

## Winter Safe Space Lessons Learned

---

April 2018  
Ramsey County Health and Wellness  
Administration, Research and Evaluation  
Unit

## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge Winter Safe Space partner agencies for their assistance with this evaluation. Christine Michels of Catholic Charities helped arrange for client survey interviews and staff interviews. Winter Safe Space staff coordinated client interviews and provided space. Commander Brad Hazelett from the Saint Paul Police Department Central District and Sergeant Mario Ruberto of the Metro Transit Police assisted with the police survey. Ellen Watters and the Saint Paul Foundation provided money for client survey incentives.

We would also like to acknowledge the shelter users who shared their time and experiences.

This evaluation was a joint effort of the Ramsey County Health and Wellness Administration's Research and Evaluation Unit. Mark Herzfeld, Sarah Myott, Allan Malkis, Kathy Gilmore, Zachary Hylton, and Wolde Selameabe all contributed to the evaluation and report.

Dana DeMaster, principal evaluator and supervisor

## Executive Summary

With the closing of Catholic Charities' Dorothy Day Center in the fall of 2017, Ramsey County, Catholic Charities, and the City of Saint Paul recognized that there needed to be a safe, warm space for unsheltered people through the winter. Previously, Catholic Charities had provided overnight shelter in its Dorothy Day facility. With that building torn down to make way for the new Opportunity Center, an alternative had to be provided for the winter of 2017/2018.

The Winter Safe Space (WSS) operated in the old Ramsey County detoxification facility in the Ramsey County Government Center East building from December 1, 2017, to March 31, 2018 and was available from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. It was staffed by two Catholic Charities staff, with assistance from homeless outreach workers and Ramsey County. The WSS had capacity to serve up to 50 people per night. Funding was provided by Ramsey County, Saint Paul, and the Saint Paul Foundation.

The goal of the project was simple – provide short-term, safe shelter for the winter – although it is part of a larger goal of addressing the growing population and needs of unsheltered people in downtown Saint Paul.

The evaluation focuses on two major questions:

1. What have we learned this winter to inform and improve practices for future years?
2. Did the WSS decrease the number of people sleeping in other places, like skyways or on transit? Did WSS serve the intended audience of unsheltered people rather than acting as an overflow for other shelters?

To answer those questions, evaluation staff surveyed WSS users, surveyed Saint Paul and Metro Transit Police, analyzed user data from administrative data systems and staff records, and interviewed WSS staff and the supervisor.

Recommendations:

- 1) Change the referral process to account for people seeking referrals during the day and to reduce the use of emergency response.
- 2) Provide additional staff in the first two hours to assist with intake and allow time to interview people and connect them with resources.
- 3) Revisit the hours the shelter is available and consider opening earlier and/or staying open later in the morning.
- 4) Decide whether the target audience is the unsheltered and clarify the role WSS plays in providing shelter overflow to Higher Ground and other shelters.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Evaluation Description .....	1
Results.....	2
Discussion.....	15
Recommendations.....	17
Appendix A: Survey Questions .....	18
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	22

## Introduction

With the closing of Catholic Charities' Dorothy Day Center in the fall of 2017, Ramsey County, Catholic Charities, and the City of Saint Paul recognized that there needed to provide a safe, warm space for unsheltered people through the winter. Previously, Catholic Charities had provided overnight shelter in its Dorothy Day facility. With that building torn down to make way for the new Opportunity Center, an alternative had to be provided for the winter of 2017/2018.

Through its Outside In partnership, Catholic Charities, the city, and the county came together, with other partners including the Saint Paul Foundation, Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD), Metropolitan Transit Police, and non-profits serving people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, to provide the Winter Safe Space. The Winter Safe Space (WSS) operated in the old Ramsey County detoxification facility in the Ramsey County Government Center East building from December 1, 2017, to March 31, 2018 and was available from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. It was staffed by two Catholic Charities staff, with assistance from homeless outreach workers and Ramsey County. The WSS had capacity to serve up to 50 people per night. Funding was provided by Ramsey County, Saint Paul, and the Saint Paul Foundation.

People using the shelter were required to have a referral from either a police officer (in the form of their business card), Higher Ground or Union Gospel Mission shelters, or an outreach worker to avoid lines forming and to better target the unsheltered. Once users had a referral they could return on subsequent nights with no additional referral. Users were offered a sleeping mat and bedding, coffee and light snacks, and assessments to connect them with Coordinated Entry and other services.

The goal of the project was simple – provide short-term, safe shelter for the winter – although it is part of a larger goal of addressing the growing population and needs of unsheltered people in downtown Saint Paul.

## Evaluation Description

The Ramsey County Health and Wellness Administration's Research and Evaluation Unit was asked to evaluate the WSS and make recommendations about "lessons learned" for future years. The WSS is not a long-term solution for the needs of unsheltered people, however, in a cold climate there will be an ongoing need to provide this type of facility and services in some way. The evaluation focuses on two major questions:

1. What have we learned this winter to inform and improve practices for future years?
2. Did the WSS decrease the number of people sleeping in other places, like skyways or on transit? Did WSS serve the intended audience of unsheltered people rather than acting as an overflow for other shelters

**Methods.** The evaluation used four methods to answer these questions.

First, data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and data collected by program staff was analyzed to determine:

- Who used the WSS and what were the usage patterns?
- Were WSS users “known” to HMIS, meaning they had accessed other services for people experiencing homelessness, or were they new clients?
- How many shelter users were assessed and referred for longer term services?

Second, a survey was sent electronically to nine Metro Transit police officers and 26 SPPS officers to assess their experience, ease of referral, communication with partners, and knowledge about the WSS. The SPPD Central District Commander and Metro Transit Internal Affairs manager provided email addresses for police officers working in downtown Saint Paul and encouraged police officers to respond.

Third, two WSS staff and one supervisor were interviewed to better understand staffing needs, how well referral and other processes, how well the detox site met the needs of staff and shelter users, and interactions and communication with partners and other Ramsey County staff. Interviews were at a place of the person’s choosing in the week following closure of WSS.

Finally, using a survey tool, 56 users of the shelter were interviewed during the last two weeks of March. Interviews were conducted on-site on Thursday, March 22 and Saturday, March 24, from 10 p.m. to 12 a.m. and on Tuesday, March 27 and Thursday, March 28 from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. Participants were given a \$5 to thank them for their time.

## Results

**Who and How People Used the Winter Safe Space.** Catholic Charities staff recorded Winter Safe Space clients on the state’s homeless management information system (HMIS). Entries began slowly on the evening of Saturday, December 2, ramped up by mid-December to an average of about 43 per night, and ended on the evening of Friday, March 30. An unduplicated 707 persons stayed in WSS over the 16 weeks for total 4,823 bed nights. Starting on January 1, WSS required clients to have a formal referral in order to enter, which could have altered the make-up of the clientele for the last three months. Capacity was reached 34 times – four times in December, 15 times in January, eight times in February, and seven times in March. Table 1 shows entries and average nightly users per month<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 1. Number of Entries by Month and Average Per Night**

	17-Dec	18-Jan	18-Feb	18-Mar	Total
Entries	1,016	1,344	1,187	1,276	4,823
Average per Night	33.9	43.4	42.4	42.5	40.5

At entry clients were given breathalyzers to assess whether they were intoxicated. In December 10 percent of clients were intoxicated, in January 12 percent were, in February 17 percent were, and nine percent were in March.

