Minutes – Executive Policy Committee – March 12, 2024

REPORTS

Item No. 7 24/7 Safe Space Grant Program: Year Four Update

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and recommended to Council:

1. That this report be received as information.

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Duncan,

That the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service be concurred in and forwarded to Council.

Carried

COUNCIL DECISION:

On September 30, 2020, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee and adopted the following:

1. That 24/7 Safe Space Grant Program funding be awarded to:

    A. Ka Ni Kanichihk in the amount of $150,000 each year for four years (2020-2023);

    B. Spence Neighbourhood Association for The West End 24 Hour Safe Space, in the amount of $100,000 each year for four years (2020-2023).

2. That upon the approval by Council of individual grants, the City enter into, execute and deliver multi-year agreements with the recipients of grants approved by Council, and that authority be delegated to the Chief Administrative Officer to manage, negotiate, and approve the terms and conditions of agreements with grant recipients, in accordance with this report and such other terms and conditions deemed necessary by the Director of Legal Services and City Solicitor to protect the interests of the City.

3. That within 90 days following the end of year 2 (2021) and year 4 (2023) the Community Services Department report back to Executive Policy Committee with an update on program outcomes provided by successful grant recipients.

4. That the Proper Officers of the City be required to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: 24/7 Safe Space Grant Program: Year Four Update

Critical Path: Executive Policy Committee – Council

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2020, Council awarded grants under the 24/7 Safe Space Grant Program to two organizations. Ka Ni Kanichihk was awarded $150,000 each year for four years (2020-2023). The Spence Neighbourhood Association (for the West End 24 Hour Safe Space) was awarded $100,000 each year for the same time period. Council also directed the Public Service to report back to Executive Policy Committee (EPC) within 90 days, following the end of year two (2021) and year four (2023) with an update on the successful grant recipients' program outcomes.

This report provides the second update to EPC and summarizes activities occurring in 2022 and 2023 according to the grant recipients. The report is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview and history of the granting program. The second section highlights outcomes, challenges, and trends identified by each agency in 2022 and 2023. The third and final section concludes the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be received as information.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

In September 2020, Council directed the Public Service to award the 24/7 Safe Space grant program to Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. and the Spence Neighbourhood Association for the West End 24 Hour Safe Space. As part of this disposition, Council directed the Public Service to report back to EPC within 90 days following the end of year two (2021), and year four (2023), with an update regarding program outcomes achieved by successful grant recipients.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no implications associated with the recommendation of this report.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

Background and Context

In June 2019, the Illicit Drug Task Force published its report titled “Recommendations to Reduce the Use and Effects of Illicit Drugs within Manitoba’s Communities”. The report identified 11 recommendations. Of these, the third recommendation called for the improved management of mental health and addictions through 24/7 safe spaces. A 24/7 Safe Space can be defined as a physical space that is welcoming, free of bias or conflict, open 24 hours a day, and that provides shelter, food, and cultural supports, and referrals to health care, housing, income assistance and counseling services.

In response to this recommendation, in 2019 the Executive Policy Committee (EPC) passed a motion directing the Public Service to bring forward options to the first multi-year budget process to fund additional 24/7 safe spaces in Winnipeg. To help facilitate this work, End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW) was asked to provide a scan of existing services and gaps in Winnipeg, as well as potential sites for new or expanded 24/7 services. In September 2019, EHW provided their report “24/7 Safe Spaces in Winnipeg: A Brief Review of Existing Reports and Services”. The report recommended that Council consider funding through a multi-year grant program 24/7 safe space services provided by an existing agency or agencies whose mandate is to work with one or more of the following priority populations: Indigenous people, women, people who use substances, youth, 2SLGBTQQIS+ and sexually exploited girls and women.

