

Connective · Whitehorse Emergency Shelter Community Information Sessions

OCTOBER 25 & 26, 2022

QUESTIONS ASKED BY PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSE PROVIDED BY CONNECTIVE STAFF

Question 1

"I am an acquaintance of those who use the shelter. I would say a large percentage have a neuro-development issue, related to drugs or etc., or a form of postnatal cognitive disintegration. It manifests in a series of behaviours. Behaviours are a response to the environment they are in. What kind of training will the staff have in working with individuals with neuro-developmental disorders?"

Response

As an organization that takes a person-centered approach and meets people where they are, we know how important it is that our staff be equipped with the skills and training needed to support our service users with all aspects of their individual, lived experiences, in a way that is both culturally informed and appropriate.

This starts with our screening and recruitment processes for all program support workers, where experience and comfort navigating complex needs is something we look for.

We build on this preexisting foundation with a series of trainings that must be completed by all new Connective staff, regardless of program. Included in this is MANDT training (a full 2-day, trauma informed, healthy relationship-based curriculum designed to promote prevention, de-escalation, and intervention), a holistic substance use support training (that includes not only the administration of naloxone, but also equips staff with the knowledge and understandings of the underlying chemical and social aspects of addiction, so they can better engage with service users in a person-centered way), and more.

Beyond this, we remain committed to learning all that we can, to enhance all that we do and our ability to support the people who access our services. This means working with community partners to pursue additional training opportunities, such as First Nations 101, Med Assist, online FASD training through CanFASD, and – now that COVID-19 restrictions have eased – engaging once again with on-the-ground training opportunities, through organizations like the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon, and others.

Question 2

"Independence may not be the goal. Please talk about supportive housing as a step on the continuum?"

Response



The housing continuum, illustrated above, is a useful tool for thinking about the range of housing options available in our communities. It depicts everything from temporary ones, such as emergency shelters (such as the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter) for those who are experiencing homelessness, to more permanent housing, such as rentals or home ownership.

The intention is not a linear progression toward home ownership, but rather, to illustrate the full range of options that at any point in time may meet an individual's changing needs and preferences. Each part of the continuum is important – there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to housing.

As a low barrier entry point for many experiencing homelessness or seeking support during crisis, shelters are an instrumental part of the continuum, but a shelter cannot be all things to all people, and alone will not end homelessness.

It's with this in mind that included at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter are 20 permanent, supportive housing units. Staffed by tenant support workers, these will provide residents with access to life skills training, employment assistance, connections and referrals to community services, and more.

Supportive housing options – and the person-centered supports that come with them – are essential to building independence and helping people meet their self-identified needs and goals, and an essential part of building a safe, healthy, and inclusive community for all.

Questions 3 & 4

"Understanding the Good Neighbour Agreement – can you tell us more about that and how it will affect the neighbourhood?"

"Good neighbour guidelines – seeking more information on that. What are the different ways to reach out?"

Response

Maintaining positive community relationships is of utmost importance to us, and a crucial contributor to the success of our programs and their participants – both at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and beyond.

Connective's internal Good Neighbour Policy guides our organization's engagement with the local communities around our programs. Many aspects of that policy have been covered in our presentation – including our commitment to maintaining the physical premises, and ensuring regular, open, and early communication with neighbours to stay abreast of any concerns before they escalate.

Also covered in this policy is a formal and clearly articulated process for handling inquiries or complaints received from the community, guaranteeing that each is directed either to the Program Manager, Senior Manager, or Regional Director, as appropriate.

Through one-on-one person-centered interactions at the shelter, we're committed to supporting our service users to foster good neighbourhood relations, and to building a sense of community belonging which in turn will support that goal.

It's also important to us to foster that a collaborative relationship with the community at large, and we encourage neighbours to reach out to speak with us about any specific challenges they may be having or witnessing.

We have put together (and included at the end of this summary) a shelter contact sheet, but if you wish to connect with us at any time, please use the information below:

Email: wes@connective.ca

Phone: 867-455-2820

Website: connective.ca

RCMP Response: We take part in community events and encourage everyone to reach out to us and let us know what they are seeing. Hearing from the community, both regarding specific incidents and general trends, equips us with the knowledge to reach out to other groups, and craft appropriate responses.

Question 5

"What is the status of the "House of Wolf" report? What is the contract with Connective?"

Response

To clarify, there is no contract between House of Wolf and Connective.