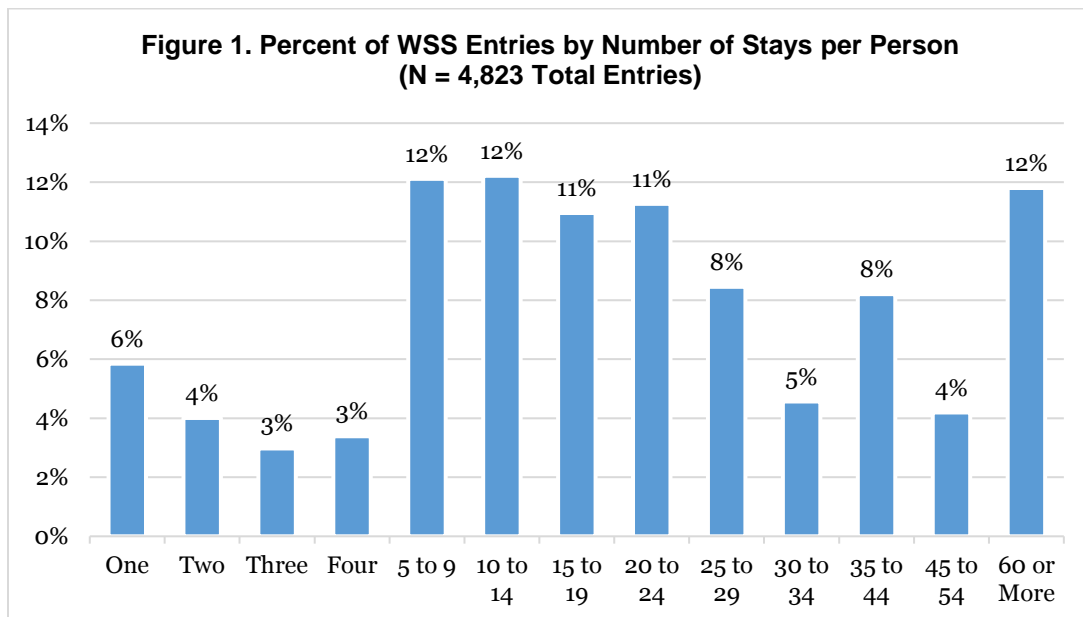
<sup>1</sup> Evaluation staff found different number of clients served than Catholic Charities tracking and reporting. Evaluation excluded people who only stayed at WSS for a few hours. Some clients were not entered in HMIS. This difference is about one person per night.

Forty-six percent of the persons and 52 percent of the entries were Black people, far greater than any other racial or ethnic group. Females comprised one-fifth and Latino six percent of both the number of unduplicated persons and number of entries. Asian people had the greatest number of entries per person (8.8) and White people the lowest (5.9). Table 2 shows race/ethnicity and gender of WSS users.

**Table 2. Race, Gender, and Ethnicity of WSS Users**

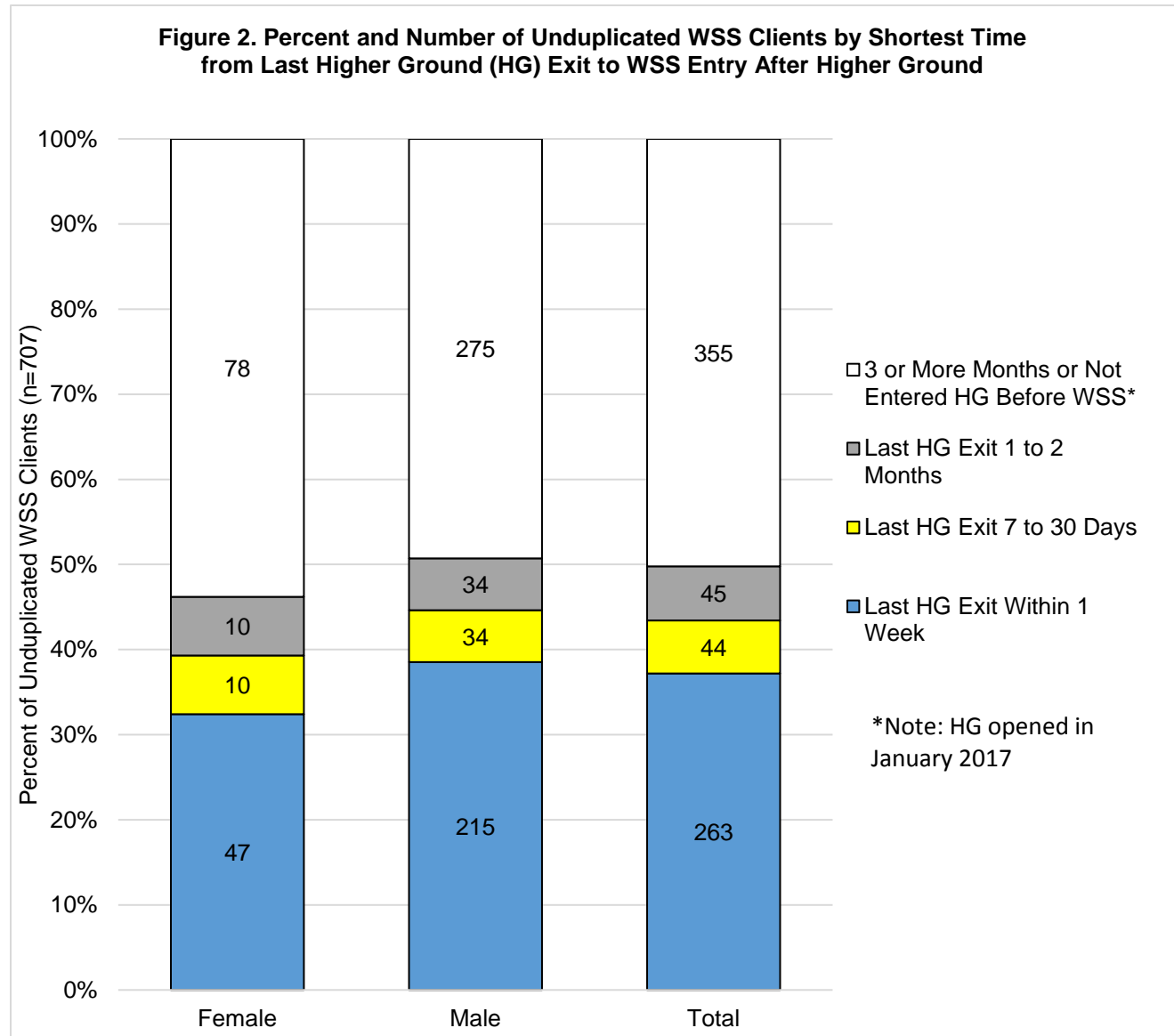
Race	Total Entries	Unduplicated People	Entries per Person	Percent of Entries	Percent of People
American Indian	272	41	6.6	6%	6%
Asian	272	31	8.8	6%	4%
Black	2,484	324	7.7	52%	46%
Multiple Races	221	36	6.1	5%	5%
Unknown	109	25	4.4	2%	4%
White	1,465	250	5.9	30%	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,823</b>	<b>707</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	1,007	146	6.9	21%	21%
Male	3,799	557	6.8	79%	79%
Other / Unknown	17	4	4.3	0%	1%
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
Latino/Hispanic	302	48	6.3	6%	7%

The number of times a person entered varied from once to 92 times. About two-fifths (287) of the clients stayed only one night, accounting for only 6 percent of the entries. In contrast, a little over one-fifth of persons (150) stayed at least 10 nights and accounted for 72 percent of the entries (Figure 1)



Note: No one had between 55 and 59 entries, and 19 persons stayed 60 or more times.