In March 2020, Council adopted the 2020-2023 multi-year operating budget which included a grant program to support the delivery of $1,000,000 in new funding over four years to provide 24/7 safe space supports and services in Winnipeg. Through this program, up to $250,000 in funding was made available each year for four years, beginning in 2020 and ending in 2023. At its September 2020 meeting, Council awarded the 24/7 Safe Space Grant to Ka Ni Kanichihk and The Spence Neighbourhood Association (for the West End 24 Hour Safe Space). Ka Ni Kanichihk was awarded $150,000 annually for four years, while the Spence Neighbourhood Association was awarded $100,000 annually for the same period. As part of this motion, Council also directed the Public Service to report back to EPC within 90 days following the end of year two (2021), and the end of year four (2023), with an update regarding program outcomes achieved by successful grant recipients. The following section provides updates from each agency for years three and four of the granting program.

Ka Ni Kanichihk: Velma’s House

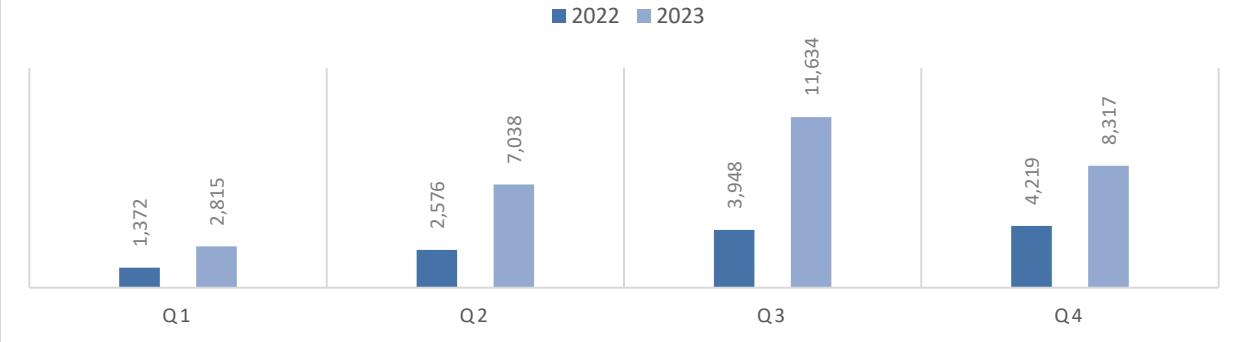
Velma’s House 24/7 Safe Space, led by Ka Ni Kanichihk and supported by a Lived Experience Advisory Committee of Survivors, is a low barrier safe space for adult women and individuals who are gender diverse, that are unsheltered, experiencing sexual exploitation, or fleeing violence. The Lived Experience Advisory Committee of Survivors, which advocated for and began the work of developing a safe space, meets regularly to provide information about community needs and trends experienced in real time. Committee members provide guidance and advice on the services offered at Velma’s house, as well as the overall direction and goals of the space. This allows Velma’s House to continuously improve and remain focused on services that matter and are relevant to the people they serve. Several former group members have moved on to other projects or have become staff members at Velma’s House, and as a result, membership to the Advisory Committee has moved from a closed group to an open group represented by those who are currently accessing services at the safe space.

Velma’s House programming, services, and guiding principles are based on cultural safety, trauma-informed care, harm reduction and anti-oppressive practices. It is important to note that

Indigenous women and the gender diverse community often face significant systemic barriers while accessing safe spaces and social services. For this reason, Velma's House is not only a critical service in Winnipeg, but also one committed to ongoing learning and growth in the area of inclusion and diversity.

In 2022 and 2023, Velma's House experienced significant growth and demand for service. In terms of client volume, Velma's house experienced a 17 percent increase in the number of total visits to their site in 2023, compared to visits in 2022. Table 1 below outlines this data broken down by year and quarter.

TABLE 1: VELMA'S HOUSE-QUARTERLY NUMBER OF PARTICIPANT VISITS



In part as a response to the increase in demand for service, in January of 2023, Velma's House moved locations from 154 Sherbrook Street, to 566 Bannatyne Avenue. This change allowed the project to triple the number of women served at one time due to increased occupancy limits compared to their previous location. Currently, Velma's House can serve up to 15 women at one time with wrap-around supports.

