to reach shelters, Out of the Cold locations, 24-hour Women's and Winter Respite Drop-ins.

- Community organizations and agencies that work with vulnerable population (more than 100) are notified by SSHA to prepare for Extreme Cold Weather Alerts and made aware of available enhanced services offered by SSHA.

## 2. Client Profile and Service Trends in the 2016/17 Winter Season

Last winter over 1,800 different individuals stayed overnight at Winter Respite service locations.

Based on a comprehensive survey of over 500 service users, we know the following about this unique group of service users:

Program	Gender			Age*		
	Male	Female	Trans-gender	16-24	25-49	>50
24-Hour Winter Respite Drop-ins	80%	20%	0%	13%	59%	28%
Out of the Cold	74%	11%	0%	3%	54%	43%
University Settlement	84%	15%	1%	4%	62%	34%
SHARC Respite	83%	16%	0%	21%	53%	26%
Total	78%	14%	0%	7%	56%	36%

Additional demographic characteristics of the Winter Respite Service users were identified in the client survey:

- 54% identify as white;
- 46% are between the age of 50-65;
- 23% identify as Indigenous;
- 8% identify as part of the LGBTQ2S community;
- 6% served in military (in Canada or another country);
- 79% have been in Toronto longer than five years;
- 7% came to Canada as an immigrant or refugee within the last 5 years; and
- 41% receive ODSP income supports.

### Service Needs

Many people who use Winter Respite Services live on the street or outdoors during warmer weather and access overnight services only when it becomes too cold to stay outdoors. According to the 2013 Street Needs Assessment, they make up almost 10% of the homelessness population.

## 2013 SNA



Individuals who live on the street often have complex needs and typical service responses do not adequately address the supports that this population requires. Across both the Out of the Cold program and the 24 Hour Winter Respite Drop-ins, the low-barrier nature of these services meets the needs of a particular population of people who are homeless, specifically the ability to come and go, no obligation to participate in programs, ability to stay with a partner or bring a pet make this a preferred service model.

Survey findings indicate that of those using Winter Respite Services:

- 35% have serious medical conditions and disabilities;
- 31% have mental health issues;
- 30% have substance use issues;
- 25% have post-traumatic stress disorder; and
- 14% require an assistive device.

Those using Winter Respite Services also tend to have a longer history of homelessness than generally found among the homeless population staying in shelter. While the majority of people using the shelter system experience homelessness for less than 60 days, the majority of people who use WRS (58%) have been experiencing homelessness longer than one year.

### 3. Planning for 2017/18 Winter Readiness

Over the past several months, staff have undertaken a comprehensive review of SSHA's approach to planning for WRS. This included engaging over five hundred people using winter services through a survey, key informant interviews, round table consultations with service providers and community stakeholders, a literature review, and a review of administrative and service data.

Based on the findings of that analysis, this report recommends a number of actions to increase capacity and improve effectiveness of the services available next winter. This includes:

- Extending the dates for continuous operation of WRS
- Increasing capacity of 24-hour WRS

- Expanding Out of the Cold programs
- Adding surge capacity beds within regular shelter system
- Improving planning and coordination of Winter Respite Services

Each of these recommendations is described further below.

### **Extension of Continuous Operating Season**

The need for extension of continuous operation of WRS was identified as a priority through the review. Operating on an alert basis for part of the season is more challenging for service operators, and ad hoc extensions of continuous services as occurred in 2016/2017 season contributes to uncertainty for clients.

The operating season for the previous season was based on the Toronto Public Health review and recommendations to operate continuously between December 15 and February 28 and during ECWA during other times between November 15 and April 15 to minimize highest risk of cold related injury. The most recent Public Health review of emergency department visits for cold-related injuries in Toronto found that while the highest risk from cold weather occurs on the coldest days, there are relatively few of these days during most Toronto winters. When temperatures are moderately cold, with temperatures of -15 °C or warmer, the risk is lower, but the effects compound over time, producing a relatively high health impact at the population level.