Of the 707 total unduplicated WSS clients, 37 percent (263) had at least one entry into WSS seven days or less after their most recent exit from a Higher Ground shelter in St. Paul. Another 6 percent last exited Higher Ground one week to a month and another 6 percent one to three months prior. These percentages do not include stays at other shelters, whether in Ramsey County or elsewhere. As a result, half the WSS clients had last exited Higher Ground more than three months before WSS or never entered Higher Ground at all since it opened. These figures do not describe future entries into Higher Ground after WSS, only Higher Ground exits before a person entered WSS.



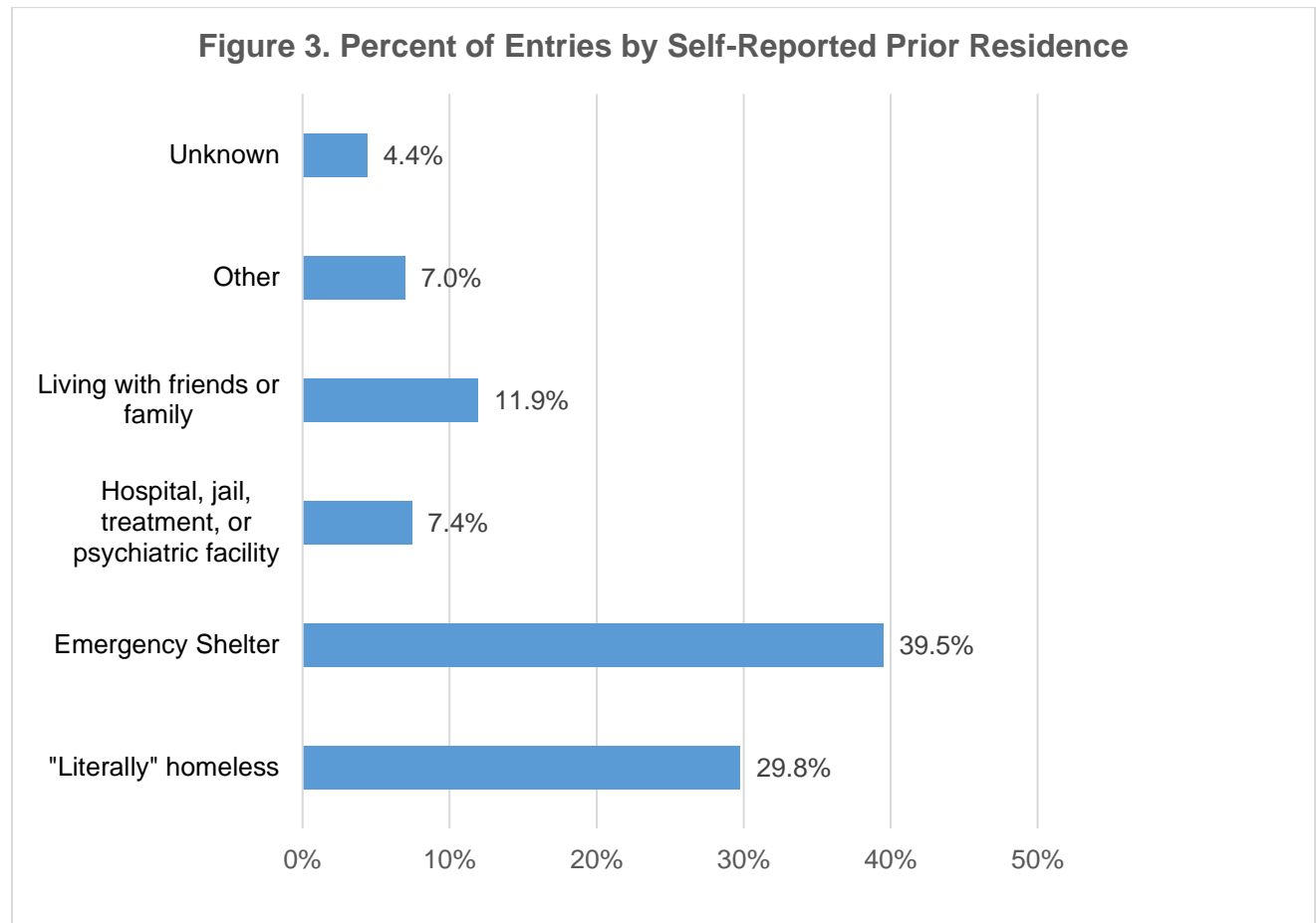
Source: HMIS shelter stays recorded at Higher Ground and entries at WSS

Figure 3 shows that the recent shelter stays at Higher Ground mirror the self-reported living situation by the client at WSS entry. Among the roughly 4,800 times a client entered, 39 percent reported an emergency shelter as their prior residence. Another thirty percent indicated to the



WSS staff they stayed in a place not meant for human habitation, also described as “literally homeless.”

In terms of the nightly entries, 28 percent of the beds were occupied by a client who had never stayed at Higher Ground and another 17 percent of the entries came from those who most recently exited Higher Ground at least three months prior to that night. The time since last Higher Ground exit didn’t vary significantly by age group, with the youngest and oldest least likely to have come from a Higher Ground shelter in Saint Paul in less than three months.



Source: HMIS data from self-reported prior residence by clients at each entry.

One of the goals of WSS was to connect unsheltered people with mainstream resources, including Coordinated Entry. It was anticipated that people who normally do not use shelters would use this space and have the opportunity to work with outreach workers to connect with services. Catholic Charities staff tracked the number of people assessed for housing through Coordinated Entry. In December seven percent of users were received an assessment and in January, six percent were assessed. In February this jumped to 32 percent and in March, 33 percent were assessed.

**Police Survey.** The police survey had a response rate of 69 percent with sixteen responses from the Saint Paul Police Department and seven responses from the Metro Transit Police.

Officers responding to the survey worked day, evening, and overnight shifts in roughly equal proportions. All but one officer reported that they had heard of the Winter Safe Space before the survey and the majority (87 percent) found out through a roll call briefing. Thirty-five percent found out through word of mouth, including other officers and unsheltered people.

All but one respondent referred at least one person to the WSS. The one who did not was on leave for most of the time WSS was operating. Three-quarters of the officers referred 10 or more people and everyone referred at least three people. The most common referral method was giving their business card (100 percent<sup>2</sup>). Forty-one percent also called WSS. A few others reported that they called the “data channel” or called an outreach worker. Nearly all reported that making a referral was easy.

While planning WSS it was anticipated that officers would find an unsheltered person and then make the referral, but police responding to the survey reported that this was not typically how referrals worked. Nearly all had people approach them to ask for referrals (91 percent) and 82 percent reported that they were asked for a referral during the day for later that night. In the comments section, officers said that they would prefer using a different referral method than business cards as they often ran out and saw printed cards as expensive when just card on office paper would suffice. Multiple officers reported that people used 911 and emergency call buttons on trains to summon police to ask for a referral which they saw as an inappropriate use of emergency response.