The Council of Yukon First Nations was contracted by the Yukon Government to support community safety planning, and they in turn contracted House of Wolf.

As of this moment, the contracts between CYFN and HoW, and between CYFN and the Yukon Government, have been completed, and the draft report has been submitted to the government for review.

That said, Connective is eager to learn from the information contained in the report. We look forward to gaining a better understanding of the perspectives surrounding community safety, both in relation to the shelter and beyond, and considering how its recommendations could inform future shelter operations.

Question 6

"What kind of system does Connective have to support neighbours in the Good Neighbour Agreement?"

Response

As we've touched on a few times, community collaboration and neighbourhood relationships are extremely important to us. Today's session is a first step in connecting with our neighbours and starting what we hope will be an open, ongoing dialogue, so that we might better understand their perspectives and concerns.

As noted above, we have a policy in place for handling comments or complains from the community, we have prepared a "Who to Call, When to Call" list with contact information to share (included at the end of this summary) and have articulated a clear internal process for handling comments or concerns from the local community.

As we talk about the neighbourhood, it's important to also remember a few things:

- People accessing the shelter are our community members. Connective is committed to supporting them to find success in the community, but beyond our facility they retain the same freedoms as anyone else.
- For individuals facing complex challenges, the process of finding their place in the community can take time, patience, and understanding.
- The creation of safe, healthy, and inclusive communities is everyone's responsibility. Where necessary or appropriate, we encourage neighbours to contact 911 to report any crimes or safety risks in progress, and the police non-emergency line at 867-667-555 to report an event that has already happened.

Question 7

"What programs are currently being offered? What percentage of service users coming in are experiencing homelessness – do we know that?"

Response

The emergency shelter offers much more than overnight beds. As a hub of local services for individuals who are experiencing challenges – either with accessing housing or otherwise – there are many individuals who access services but do not stay overnight.

Daily, the shelter serves roughly 300 meals. Approximately 250 of those are for members of the broader community who are experiencing food insecurity, and 50 are for overnight shelter users.

The shelter offers a variety of programs and services, including access to housing support, connection to employment opportunities, access to health clinics and harm reduction supplies, and more.

While some pieces will be constants – cultural programming and meal programs, for instance – specific programming will ebb and flow based on the needs of the community.

This responsiveness is crucial for ongoing success of the shelter, its residents, and service users.

Question 8

"What is the safety of the users of the service and how do they feel in the building?"

Response

The safety of our service users and staff within our program locations is paramount. We have a robust system of practices and standards designed to create a safe culture for staff, service users, and community partners alike.

Our staff are trained to enhance safety and wellbeing by proactively managing tensions before they have a chance to escalate. They also possess a thorough understanding of how to handle situations that do – knowing when to engage, when to distance, and when outside intervention is required.

In the case of any escalations, we have a good relationship with the RCMP; one that is built on open and honest communication.

Question 9

"Alcohol consumption and drug consumption in and around the building – will there be policies to change that?"

Response

In everything we do, we draw on best practices, knowledge, and research across the social service sector. Harm reduction is an evidence-based approach, and an important aspect of practicing person-centered care.

Thinking back to our housing continuum graphic, and the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter's position on that continuum, we believe (and have seen articulated through many recent reports) that it is essential that all people seeking help are accepted into the shelter – no matter what their lived experience might be. The importance of this was also articulated clearly in the 2017 Safe at Home Report.

For many in the local community, the shelter will be the first point of contact as they look for assistance with the challenges they may be facing, or the goals they wish to pursue. Many individuals facing problematic substance use may not be able to remain abstinent from their substance of choice, and so while an abstinence-based approach may work for some and be an important part of their journey, it cannot be the only available approach for a program like the shelter.

Instead, harm reduction supports service users with ways to minimize harms through non-judgmental and non-coercive strategies and tools, and provides a chance to engage with staff, peers, services in a non-judgmental way. If service users are ready and wanting to make a change in relation to their substance use, staff can connect them with additional support services to do so

Question 10

"Are there plans to implement more space? And are there opportunities to support folks staying elsewhere – What diversion strategies are in place at WES, or are there plans to support diversion (Diversion in the sense of, those who are staying at the shelter and who may have other places to stay; supporting people who may have family members who they can stay with but need support connecting with them, transportation, etc.)?"

Response:

This is a complicated question. Our immediate priority at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter has been the smooth transition of shelter operations for service users, residents and staff, and the creation of community relationships. With that in mind, this topic is one we have yet to explore in detail.