Given Public Health research findings and demand for services in past three seasons, expansion of continuous service for the whole cold weather season, from November 15 to April 15, is recommended. This will result in improved service coordination, seamless service that is not interrupted due to revised dates/extensions, more consistent service for users, lower chance of cold-related injuries, and improved agency planning and staffing capacity.

### **Increased Capacity of 24-Hour Winter Respite Services**

Recognizing the difficulties associated with bringing individuals from the street indoors to stay warm during the winter months and learning from successful operation of current Winter Respite programs, an increased capacity is recommended for next winter from 160 overnight spaces at 3 sites to up to 300 overnight spaces at up to 5 sites.

Given the timelines available for service planning for next winter and the need to pilot new service approaches, it is recommended for the 2017/18 season to extend operation of the existing two sites (Margaret's Community Housing and Services and St. Felix) and add up to three additional pilot sites dependent upon securing suitable sites and program operators. Based on the results of the pilots and dependent on 2018 Budget approval, in early 2018 staff will hold a competitive process to identify program operators and move to a three year funding cycle to provide greater stability.

### **Expansion of Out of the Cold program**

The Out of the Cold program has been in operation since 1987. The original mandate of the program was to deliver emergency overnight and meal services on a temporary



basis during winter months. Over the years, the program has become an essential service response that meets the needs of a particular population of people who are homeless. Given its regular use over the past 30 years, the program cannot be viewed as a temporary, ancillary service and should be recognized as an important component of the WRS response for vulnerable individuals.

Given the continuing high demand for services, it is recommended that staff work with Dixon Hall and faith-based organizations to expand program availability. Several potential additional sites have been identified that could add up to 90 overnight spaces for 2017/2018 winter season. Expand hours of operation and site capacity at existing service locations will also be explored, if operationally feasible.

It should also be noted that the faith-based organizations who agree to operate OOTC programs also bear the costs of program space and food. For the ongoing sustainability of this service model, staff will explore the opportunity to provide a basic food stipend and access to an emergency fund for building repairs.

### **Additional Surge Capacity Beds within Regular Shelter System**

At its meeting of May 10, 2016, Community Development and Recreation Committee directed SSHA to report, as part of the 2017-2018 winter season, on flex bed capacity. In 2013, the existing flex beds were made permanent to respond to increasing occupancy pressures. SSHA will work with shelter providers to add extra surge capacity beds to the shelter system, where possible.

The City also uses motel rooms to expand capacity based on demand and shelter occupancy levels. SSHA is currently using motel contracts to provide surge capacity to respond to increased number of refugees accessing shelter in Toronto. Drawing on the experience from last winter and based on other review recommendations, in preparation for the upcoming season, SSHA will work to secure an additional motel rooms, effective mid-November, to supplement current motel contracts and provide additional winter surge capacity if needed.

## **4. Improvements to Planning, Coordination and Service Approaches**

Based on the review and engagement with stakeholders, a number of enhancements to Winter Respite Service planning approaches, service coordination and enhancements to the existing services approaches were identified, including:

- Enhancing coordinated referral processes, data collection and measurement;
- Increased housing access and support services; and
- Enhancing Winter Respite Service planning processes.

### **Enhancing Coordinated Referral Processes, Data Collection and Measurement**

Unlike with the shelter system, there is no formal referral process to WRS, as OOTC programs and the 24-Hour WRS do not use the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS).

Lack of standardized intake processes and data collection tools across WRS makes it challenging to understand the profile of service users, effectively identify service needs and track outcomes. Currently, WRS providers report that client intake in real-time through the SMIS presents logistical challenges in a low-barrier, drop-in type environment.

Staff will continue to work with service providers to further enhance referrals, data collection and reporting on service use and outcomes, and integration with SMIS.

### **Increased Housing Access and Support Services**

Over the past winter season, additional housing help services were provided at Winter Respite Services in order to connect clients with housing options and help them to exit homelessness. Dixon Hall employed a client intervention worker, who, over the course of the year, engaged 80 individuals, made 130 referrals, including housing applications, income supports, and identification clinics and assisted 36 individuals to find housing through a 12-month period.