Comments regarding referrals included:

“I work downtown evenings and everywhere I went I was asked for a referral. I felt most of these people stayed there every night. Also, people were calling 911 from somewhere to get a referral.”

“I gave out a ton of business cards. We should be able to get a special voucher that we can give out.”

“It seemed like the WSS just became an overflow shelter. That it veered away from the original purpose of being an emergency shelter for people police encountered who were in need of shelter after Higher Ground was closed or full. Soon after it opened and word got out about it, people sought out officers or hit the emergency/911 buttons.”

“Have another option instead of using officers’ business cards. Officers run out of business cards quickly and it would be nice to maybe have cost effective brochures.”

“The only concern I can add as a Transit Officer we had people activating our emergency buttons on the light rail platform stating they had emergencies or had a criminal act to report to get officers to respond to them faster and then when Officers arrived they advised officers they just wanted a referral. This tied up resources when dealing with other situations. There needs to be a better way to get these people into the building having them respond to a central spot

---

<sup>2</sup> Officers could have multiple responses to the question so the responses total more than 100 percent.

with safe space employees leaving Officer contact as they deal with people who will benefit from the services and not come running to false calls as they know officers will come faster when it is believed a criminal situation has occurred. It would be nice to have them just respond there and primarily deal with safe space employees and have officers as a back up when we are out in the community and we observe people who may not know about the service and get them set up with the service.”

Ninety-one percent agreed that WSS “made their job easier by providing a quick way to assist a homeless person” and 68 percent agreed that WSS “provided them peace of mind that there were places for homeless people to go.” Sixty-eight percent also felt there was a decrease in police calls from residents/businesses about homeless people, but only 48 percent felt WSS increased the public’s sense of safety downtown.

About a quarter of respondents did not have interactions with WSS staff, but those who did all felt the staff were helpful, polite and respectful, were knowledgeable about resources, and were able to answer their questions about WSS (between 61 and 77 percent of total respondents).

In addition to comments about the use of emergency response and business cards, officers overall felt that WSS went well and that it was a good resource. Some wanted the WSS to open earlier, especially when there were large events downtown.

**Interviews with Staff.** Evaluation staff conducted interviews with one supervisor and two staff members who worked at the WSS. The supervisor was there all of December and then several times a week in January-March. The other two staff members were those who most frequently worked at WSS.

#### Referral Process & Clientele

Interviews began by asking staff about the referral process. The WSS started a formal referral process in January 2018, where a client needed a referral from SPPD, Metro Transit, Higher Ground or Union Gospel Mission. Clients needed a new referral for each day they sought to stay at WSS. In the month of December, there was no formal referral process as the Outside In grant had not yet begun. All interviewed staff agreed that they had a very strong and positive relationship with referring officers from Saint Paul Police Department and Metro Transit. Many clients were also referred by Higher Ground and Outside In outreach workers as well as others.

Staff and the supervisor referred to occasional issues with clients sent over from hospitals. The Supervisor indicated that inappropriate hospital referrals were a systemic problem for all shelter providers. Staff said that hospital discharge referrals were sometimes accepted, especially if made by a police officer on behalf of the hospital. Over time they also started to get calls outside of Ramsey County. In these cases, the caller was told that a referral was still needed through one of their approved referral sources. One staff member noted that they overheard clients talking about selling their referrals to other individuals.

All three respondents indicated that WSS often sheltered clients that may have otherwise stayed at Higher Ground. In many cases, Higher Ground was full and clients were referred over to WSS. In other cases, clients had been restricted from Higher Ground. Staff also indicated that

some clients sought out WSS because they preferred it over the larger shelters. In some cases, clients were veterans or had other past experiences that made it hard for them to be in large crowds and around a lot of noise. Some couples also sought out WSS because they had more opportunity to spend time together than at other shelters. Staff also mentioned that there were times when clients ended up at WSS who were not really homeless, but, for various reasons, could not return home that night. Examples mentioned included domestic violence, intoxication, or not having money to get home. There were also occasional clients from Minneapolis or other communities who just wanted to visit the new shelter and see what it was like.

At first, WSS would turn individuals away after they met a general 50-person capacity. They eventually shifted to having capacity limits by gender, where they would allow up to 35 males and 15 females. This was due to concerns over capacity within the men's area of the shelter. Staff did believe that there was a higher demand for WSS than they were able to meet. Two staff reported that turned away due to being full on average 10 people per night and one night 40-50 clients were turned away.

Staff reported that clients overall did not have problems finding WSS. In the beginning, this was more of an issue, but improved after staff started directing clients to use the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street entrance instead of the Kellogg entrance, and that the space was the former Detox location. This was familiar to law enforcement personnel and to many clients.

#### Intake Process & Nightly Routine

Staff reported that the intake and evening process went as follows: clients would start lining up outside the WSS prior to the shelter opening at 10 pm. Clients would wait in line and complete an intake process (described below), would be provided with bedding, and invited to spend time in a community space where there were snacks. Over time, staff found that clients were sometimes skipping over the intake process and heading right for the community area. They then implemented a ticketing system, where they would receive a snack ticket after completing the intake. At first, staff would provide returning clients with fresh bedding each day. In order to save on laundering resources, they soon changed to bagging and saving bedding from the previous night, to give back to clients if they returned the following night.

Staff reported that the intake process went fairly well, although sometimes there was a line of people waiting to get in and the first hour was very busy. Staff thought having a third person to assist when there was a line would have been valuable at times. Having more support at intake time would allow staff to spend more time answering client questions and referring them to resources. Everyone without an HMIS/shelter card did the HMIS 30-minute interview and everyone was asked 6 (originally 10) additional questions. These questions addressed: (1) whether the client was under the influence of alcohol, and if so, at what blood alcohol level, (2-5) who referred the client to WSS, whether they were working with an outreach worker, whether they were restricted from Higher Ground and in need of restorative justice, whether they were interested in being called in the future about an open bed at Higher Ground, and (6) whether they have completed a housing assessment.

Staff reported that they put a strong emphasis on making WSS a welcoming environment where clients felt respected. Staff put a lot of effort into building rapport with clients, listening to their experiences, and talking with them about services and resources. They also made small efforts such as buying ice for the water, which was warm. Staff also emphasized being fair and honest and provided clear and consistent expectations around behavior in WSS. This allowed clients to help feel ownership of their own behavior in the space.

After intake, clients had several hours to eat snacks and socialize in a common space. Staff reported making efforts to interact with clients and get to know them before “lights out”. Clients were given access to clean linens and had a mat for the floor plus blankets, etc. Staff described receiving donations of clothing and winter gear which were distributed to clients.

### Morning Routine and Closure

In the morning staff would do a “soft waking” at 5:30 am by turning on the lights. The staff would then start talking loudly at 6:00 am, with the expectation that all clients were off their mats by 6:30 am. Clients were expected to be out of the space before 7:00 am. Outreach workers from Outside In were also available at least two days a week. Medical services were available at least on morning a week.