There are many nuances involved, for instance – if someone has another place to stay, how can we ensure that it is safe or stable to redirect them to?

Creating and maintaining community connections will be important, and have an outreach worker at the shelter who, through person centered care, will be able to assist with these sorts of opportunities.

Long term, we will be looking at why people are ending up at the shelter – those who may not feel safe staying in their residence, those who may be coming to the shelter while choosing to reside elsewhere, and other broader community trends, that may play into our approach.

Question 11

"I'm a neighbour. Been here since pre-shelter. Neighbourhood has changed, not necessarily for the better. It's not about having a shelter, it's about poor city planning. Elementary school, late-night liquor store, and residential neighbourhood all nearby. Have noticed – residents have spoken about a lack of safety for themselves. One resident I spoke to was run down by a taxi, there are drug dealers, partially naked women being forced into vehicles. Want to support people facing barriers, but also want to ensure it's a safe community for everyone."

Response

As we have noted throughout our presentation, our role and what we do at the shelter is important, but it is just one piece of a broader puzzle when it comes to community safety.

We have policies and trained staff in place to support safety within the program, and through person-centered relationship building we can support service users to identify and mitigate risks before they happen when they're out in the community.

That said, it's important to recognize that we do not have capacity or control over what happens when people leave the shelter, and that community safety involves everyone.

RCMP Response

The goal of the RCMP is public safety, and one important piece of that is maintaining community connections with individuals in the neighbourhood.

The RCMP can't put preventative actions in place if we're not aware of the issues that people are seeing and experiencing. We need reports to come in so that we can address them; it's a community responsibility.

The need for individual connections extends to current and potential shelter service users, as well, so that we can play a role in encouraging people to access services as needed.

It's a challenge with at-risk populations – we want to make ourselves available to respond quickly and appropriately when needed, but there's a balance to strike so that we don't further marginalize people, or drive people away to less populated areas (which can pose a danger to themselves) by over policing one area.

Question 12

"Previously, before the Yukon govt was running the shelter, there was collaborating with community with supplying goods and supports. Plans for this?"

Response

While we can't comment on any past shelter operations, we can highlight that collaboration is one of Connective's core values, and plays a central part in both who we are and how we operate.

We recognize that as a shelter operator, we can't be successful in the community on our own. A safe, healthy, and inclusive community for all is much bigger than one organization, or one building. As we become more firmly established, there are certainly things we can look toward – such as food or material donations, programming contributions, etc. We look forward to exploring these sorts of opportunities as we navigate this initial transitional period and settle into the community.

Question 13

"Plan for regular information sessions with the community/opportunities to have discussion?"

Response

These community information sessions are an important first step in bridging an open dialogue with the community, and we are eager to explore opportunities to keep that conversation going. However, we're not yet at a point where we can comment out what that will look like.

Question 14

"People can't get sober there because there's so much drinking. End up getting into fights. A lot of people are coming there from other communities. There was a gentleman openly selling drugs. People are going there to party. How are you regulating visitors to the shelter who are not staying there, or working to understand where people are coming from?"

Response

The shelter is intended as a low-barrier venue for people seeking services. As we touched on in response to an earlier question, it's often the case that in places where there is wide geographic spread and low population density, bigger city centers do end up being service hubs for the surrounding areas.

So, some people are coming from outside of the immediate Whitehorse community to seek services, and this is not unusual. It's important that we are here for everyone. Beyond being a safe place to sleep for those in crisis or who are unhoused, the shelter also acts as a service hub, so those accessing our services may not also be staying overnight, and these individuals are free to come and go.

Above all else, we are working hard to meet people where they are at, to build relationships, and to connect people to the supports that suit their needs and preferences. Learning how best to fit different pieces together will take time.

We recognize that while the low-barrier approach of the shelter is best-practice and is required to support people at this stage, there are some who will be best served by an abstinence-based approach. We are working to explore opportunities to facilitate this, and to connect people to supports in the community that best fit their needs.

Question 15

"What is your plan to connect with the communities outside of Whitehorse, about what the shelter represents to people who live here. Is there a plan to educate communities to come and understand what is going on? Is there any outreach you are planning, so that everyone is on board throughout the Yukon, and so it's not a dumping ground for these activities we've been hearing about?"