24-Hour Winter Respite Drop-in Services collaborated with Streets to Homes housing workers to provide housing assistance. They engaged 135 unique individuals over a five month period, secured housing for 10 individuals, assisted 22 individuals with accessing shelter bed, and made 111 referrals to assist with identification, taxes, food, and financial services. 27 clients were engaged in development of a housing plan and continue to work with S2H staff through the spring and summer months to find housing.

These housing services offered on a temporary pilot basis have achieved good results in helping clients become housed in the community, and have demonstrated the importance of ensuring people have supports needed to find and maintain housing. This is an important part of SSHA's Housing Stability Service Plan, which sets out the goal of moving towards more preventative, housing focussed service responses to homelessness. As part of planning for 2017/18 services, it is recommended that the partnership with Streets to Homes be expanded to connect clients with housing and supports, and provide additional hours of service at all WRS.

### **Enhancing Winter Respite Service Planning Processes**

Enhancing Winter Respite Service planning would alleviate operational challenges reported by service providers. Recommendations for streamlining and enhancing planning process include:

- Establishing Winter Respite Service planning cycle that will define the Winter Respite Service response phases, identify and engage key stakeholders and outline appropriate timelines throughout planning, operation and deactivation of the program. A draft planning cycle is presented in Appendix 1;
- Streamlining administration of funding. Service providers identified current funding period as a weakness that impedes agency planning and staffing capacity and that more time to on-board and train staff is essential;

- Improving communication protocols between SSHA as a service manager, service providers and other key stakeholders;
- Establishing Maximum Capacity Protocols for Winter Respite Service providers, that provide clear direction about what steps to take when location capacity is reached to refer clients to another available service;
- Establishing a transition plan for clients at the end of the winter season to improve referral pathways; and
- Leveraging relationships and services within the City to improve service delivery.

## 5. Next Steps and Further Work

### Low Barrier Service Models

Through the review, it became clear that for a specific group of clients, the low barrier nature of the WRS was a driving reason why they accessed these services. A critical element of developing effective low-barrier services is ensuring that they operate from a Housing First perspective, and that clients are engaged in housing case planning, using trauma informed approaches that are tailored to people with more complex needs.

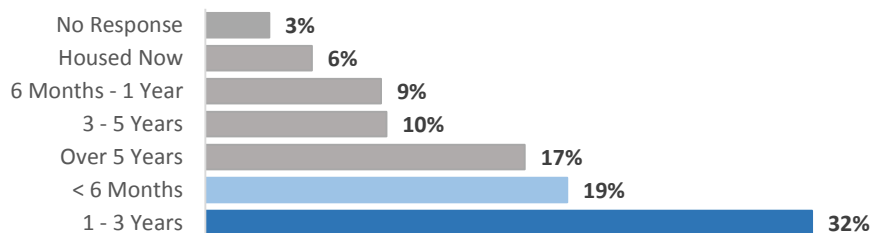
Staff will continue to explore potential low-barrier program models that respond to these client needs, and how they could also be applied within the existing shelter system.

### Winter Respite Services as Part of the Long-Term Shelter-Infrastructure Plan

Only 20% of WRS users surveyed last winter indicated that they would use the shelter system, however, it is important that this option remain available. In response to ongoing occupancy pressures Council adopted SSHA's four point Shelter Infrastructure and Service Improvement Plan. As part of the implementation of that plan, up to 90 permanent beds are planned to open by the end of 2017. As the infrastructure plan is implemented, staff will monitor shelter system occupancy and changes in demand for Winter Respite Services and adjust as required.

### Housing First and Wrap-around Supports

Users of WRS tend to have a longer history of homelessness, returning year after year. 59% of winter respite users have experienced homelessness for more than one year, and 17% have been homeless for more than 5 years.



The need to focus on longer-term solutions for this group of people was clearly raised by all stakeholders. Affordable and supportive housing was identified as the key solution to addressing homelessness and reducing demand for Winter Respite Services. If approved, additional housing resources will be available in Winter Respite Services. Housing workers will engage clients in a housing case plan and provide wrap-around case management supports to connect clients to housing, with housing allowances and follow-up supports and/or supportive housing where possible.