### Hours, Location and Facilities

Overall, staff thought the location and facilities worked well. There were some issues with sewage pipes breaking, elevators getting stuck and lack of heat, but all were attended to promptly by maintenance. The clothes dryer caused several false fire alarms until it was repositioned. One staff thought having a third room open and staffed would allow for more clients to stay at WSS.

Staff responded very highly about the Ramsey County property management staff. They felt that there was a very positive relationship. Whenever there was an issue, property management was always very responsive with addressing the issue. Staff did report some issues around other Ramsey County employees (not property management or leadership) where clients and staff leaving WSS in the morning would have negative and unwelcoming experiences with Ramsey County staff entering the building in the morning.

Although the hours worked well from an operational perspective, staff did mention that it could be of benefit to clients to have WSS open earlier in the evening and close later in the morning. In the evening, clients often don’t have places to go until 10 pm when they can enter WSS. Having the shelter close at 7 am means that clients often only get five or six hours of sleep in the night. They thought it would be nice if, even on the weekend when Ramsey County offices are closed, that clients had an opportunity to sleep longer.

### Support and Resources

Staff felt that they had the resources and support from management to operate the Winter Safe Space. Staff also generally felt that there was enough staffing capacity each night, though having additional support at intake could be a benefit. Although there was adequate staffing, there were only a few staff who rotated through staffing WSS, requiring them to work extra hours with few days off.

### Room for Improvement

Although staff felt that the WSS operations went very well and felt very proud of what they provided, there were a few areas for improvement that came up during the interviews.

- The 2017-2018 WSS was put together in a tight amount of time. In the future it would be helpful to start planning earlier in the year.
- Make sure referral cards had the full name of the client, in order to deter selling of referrals
- Anecdotally, staff were able to estimate the number of persons turn away each night. In the future it would be helpful to track referrals/calls that were turned away. Include the referral source and reason for turning away
- Have outreach workers present in the evening as well. Clients often seemed to have a lot more questions and interest in talking in the evening than in the morning.
- Have the outreach workers and medical services available more frequently in the morning. Consider having outreach workers there at the night open as well.
- Have a Ramsey County worker present to assist clients with county benefits
- Expanding the hours of WSS, in order to reduce congestion with intake at night and allow clients to sleep later in the morning (especially on weekends, when RC is not open).
- If snacks are going to be provided, make them more nutritious. Having a refrigerator would allow for the storage of healthier foods. Also, having a cold water fountain or ice machine.

**Client Interviews.** Evaluators surveyed 56 users of the WSS on four different dates and times. Two survey sessions were at night, from 10 p.m. to 12 a.m. and two were in the morning from 6:15 a.m. to 7:15 a.m. The 56 surveys reached eight percent of the total 707 users and are not a representative sample of the total number of users.

**Table 3. How Did You Find Out About WSS?**

	Number	Percent
Total	56	100%
Higher Ground	23	41%
Friend/Family/Word of Mouth	16	29%
Police	9	16%
Union Gospel Mission	3	5%
Other	5	9%

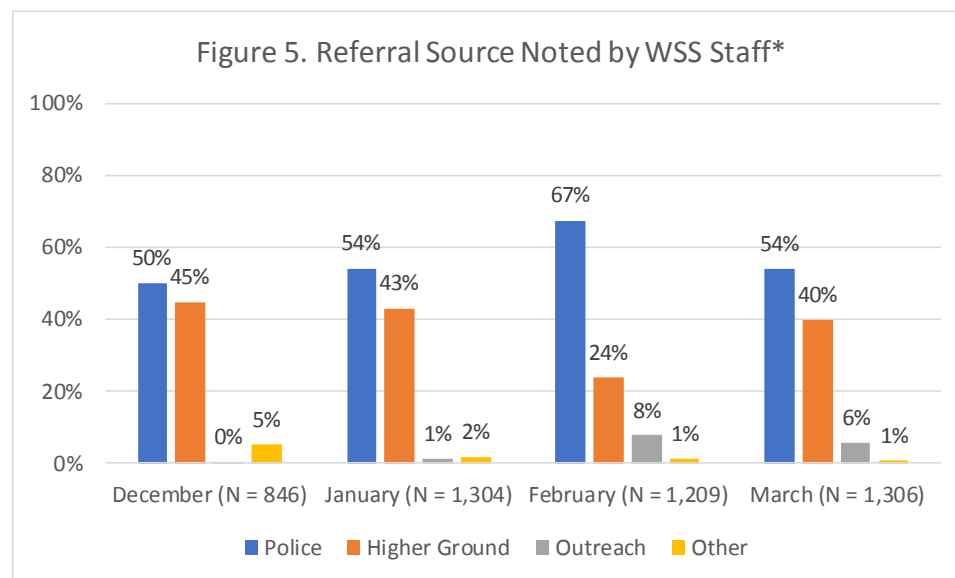
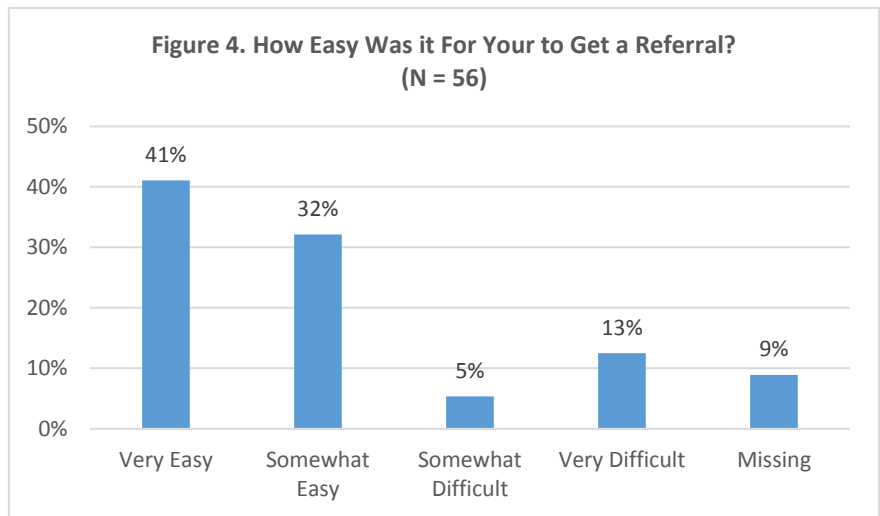
As shown in Table 3, 41 percent of users found out about WSS from Higher Ground. Nearly a third found out via word-of-mouth, a friend, or family member and the police told 16 percent. Ninety-three percent of respondents chose to come to WSS on their own, but five percent did not choose to come. Nearly all (93 percent) of respondents were referred.



More than 46 percent of users were referred by the police. Another 30 percent were referred by Higher Ground, while most of the rest were referred by another shelter or outreach agencies. As shown in Figure 4, 73 percent reported that getting a referral was very easy or easy, while 18 percent reported that it was somewhat difficult or difficult. Most comments regarding referrals were positive, but a few people indicated they “got the runaround” or were told to go to Higher Ground first.