Response

This is an important piece of the puzzle when we talk about community engagement, and one that we will be working towards in the coming weeks and months. We were eager to give space to House of Wolf to complete their report on behalf of the Yukon Government, and now to begin building our own local connections starting with these two community information sessions. We want to make sure that we are developing good precedents locally, before expanding our horizons to neighbouring communities, but that is an important part of our longer-term plan.

It's also important to keep in mind that, as mentioned previously, it's not uncommon for city centers to end up serving individuals from the surrounding areas. There are many pieces involved in this, including looking at how we can better connect people back to services in their home communities, on top of education about the situation here at the emergency shelter.

CYFN Response

We know many folks who are using shelters/services aren't residents of Whitehorse and are instead travelling to the area.

In terms of CYFN's involvement – a majority of individuals using the shelter are Indigenous, and local to Yukon First Nations. As part of our partnership, we are ensuring we are connecting in with all 14 nations to ensure they understand the operations of the shelter, who can use them, what supports are needed, etc.

The need for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and programs like it comes from people feeling displaced from their communities, and the lack of decentralized services elsewhere.

Question 16

"Food bank – we're a neighbour. Every client can have a bad day. There's been some interest to create a communication channel from, us providing service on the street to be able to diffuse potential issues – is there interest in pursuing this?"

Response

As we touched on at different times during our presentation, collaboration is a core value and major part of our approach as an organization. We know that success for our program and service users must involve the community.

As we settle into shelter operation and move beyond this immediate transitional period, we are eager to begin exploring opportunities for support and collaboration with local partners, in a way that respects the confidentiality and autonomy of our service users.

Question 17

"Staff are other minorities, have disabilities, and some of the residents don't care for them; sometimes it's hard to communicate with the presence of language barriers – Is there a plan for this?"

Response

We also know it's important for residents to see staff who are reflective of them and are cognizant of inter-generational trauma, and its impacts on service users. We want to make sure that service users feel seen, heard, and respected. We also need to carefully navigate a challenging job market, to ensure that we have appropriate numbers of staff to support all who access the shelter.

Recruitment of staff from local Yukon First Nations is a priority, and one we are actively working towards. In addition to a focus on this for recruitment for all positions in the program, CYFN is currently recruiting for two positions that will operate within the program – an Indigenous Liaison and Indigenous Elder.

Beyond this, we take a person-centered approach in all that we do and know the importance of equipping staff with the appropriate skills needed to provide for our service users. We have an extensive screening process to support this.

Question 18

"I live downtown and sit on the board of the Downtown Residents Association. The Association is a good mechanism to get the word out about your work. Are you planning

any changes to the physical layout of the shelter and how that space operates on the street?"

Response

We know there are some recommendations coming down the line regarding this but have nothing to share at the moment. That is driven by a few things, including the findings in the upcoming House of Wolf Report, physical space limitations, and so on.

It's also important to keep in mind that while we are the shelter operators, we don't own the building – any potential changes will be a process of working with the Yukon Government.

Question 19

"When will the House of Wolf report be shared. With who? What is the release plan?"

CYFN Response

As mentioned, the contracts between CYFN and HoW, and between CYFN and the Yukon Government, have concluded, and the draft report is now in the hands of the Yukon Government for review.

After the review process, it is up to the government to decide how and when to release the final version of the report. We look forward to its release, to reading the findings and considering how they might play into future shelter operations, and to seeing how the Yukon Government, for its part, plans to respond as well.

Question 20

"How do you propose to get the clients in a sober mind to participate with an Elder/in a program? How would an Elder feel comfortable in that environment."

Response:

As with all aspects of our programming and organization, we take a person-centered approach and meet people where they're at – this includes our staff and service providers, alongside our service users.

Extending this, we also know that some service users will be willing to access services and others will not. Success – both at the shelter and in the community – is not a one-time thing, but an ongoing project. We're committed to providing for service users in the way that meets their needs and preferences in the moment; we recognize that these may change over time, and are ready and willing to change with them.

CYFN Response

We have established a good relationship with Connective as we've worked together over the years, and as we've operated the Housing First program. We have learned a lot in that time and will take everything that we have learned into practice with the shelter.

We know that some Elders and Knowledge Keepers are not comfortable with providing services to individuals who are actively using, but we have also identified others who are.

Question 21

"Relationship between City bus routes and low barrier clients. Are they welcome to take the busses?"

Response

This is not something that has come up for us. We would love to hear more, so welcome you to reach out so we can learn more context and explore further.

RCMP Response

We're not aware of this happening in the community.