Participants can access a wide variety of services on a drop-in basis including: three nutritious meals per day, snacks, coffee, water, recliners to rest, emergency clothing, washrooms, showers, laundry, entertainment (TV, movies, games, cards) one-to-one coaching, peer sobriety support, traditional medicines and ceremony, culturally safe healing opportunities, knowledge keepers and elders, hygiene kits, harm reduction supplies, menstrual supplies and dental hygiene kits. Participants also have increased access to basic needs items and culturally-based supports during all hours of operation as a result of extended hours and additional staff. Staff also provide extensive support to help guests navigate systems of employment, housing and healthcare. Transportation needs are met daily for all participants. Bus tickets and taxi slips are provided to support women getting to shelters and other important appointments. The staff team provide safe transportation to participants requiring shelter outside of Winnipeg. Finally, staff also assist guests with accessing detox. Save Our Selves (SOS) is a group led by staff and peers providing a self-empowerment approach to recovery and addictions, offered on site.

Through their reporting to the City, Ka Ni Kanichihk identified several important lessons learned and trends experienced in 2022 and 2023, these include:

- Guests report accessing Velma's house primarily because they are unhoused.
- Guests often refused medical care due to their fear of hospitals and the medical system.
- Reported HIV and hepatitis infections are occurring at younger ages.
- Staff wellness supports are necessary due to the vicarious trauma experienced by staff.
- Lived experience is valued by community members and guests.
- Ideal staffing levels operate on a 1:3 ratio. This ensures a greater level of safety for staff and guests, particularly within a low barrier setting.
- Neighbourhood community members are more supportive of the space knowing it is well staffed and equipped to handle emergencies.
- Guests have identified their appreciation for security. There are camera systems as well as security team members on site.

In addition to lessons learned, key challenges identified in agency reporting include:

- **Access to a Supervised Consumption Site:** Winnipeg does not have an established supervised consumption site. Community members with problematic substance use continue to use in dangerous spaces such as washrooms. Velma's House is not a supervised consumption site, but responds to drug use in the building with harm reduction protocols and supplies naloxone as needed from an internal supply of kits. Substance use on and around the property has become an increasingly difficult challenge as people accessing the site seek a safe place to use drugs.

- **Toxic Substance Supply:** During 2023, the City of Winnipeg saw high levels of toxic substances being consumed. This led to a sharp increase in substance poisonings and overdoses on or around the Velma's House property at 566 Bannatyne Ave.

- **Deaths of Community Women:** This is a devastating reality for staff and guests at Velma's House, as many of the women who are victims of violence are known to staff.

- **Inappropriate Referrals:** Often other service providers send and refer people to Velma's House who need supports from other systems, putting a strain on the program and staff. Examples include: urgent medical care, criminal charges with strict conditions and curfews, overwhelming mental health needs, people becoming violent and displaying unsafe behavior. Velma's House staff stated they often felt like a "catch all".

- **Extreme Weather:** Safe spaces for women and gender diverse individuals are critically limited in Winnipeg. This issue is made worse during extreme weather events. If an individual does not feel they can safely access a mainstream shelter, their only alternative may be to remain outside. During periods of extreme cold or extreme heat, the individual is at increased risk of injury such as frost bite or heat exhaustion. For this reason, there is an acute need for spaces like Velma's House in the city.

- **Community Acceptance:** Velma's House is located in the Centennial Neighbourhood, a residential community surrounded by families and schools with a high concentration of poverty. Neighbours have complained of noise, increased foot traffic and have expressed safety concerns living or working close to a low barrier space. The organization continues to work closely with the community to listen to and respond to these concerns. A few changes resulting from these discussions include:

    - Increased safety with Bear Paw Security contracted to be on site 24/7.