Reported referral source from the client surveys was somewhat consistent with referral sources reported by

WSS staff. While 46 percent of those surveyed reported being referred by the police, 54 percent were referred by the police in March according to WSS staff data collection. Thirty percent of survey respondents reported being referred by Higher Ground, compared to 40 percent of referrals tracked by WSS staff. As shown in Figure 5, police referrals were the most common, ranging from 50 percent in December to 67 percent in February. In February the number and percent of police referrals grew by more than 100 referrals and referrals from Higher Ground decreased nearly in half. Not surprisingly, referrals by outreach workers increased from one percent in January to eight percent in February and six percent in March as January and early February were when Outside In outreach workers started their work.



\* Please note that totals in this figure are not consistent with total duplicated users as noted in HMIS or by WSS staff. Some referrals were not tracked or people did not have a referral and not all users were entered in HMIS.

The majority (70 percent) of users arrived at WSS the first time by foot. The next largest group came by public transportation (13 percent). Four percent were shuttled from Higher Ground. Sixty-three percent reported that the first time they came to WSS the location was easy to find and another 20 percent said it was somewhat easy. Twenty-two percent experienced difficulty finding the location.

When asked where they would have stayed that night if WSS was not available half of respondents would have stayed on the train. The next largest group (18 percent) would have stayed outside. Table 4 shows all responses. About two-thirds reported spending a night at another shelter this winter and one-third did not. Of the 36 people who reported spending a night at another shelter, 75 percent said it was another Higher Ground location, both Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Of the shelters in Saint Paul, Higher Ground was the most common followed by Union Gospel and Booth Brown.

**Table 4. Where Would You Have Stayed if WSS Was Not Available**

	Number	Percent
Total	56	100%
On the train	28	50%
Outside	11	20%
Higher Ground/Union Gospel	7	13%
Do not know	5	9%
Friend/Family	5	9%

Of those who stayed at another shelter this winter, 75 percent preferred WSS to other shelters. The main reasons reported (Table 5) were related to smaller space/less people (11), restful environment (9), staff (8), open later in the evening (4), and access or location (4).

There were seven people who did not prefer WSS. The main reasons were having to wake up and leave early, no smoking, and cleanliness.

More than 95 percent of WSS users reported staff were both helpful and polite and respectful. Eighty-four percent said staff were knowledgeable about resources and 77 percent said staff were able to connect them to resources.



**Table 5. Reasons People Preferred WSS to Other Shelters**

Reasons	Number	Percent	Quotes
Space: Smaller, less people, nicer, more room clean	11	30%	
Peaceful/restful/easier to sleep/low key, quiet, not institutional	9	25%	<i>You can lay your head down. Laid back. Not too much drama.</i>
Staff: nice, respectful, cool, treat you like a human, help with housing	8	22%	<i>They are inviting and approachable. They are genuinely caring and don't judge people. The two people here are very humble. You don't feel like you are begging, they don't want to break you, they are fair - no favoritism</i>
Hours: start earlier than 10 pm	4	11%	
People: Nice, friends	4	11%	
Easy access/good location	4	11%	<i>Easy to get in, no waiting to enter</i>
Food	2	6%	
General positive comments	2	6%	
Safety	1	3%	<i>Not a bunch of people stealing stuff, could take boots off and not have them stolen</i>

When asked where they planned to stay when WSS closed, 82 percent reported having one plan while 18 percent mentioned multiple options. The three most common responses were Higher Ground or another shelter (45 percent), “I don’t know” (18 percent), or an apartment they had arranged or chemical dependency treatment (6 percent). People also reported staying with friends, outside, the train, vehicle, or leaving the state. One person reported she was likely to exchange sex for a place to stay.

Table 6 summarizes the types of comments made by 40 people who responded to this question. The percent column exceeds 100 percent because people made multiple comments. Forty-two percent shared general positive comments such as “WSS is good” or “I like it.” Ten percent commented on the environment being quiet, a space that is safe and warm without fights. Twenty percent commented on staff being respectful, caring, and able to keep things cool. Twelve percent appreciated the food options.

Participants also had suggestions for improvement. More food was the most frequent suggestions, followed by the need for more blankets or cots, a change to a later morning closing time, providing bathing/hygiene items, and secure bicycle parking. Other areas of concern were intoxicated people, crowding, sleeping on the floor with a medical condition, privacy, noise, lack of meals, chaotic check-in, and people not being nice.

**Table 6. Comments about WSS**

<b>IS there anything else you would like to add about your experience at WSS?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>WSS is good/I like it:</b> Examples: good that it's here, good, a blessing when you get here, grateful it is here/being on light rail sucks, would refer others, grateful for , helpful/can get in here, Nice to have this place. It would suck without it WSS really helpful (can freeze sleeping on ice and rain), very helpful, I like it here, convenient, I just like it, I like it, hope it continues.	17	43%
<b>Environment:</b> quiet, not a lot of arguments, It's a safe place. It helps me stay warm when it's cold. no fighting here	4	10%
<b>Staff:</b> respectful, good, caring, like, have good standards, charitable, nice, awesome, help you out/keep things cooled down, They told me about housing referral/library on Wednesday	8	20%
<b>Food:</b> coffee good, nice to have snacks, nice when ramen noodles/chips/coffee, nice they feed us unlike Higher Ground, more like a meal yogurt and crackers	5	13%
<b>Suggestions /Needs</b>		
More food (used to be noodles, food, coffee, snack, more bars or breakfast, ran out of food)	7	18%
Need a bath tub or shower, hygiene items	1	3%
Bedding: thicker blanket, cots, more blankets	3	
Change close time in morning to 8 am	1	3%
Need secure bike parking	1	3%
<b>Concerns</b>		
Had surgery – sleeping on floor problem	1	3%
Should not let intoxicated people in; they create a lot of problems, safe except when intoxicated person	2	5%
Privacy not protected	1	3%
Overcontrolling too much; following people and telling them they are wrong	1	3%
Space: packed	2	5%
Don't like people being on their phones, too noisy, alarms going off, toilets dirty	1	3%
No meals	1	3%
The times I've been here, I wake up with sore throat and cough	1	3%
Check-in at 10 pm chaotic	1	3%
People not nice/talk about you	1	3%
<b>Miscellaneous comments</b>		
Police in Minneapolis gave me runaround; easy in downtown st paul	1	3%
Glad about new Higher Ground	1	3%
Everyone amicable	1	3%

## Discussion

The evaluation questions were:

1. What have we learned this winter to inform and improve practices for future years?
2. Did the WSS decrease the number of people sleeping in other places, like skyways or on transit? Did WSS serve the intended audience of unsheltered people rather than acting as an overflow for other shelters?

As this was the first winter using this space, working in this partnership, and using the referral process, there was great opportunity to learn and improve practices. This section discusses referrals, staffing and hours, and audience reached.

**Learning and Improving Practice: Referrals.** The envisioned narrative was that the police would find someone sheltering in the skyway or transit and then would provide a referral to WSS. In reality, many people sought out police officers during the day in preparation for that night. Police reported that “everywhere they went they were asked for a referral” and that some people used 911 or the emergency call buttons on trains to summon a police officer. For the most part, users reported that the referral process was easy and rarely did they have trouble getting a referral. WSS staff also reported good relationships and partnerships with the Saint Paul Police Department and Metro Transit Police. If officers accompanied clients or were present at intake, they would often stay to ensure people were able to get in to WSS.

