



Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Out of the Cold Warming Centre Wraps for the Season

The Fort Frances Homeless Committee was pleased to be able to open an Out of the Cold Warming Centre spanning eleven weeks this winter. The committee is comprised of representatives from fifteen local non-profit agencies including: Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board, United Native Friendship Centre, NCDS, Victim Services, Canadian Mental Health Association, Community Living, Northwest Community Legal Clinic, Kenora-Rainy River Child and Family Services, Salvation Army, Northwestern Health Unit, Metis Nation of Ontario, Riverside Health Care Facilities, Fort Frances Jail, and recently welcomed Adult Probation and Nelson House Transitional Housing as regular members.

The committee's goal was to provide a safe space for people to get out of the Cold during the coldest months, in addition to trying to get those individuals connected to services that will help them achieve stable, independent housing.

The Fort Frances Homeless Committee began working toward this goal in October of 2017 and in October 2018 held an awareness and fundraising event on Scott Street that was attended by nearly one hundred people and fundraised just over \$50,000 in total.

When the goal of opening a designated shelter space faced delays around staffing and building compliance, the committee shifted to opening an overnight drop-in centre instead in order to be able to open and get people out of the cold. The Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board took on the role of overseeing the staff and space when the committee secured a location out of the Volunteer Bureau.

The centre successfully opened in mid-February and by the end of April, had been visited 566 times by almost 80 individuals who were homeless, considered transient or at-risk of homelessness. The average night saw 9-10 individuals accessing service at the warming centre, with the average client returning seven nights over the season.

The largest age range of clients attending the centre was 30-39 years of age. The majority of individuals who identified themselves as being homeless, said that this was the case for over one year. A large majority of individuals accessing the centre had at least graduated high school, with some graduating college or university. The largest circumstance leading to their current situation was illness or addiction causing homelessness. If not for the warming centre, visitors indicated they would have resorted to sleeping outdoors, couch surfing, attending the hospital or going to jail.

The centre was successful in getting individuals experiencing homelessness connected to services that can help them achieve stable housing. In a survey, 90% of visitors who responded said they felt they gained knowledge of resources available to them and over 80% felt staying at the warming centre was a safe alternative to their existing nighttime arrangements.

The figure to run the Out of the Cold warming centre exceeded donations received by approximately \$5000.00. Integrated Services Manager with the RRDSSAB, Sandra Weir stated, "This was a new initiative for this community, and it was really a learning experience for us as a DSSAB and for the service providers that make up the homeless committee. The amount of work and resources that went into even a temporary space was quite eye-opening, and was made possible by the entire community."

The Homeless Committee intends to keep working toward solutions to homelessness in Fort Frances, and is focusing on supportive/transitional housing with a shelter component. Understanding that a project of this magnitude may not happen before the next cold season, the committee hopes to be able to provide a space to get Out of the Cold next winter again.

The Fort Frances Homeless Committee wishes to sincerely thank its members, who have spent countless hours over the past year in effort to open a homeless shelter for the community of Fort Frances. Additionally, the committee wishes to thank the Volunteer Bureau for providing the space, as well as all of the financial and meal donors, churches, agencies, individuals, businesses and First Nation communities for their support. Without it, opening the warming centre and providing homeless individuals a safe place out of the cold overnight this winter would not have been possible.

To be kept informed of future updates, please visit "Out of the Cold Fort Frances" on Facebook.

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Thank you for providing the opportunity to further address the issue of homelessness in Fort Frances.

For information on the Out of the Cold Warming Centre, please contact Sandra Weir at sandraw@rrdssab.on.ca or 807-274-5349 x 230.