- An extra staff person hired for each shift to address the needs of the participants and support positive interactions with the community.
- A new and revised intake process that includes a thorough review of safety expectations for every visit and for each guest.
- Updated internal processes to clarify and simplify to staff and guests what services and supports Velma's House can and cannot offer.

Since opening, Velma's House has grown beyond its initial space and staff capacity to meet the needs of the community. Moving forward, the demand for service is expected to continue to increase, particularly following the COVID 19 pandemic and the increased costs of living. To meet this demand, Ka Ni Kanichihk has identified the need for additional staffing and dedicated medical supports. As well, the organization identified they have quickly outgrown the existing space at 566 Bannatyne Avenue and a future expansion of the space is needed to accommodate the rising numbers of individuals seeking support.

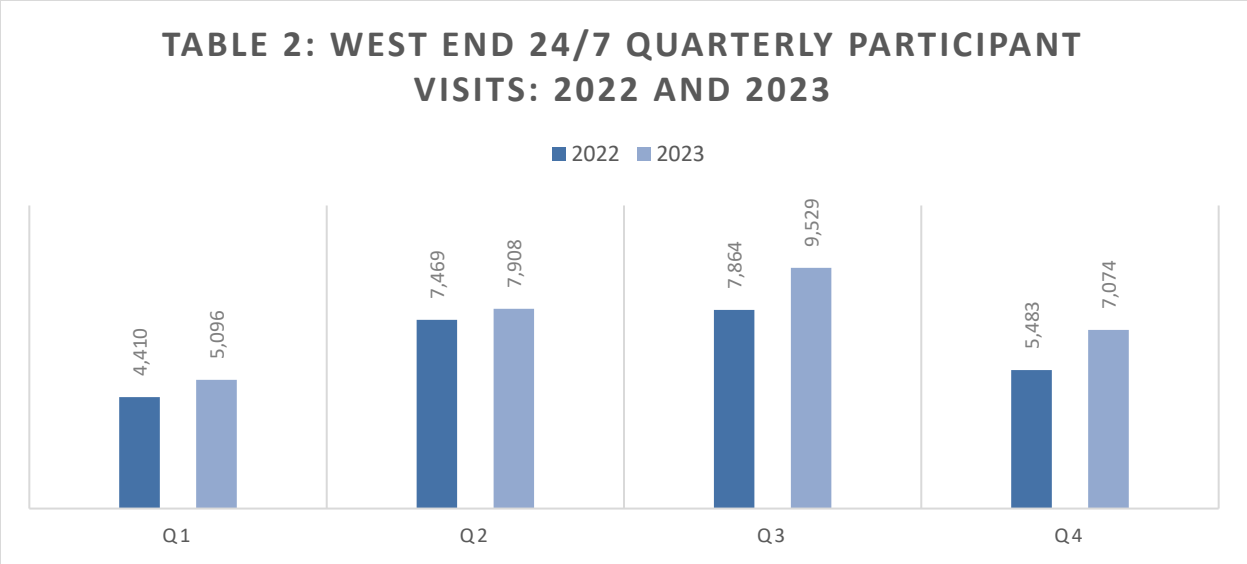
Velma's House remains the only 24/7 safe space in Manitoba that supports sexually exploited adult women and those who are gender diverse. It is a lifeline for individuals fleeing domestic and street violence, providing a wide range of culturally safe supports and essential services, particularly in underserved communities. Going forward, the organization is committed to working with stakeholders to create a place where everyone has equal opportunity to be safe, take part in community, economically, culturally and socially.