WSS did often act as Higher Ground overflow, which was not unanticipated, but was also not the primary target users for WSS. Between 24 percent and 45 percent of referrals were from Higher Ground. Higher Ground staff and WSS staff communicated regarding referrals when Higher Ground was full and often ran a shuttle or taxied people to WWS. Higher Ground will not take people who are intoxicated, but WSS would take people with a blood-alcohol content of 0.30 or less. Roughly 10 percent of users were intoxicated at intake. WSS also served as a way for people who were restricted from Higher Ground due to behavior to get their restriction lifted from good behavior at WSS.

WSS staff reported referrals from other sources, like suburban police departments and hospitals. Staff did not accept referrals from hospitals unless made by a police officer on behalf of the hospital. This resulted in challenges for those clients which was particularly burdensome due to health issues that took them to the hospital in the first place.

Police reported concern about the use of business cards. They often ran out of cards and thought cards were expensive and time consuming to have printed. Shelter staff reported that people were bartering referral cards. Suggestions included printing referral slips on regular paper and using full names on the referral so it could not be traded or bartered.

**Learning and Improving Practice: Staffing and Hours.** WSS users overwhelmingly reported staff were respectful and polite (95 percent) and nearly all said they were knowledgeable about resources (84 percent). Police also reported positive interactions with WSS staff. Staff themselves described the need for more staff available during intake as there were often lines and some confusion while trying to interview people and distribute snacks. They would have also liked to have more outreach workers on hand at intake and in the morning. Staff also

mentioned the need to have medical services available more often and having a financial worker available to help people with applications for benefits.

Police, shelter users, and staff commented that next year WSS should open earlier and stay open later in the morning. Police would like the space to be open earlier when there are events downtown. Shelter users commented on the morning rush to wake up and exit as well as the desire to be settled in earlier in the evening. Staff wanted more time to work with outreach workers, as well as a longer time to do intakes.

One consideration is communication and information for Ramsey County Government Center East (RCGC) staff. While users did not mention any negative interactions, staff said that RCGC staff were often rude or made disparaging comments in the morning. There were two incidents that resulted in police calls. Extra police presence was on hand and users were encouraged to leave the area and not loiter. Next year communication with RCGC staff about the generally positive or neutral experience of this year and role of human services in supporting the community, including the unsheltered, could be increased and start earlier.

**Learning and Improving Practice: Targeted Audience.** The stated intentions of providing WSS included providing shelter for the unsheltered who would otherwise stay in skyways, on transit, or other outside places and to decrease public concern about the unsheltered in downtown Saint Paul. Overall, it seems that WSS did a fair job reaching the target audience. Just more than half of users had not stayed at Higher Ground for at least three months before WSS entry or had never stayed at Higher Ground. Thirty-seven percent had stayed at Higher Ground the same week they had a WSS entry. According to Catholic Charities WSS staff records, 109 people were new to HMIS (15 percent) which means they had not previously received services from a provider who uses HMIS. So, about half could be considered “unsheltered,” although many of those had used Higher Ground earlier in the year.

Clients surveyed reported that if WSS were not available that night, 70 percent said they would have stayed either on the train (50 percent) or outside (20 percent). Only 13 percent said they would have stayed at Higher Ground or Union Gospel Mission. Contrary to this, nearly half (45 percent) planned on staying at Higher Ground or another shelter when WSS closed. Perhaps some people who would have stayed outside or on transit were figuring on Higher Ground already being full that night or, aspirationally, would like to stay at the shelter while in reality they might not.

About two-thirds of police survey respondents agreed that WSS provided them peace of mind that there were places for homeless people to go and felt there was a decrease in police calls from residents/businesses regarding homeless people. Just less than half felt that WSS increased the public’s sense of safety downtown.

## Recommendations

- 1) Change the referral process to account for people seeking referrals during the day and to reduce the use of emergency response.

Next winter, WSS planners should account for day-time referral seeking and find alternative ways to either make a referral or allow people to contact police without using emergency response. Using a referral card printed on regular paper with the person's name would cut down on the use of business cards and result in less bartering. Perhaps a central location where people could go to get a referral could be used.

If referrals will not be accepted from entities, like hospitals, partners should communicate early with these entities to avoid inappropriate referrals that result in clients having to be sent back to the hospital or having to find another referral source.

- 2) Provide additional staff in the first two hours to assist with intake and allow time to interview people and connect them with resources.

Staff identified a need for more people to assist with intakes to avoid lines and to better assist with resources. Consider having medical services available more often, as well as outreach workers and possibly a financial worker available in the evening.

- 3) Revisit the hours the shelter is available and consider opening earlier and/or staying open later in the morning.

All sources desired longer hours for different reasons. Police faced competing time pressures during large events downtown. Users wanted to sleep longer and be settled in for the night earlier. Staff wanted more time for intakes, more time for sleep, and more time to provide links to services.

- 4) Decide whether the target audience is the unsheltered and clarify the role WSS plays in providing shelter overflow.

About half of users (47 percent) had stayed at Higher Ground within a month of their WSS stay. According to clients surveyed, 30 percent were referred by Higher Ground and, according to WSS staff tracking, Higher Ground referrals varied from 24 percent (February) to 45 percent (December) with 40 percent being referred by Higher Ground in March. WSS was serving as both a space for the unsheltered and Higher Ground overflow in about equal measure.

If the intent is to target the unsheltered and not serve as shelter overflow for Higher Ground, priority could be given to people who had not stayed at Higher Ground in the referral process. If WSS opened at a closer time to the Higher Ground curfew that would allow prioritization of unsheltered or police referrals with any remaining beds made available for shelter overflow.

## Appendix A: Survey Questions

### Winter Safe Space Participant Survey

Surveyor Name:

Date:

Time:

We are conducting a brief survey to learn more about experiences with the Winter Safe Space this year. This survey is completely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Your responses will not be linked back to you in any way, and have no influence on the services you receive. You may choose not to answer any questions you wish or stop the survey at any time. After completing this survey, you will receive a \$5.00 stipend for your participation. In order to receive this stipend, you must sign your name on a stipend distribution form. Again, your signature will not be connected to your survey responses in any way.

1. Do you wish to continue?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. How did you find out about WSS?

3. Did you choose to come to WSS?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Were you referred to WSS?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4a. (If yes to Q4) Who referred you? (check all that apply)

☐ Police/Transit Police ☐ Higher Ground St. Paul  
☐ Union Gospel Mission (UGM) ☐ Street Outreach Worker  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

4b. (If yes to Q4) How easy was it for you to get a referral?

☐ Very Difficult ☐ Somewhat Difficult ☐ Somewhat Easy ☐ Very Easy

5. Thinking back to the first time you came to WSS, how did you arrive? (check all that apply)

☐ Walk ☐ Public Transportation ☐ Police  
☐ Shuttle from Higher Ground St. Paul ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. The first time you came to WSS, how easy was it to find?

☐ Very Difficult ☐ Somewhat Difficult ☐ Somewhat Easy ☐ Very Easy

7. Where would you have stayed last night if WSS was not available?

8. Have you spent a night at another shelter this winter?

☐ Yes ☐ No

8a. (If yes to Q8) Which ones? (check all that apply)

☐ Higher Ground St. Paul ☐ Higher Ground Minneapolis  
☐ Union Gospel Mission (UGM) ☐ St. Stephens  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

8b. (If yes to Q8) Do you prefer WSS to other shelters?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

8b1. (If yes to Q7) Why?