The City has also responded to the recent request for proposals for new provincial supportive housing funding. If successful, staff will identify opportunities to leverage that funding to support complex clients like those using WRS to achieve permanent housing.

Investing in supports that are matched to people's need is essential when assisting them to find and maintain housing, which is critical to reducing demand for emergency based responses and developing long term solutions to address homelessness in Toronto.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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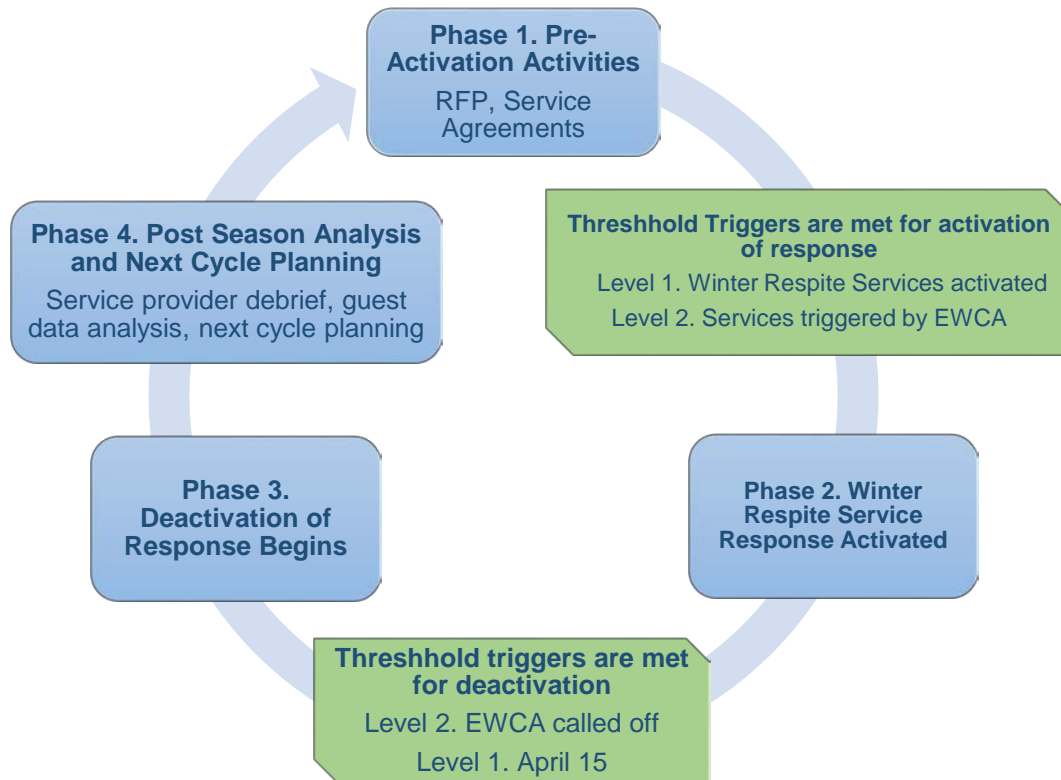
Paul Raftis  
General Manager (I)  
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1: Winter Respite Service Response Planning Cycle

## Attachment 1: Winter Respite Service Planning Cycle



### Phase 1 - Pre-Activation [August 1 – November 14]

- Notification of key stakeholders
- Confirmation of service locations, building requirements and available funding
- Orientation and training as necessary
- Interdivisional coordination with key partners (e.g. Solid Waste, Legal, TPH, etc.)
- Preparation of press release and communication plans

### Phase 2 [November 15 – April 15]

- Winter Respite Service Responses activated

### Phase 3 De-activation [April 16 – May 31]

- OOTC, 24-Hour Winter Respite Drop-ins shut down
- All reports are finalized, including guest related data and expenses
- Shelter system returned to pre phase 2 capacity
- Winter Respite Service Committee convened to conduct post season analysis and next cycle planning
- Transition Plans are in effect

### Phase 4 - Post Season Analysis and Next Cycle Planning [June 1 – July 31]

- Debrief and consultations with key stakeholders
- Data analysis
- Service level and need identification for the next cycle
- Competitive purchase process (RFP if required) and implementation of all necessary service agreements