Spence Neighbourhood Association: West End 24/7 (WE24)

Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA) overseas the operations of the 24/7 safe space known as West End 24/7 or simply WE24. Established in 2016, WE24 is a safe space for youth ages 13-26 in the heart of the West End of Winnipeg. WE24 operates out of the Magnus Elias Recreation Centre (MERC), a City owned and operated recreation facility located at 430 Langside St. WE24 is the only overnight space in the area that supports youth, providing an alternative to those who do not feel safe attending adult shelters. WE24 offers meals, warm clothing, hygiene kits, transportation support and referrals to other services including housing, mental health, education and health services. Limited, overnight accommodations are provided from 23:00-07:00 with access to additional services and programs throughout the day. WE24 works closely with Resource Assistance for Youth (RAY) to support youth that are street entrenched and/or experiencing homelessness, to ensure vulnerable youth have access to a range of services and supports. Similar to Ka Ni Kanichihk, WE24 partners with many organizations and stakeholders including but not limited to: the City of Winnipeg, the Province of Manitoba, West Central Women's Resource Centre, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc., Ndinawemaaganag Edaawaad Inc., Boys & Girls Clubs of Winnipeg, Downtown Community Safety Partnership, Nine Circles Community Health Centre, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Leftovers Rescue Food.

Throughout the pandemic, WE24 opened its doors to people of all ages given the difficult circumstances. However, following the pandemic a decision was made to re-focus only on youth aged 13-26. This decision was prompted by local area parents who expressed safety concerns living close to a low barrier space for individuals older than 26.
On average, WE24 sees between 80 and 100 youth each evening with 10 sleepers per night. Similar to Ka Ni Kanichihk, WE24 has also experienced an increase in demand for service.

Table 2 below outlines this data broken down by year and quarters:



Through their reporting to the City, SNA identified several important lessons learned and trends experienced in 2022 and 2023, these include:

- An increase in the number of youths using bus shelters as primary spaces for living.
- An increase in the number of encampments in the Spence Neighbourhood.
- A growing number of community members living in encampments and struggling, having to manage their personal safety along with poor mental health and a toxic drug supply.
- An increase in the number of youths citing trauma caused by the child welfare system as a core reason for requiring emergency shelter.
- Participants accessing this safe space tend to be young, Indigenous and impacted by the child welfare system.

In addition to lessons learned, key challenges identified in their reporting include:

- **Community Acceptance:** The 24/7 safe space is located in a residential community surrounded by families and schools. Parents and caregivers of children that partake in daytime activities offered at the MERC have expressed safety concerns to staff regarding sharing the unique low barrier space. Some feel the site is less safe because of the activities and support services offered at WE24.

- **System Failures:** SNA identified that unhoused youth must work across a complex network of systems which includes Manitoba Housing, Child and Family Services, Employment and Income Assistance, the criminal justice system and the health care system. Ideally, what should exist between these systems are coordinated approaches to homelessness prevention that connect various social service systems. Youth experience a complex, siloed network with a prevalence of system failures, situations where inadequate policy and service delivery contribute to the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. These systems require failsafe procedures to ensure youth the basic requirements to access services and resources that support transitions out of the child welfare system and/or health services. Adequate exit planning should become a cornerstone of all service activities.

- **Street Outreach:** In 2022 and 2023, WE24 staff spent extensive time on systems navigation with youth due to system failures. Youth that experience homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness, face increased barriers to accessing services and basic needs primarily due to transitioning between youth and adult systems. This can often compromise an individual's physical safety and lead to deteriorated mental health.

- **Extreme Weather Response:** Throughout the Winter of 2022, the WE24 outreach team conducted enhanced outreach patrols during the evenings. The patrols visited high traffic areas to meet with youth, offered immediate support, and provided transportation back to the MERC. Building off this work, and the demand for support experienced in 2022, a system navigation team and daytime outreach workers were added to the staff complement in 2022 going forward.

- **Securing Housing:** SNA continues to work to enhance and grow its services where possible in order to provide critical and lifesaving services to youth in the Downtown and Spence Neighbourhoods. The youth participants benefit from connections to the strong SNA housing department. The housing department is an all-Indigenous team that addresses the struggles Indigenous people encounter while trying to secure housing.