9. WSS staff/Street Outreach were:

	Yes	No	N/A
Helpful to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Polite and respectful to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledgeable about resources I could use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Able to connect me resources I could use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Where do you plan to stay when WSS closes?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience with WSS?

12. How old are you?

13. How do you define your race? *(check all that apply)*

- ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native    ☐ Asian    ☐ Black/African American  
☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander    ☐ White/Caucasian    ☐ Other\_\_\_\_\_

14. How do you define your ethnicity?

- ☐ Hispanic/Latino    ☐ Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino

15. How do you define your gender? *(check all that apply)*

- ☐ Female    ☐ Male    ☐ Transgender    ☐ Other\_\_\_\_\_

### Police Survey.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey about the Winter Safe Space. Your comments and responses will help Ramsey County, Catholic Charities, and its partners to improve any safe space winter programming happening in the future.

The Winter Safe Space was an emergency overnight shelter for homeless people which operated at the Ramsey County Government Center East (160 E. Kellogg Blvd.) between December 1 and March 13, 2018.

Your answers are confidential and will only be seen by Ramsey County evaluation staff. No identifying information is being collected.

### Winter Safe Space Police Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey about the Winter Safe Space. Your comments and responses will help Ramsey County, Catholic Charities, and its partners to improve any safe space winter programming happening in the future.

The Winter Safe Space was an emergency overnight shelter for homeless people which operated at the Ramsey County Government Center East (160 E. Kellogg Blvd.) between December 1, 2017 and March 31, 2018.

Your answers are confidential and will only be seen by Ramsey County evaluation staff. No identifying information is being collected.

1) Have you heard of the Winter Safe Space before this survey?



- ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 2) How did you find out about Winter Safe Space? (please check all that apply)
- ☐ Roll call/Briefing  
☐ Handout/Brochure  
☐ Word of mouth from other officers  
☐ Other, please specify
- 3) How easy was it to understand how to make a referral to Winter Safe Space?
- ☐ Very Easy  
☐ Easy  
☐ Neither easy nor difficult  
☐ Difficult  
☐ Very Difficult  
☐ If you answered difficult or very difficult, please explain why you think so.
- 4) What shifts did you work between December 1, 2017, and March 31, 2018? (check all that apply)
- ☐ Days  
☐ Evenings  
☐ Overnight  
☐ All of the above
- 5) Did you refer anyone to Winter Safe Space?
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Don't remember
- 6) Approximately how many people did you refer to the Winter Safe Space this winter?
- ☐ 1  
☐ 2  
☐ 3 to 5  
☐ 6 to 10  
☐ More than 10  
☐ I don't remember
- 7) If you referred someone to the Winter Safe Space, how did you make the referral? (please check all that apply)
- ☐ Gave my business card  
☐ Called Winter Safe Space  
☐ Called an outreach worker  
☐ Other, please specify
- 8) Did anyone approach you and ask for a referral to the Winter Safe Space (even if they didn't know the name)?
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No
- 9) Did you make referrals during daytime hours (before 10 pm) for later that same night?
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No



10) How easy was it to provide directions to Winter Safe Space?

- ☐ Very Easy
- ☐ Easy
- ☐ Neither easy nor difficult
- ☐ Difficult
- ☐ Very Difficult
- ☐ If you answered difficult or very difficult, please explain why you think so.

11) Where did you most often find homeless people during your shift this winter? Please rank these from 1 – 6 where 1 is most often and 6 is least often.

- ☐ Skyways
- ☐ Closed buildings
- ☐ Parks
- ☐ Transit (bus, train)
- ☐ On the street
- ☐ Other

12) Did having Winter Safe Space available

	Yes	No	I don't know/no difference
Increase the public's sense of safety in downtown			
Make your job easier by providing a quick way to assist homeless people you encounter			
Provide you peace of mind that there were places for homeless people to go			
Decrease calls from residents/business owners about homeless people			

13) Winter Safe Space staff were

	Yes	No	NA/Didn't interact with staff
Helpful to me			
Polite and respectful to me			
Knowledgeable about other resources for homeless people			
Able to answer my questions about the Winter Safe Space			

14) Please comment on the Winter Safe Space service. Do you have any suggestions for improving the referral process or service?

15) Before the Winter Safe Space opening December 1, 2017, what did you do when you encountered homeless people outside shelters on winter nights?

16) Which department do you work for?

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### Winter Safe Space Staff Interviews

Thank you for taking time to participate in an interview about the Winter Safe Space. We are conducting these interviews as part of the evaluation of Winter Safe Space. Your feedback will help Ramsey County, Catholic Charities, and its partners to improve any safe space winter programming that happens in the future.

Your individual answers are confidential and will only be seen by Ramsey County evaluation staff. Your individual responses will not be tied back to you, and instead will be grouped with the responses of the other staff.

### Referral and Intake Process

Let's start with the referral and intake process at Winter Safe Space?

1. What feedback do you have about the referral process? What worked well? What could be improved?
  - a. Do you feel like the people who were referred to you were appropriate referrals? Did you notice clients having trouble finding the Winter Safe Space?
2. Who referred clients to you? How did that interaction go?
  - a. Prompt: Ask specifically about police and Higher Ground
3. How did you determine who to let into WSS? Did this practice change over time?
4. Can you describe the intake process when a person arrived at the space? What did this look like? What information did you collect and provide at that time?
5. What worked well with the intake process? What could have been improved?
6. Where do you think these clients would have ended up if the Winter Safe Space was not available?
7. We have noticed that some clients stayed only a few times, while others would come back multiple times. Do you have thoughts on why this is? What led some to come back more than others?
8. Were clients brought to WSS who didn't want to be there?
  - a. Prompt: If so, what were the impacts of this? Who referred these clients?

### Overnight Stays and Location

Next, I'd like to ask you about your experiences at Winter Safe Space as well as where it was housed in the Ramsey County building.

9. The hours of operation were 10PM-7:00AM. Do you recommend these hours for future years? Why or why not? What was helpful/not helpful about these hours?

10. Can you describe a typical night and how it would go?
  - a. Prompts: What strategies did you use to make sure it went well?
  - b. What were some of the challenges that you faced regarding clients, facilities or other issues?
11. Did you feel like you had enough resources, support and staffing to operate the Winter Safe Space?
  - a. What was most helpful?
  - b. What would you change in the future?
12. What kind of services or assistance did you provide to clients while they were at the WSS?
13. What feedback do you have about the location and space of the E. Kellogg building for the Winter Safe Space?
  - a. Prompts: What worked well about the space?
  - b. What didn't work well about the space?
14. Did you ever communicate with, or get feedback from, Ramsey County property management staff? If so, around what needs? How did it go working with the property management staff?

#### Morning Close and Transition

The following set of questions are about the morning when WSS closed and clients left the space.

15. How did closing the space and transitioning the clients out of the space go?
  - a. Prompts:
  - b. What worked well? What could have been better?
  - c. Did you observe or hear about any issues between Ramsey County staff and your staff or clients?
16. How did you coordinate with the outreach workers?
  - a. Prompts: What worked well with that partnership?
  - b. What could have improved?

#### Closing Questions

17. Do you have any other feedback or experiences you would like to share about the Winter Safe Space?