- **Truth and Reconciliation:** Reconciliation efforts must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health and economic outcomes that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

SNA continues to work to evolve and grow its services to provide critical and lifesaving supports to youth in the Downtown and Spence Neighbourhood. This not only includes access to evening and overnight shelter space but also safe transportation, overdose prevention, food, harm reduction supplies, feminine hygiene packages and support accessing other services including housing and mental health supports. Overall, WE24 reports that its services contributed to decreased injuries, overdoses, sexual assaults, hospital visits, interactions with police and the justice system, and deaths.

Moving Forward

Through the review of the reporting from both SNA and Ka Ni Kanichihk it is evident there remains a critical and ongoing need for 24/7 Safe spaces in Winnipeg. Related to this, it is important to highlight that on June 22, 2023, Council passed a motion directing the Public Service to allocate $1 million in additional 24/7 Safe Space funds included in the 2023 Budget Update to expand 24/7 Safe Space partnerships in a ring around Downtown. This included an additional $100,000 grant increase to Velma's House, and an additional $175,000 grant increase to WE24. As well, the June 22, 2023 motion committed funding for new or expanded 24/7 services including $275,000 to N'Dinawemak, and $250,000 to St. Boniface Street Links. Finally, the motion directed the Public Service to allocate up to $200,000 to pilot new extreme weather initiatives. For the winter of 2023-2024, this includes a temporary pop-up shelter in Winnipeg's Downtown. Operating from November 2023 until March 2024, this space will be available in the drop-in area at Siloam Mission. The Pop-Up is made possible by funding from the City of Winnipeg and End Homelessness Winnipeg and is a collaborative effort by sector partners including Main Street Project, 1JustCity, Sunshine House and Siloam Mission. A decision to open the Pop Up is made three days in advance and depends on three factors to ensure staff and scheduling are ready:

- The overnight temperature ‘feels like’ -10 C or colder (forecast three days in advance);
- All emergency shelters are consistently full;
- A minimum of four staff are present.

When activated, the pop-up can support up to 90 individuals who otherwise would have nowhere else to go. This service provides a critical additional layer of support to those experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement Date: January 19, 2024

Project Name:

24/7 Safe Space Grant Program: Year Four Update

COMMENTS:

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations to receive this report as information..

Ozzy Garrett - January 19, 2024
Ozzy Garrett CPA, CGA
Manager of Finance
Community Services Department

CONSULTATION

This report has been prepared in consultation with the Spence Neighbourhood Association, and Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

Goal: Leadership and Good Governance
Objective 3: Achieve community responsive service delivery through an aligned, integrated, collaborative and results- oriented organizational culture.

Goal: Economic Prosperity
Objective 3: Address poverty as an unacceptable and costly outcome of systemic barriers, through collaboration with the community and government bodies.

- 3.12 Poverty Reduction

Goal: Good Health and Well-Being
Objective 1: Enable access to basic needs for good physical and mental health.
Objective 3: Proactively identify and address threats to community safety and well-being.

- 4.1 Health Equity
- 4.4 Affordable and Supportive Housing Options
- 4.6 Community Safety
- 4.9 Inclusive Public Spaces
- 4.11 Equitable Service Access

Goal: Social Equity
Objective 1: Uphold human rights so that no one is left behind.

- 5.1 Equitable Services Access
- 5.2 Affordable and Supportive Housing Options
- 5.3 End Homelessness
- 5.5 Indigenous Lens
- 5.8 Community Cohesion

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

Consideration was given as to whether this report connects to the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (CAP), and it was determined that the CAP is not applicable to this specific report.

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

Goal 1: Equity and a Culture of Caring are Demonstrated through Strategy Implementation and Systems Change

Goal 2: The City Actively Plans for and Partners in Affordable Housing

Goal 4: Community Well-Being Supports for those in Greatest Need are Increased

Goal 8: Equity in Community Safety is Increased through Collaboration

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Community Services Department
Division: Community Development Division
Prepared by: Karen Glugosh, Chris Brens
Date: 2024-01-25
File No: CMS-2024-2