

EWR Cumberland Shelter Report



This document serves as the comprehensive final report prepared by Bailey McKay, detailing the activities, outcomes, and reflections from the EWR Cumberland Shelter season.

INTRODUCTION

The EWR Cumberland Shelter opened its doors on February 6, 2025, and operated for a total of 46 nights, concluding on April 13, 2025. During this time, we welcomed 668 unique individuals, serving a wide range of demographics and needs.

Our mission was simple yet powerful: to offer guests the best possible end to their day and a dignified start to the next. Each evening, we provided a warm meal, and each morning, a healthy breakfast. These daily moments created opportunities for staff to build meaningful connections with guests and lay the foundation for trust and support.

As the nights went on, guests began to take pride not only in the shelter space but also in the community it fostered. They helped keep the environment clean and supported one another, turning the shelter into more than just a place to sleep — it became a shared space of dignity, care, and community.



DEMOGRAPHIC

During the reporting period, the Shelter supported a total of 668 guests, including 257 women and 404 men. Of these, 118 identified as Indigenous, and 65 were living with a disability.

Age Group

The general age group of 19–64 years consists of 650 individuals, while there are 18 individuals aged 65 and older.

To better understand the shelter population, recent data was compared with the 2023 Comox Valley Point-in-Time (PIT) Count.

Demographics Overview:

- **Gender:**
61% of shelter guests were male, closely aligning with the 2023 PIT Count (59%). This indicates consistency in gender trends among the precariously housed population.
- **Indigenous Identity & Disability:**
17% of guests identified as Indigenous, and 10% reported a disability. These figures are lower than the PIT Count, which reported 28% Indigenous and 93% living with some form of disability. It's important to note that disclosure is voluntary, and actual numbers may be higher.
- **Age Distribution:**
A significant 97% of guests fell within the 19–64 age range, compared to only 65% in the PIT Count. Seniors (65+) represented just 3% of shelter guests, well below the 27% reported in the PIT Count. This suggests seniors may face additional barriers to accessing shelter services.

Outreach Insights:

- Many **women** expressed safety concerns related to past shelter experiences.
- Individuals with **disabilities** reported feeling vulnerable or unsafe in shelter settings.
- Some **Indigenous** guests felt pressure to suppress cultural identity to access services.
- Despite these challenges, increased outreach efforts led to more Indigenous individuals accessing the shelter.

Conclusion:

While not all data is fully verifiable, trends suggest that certain populations—particularly women, Indigenous individuals, people with disabilities, and seniors—may be underrepresented due to barriers in accessing services. Outreach has proven effective in reducing some of these barriers, but ongoing efforts are needed to improve accessibility and safety for all.



Community & Peer Collaboration

The effort

We worked in close collaboration with a range of community partners — including IHOST, SOLID Outreach, ACT, and local emergency services — to ensure that individuals facing complex challenges received timely, compassionate, and comprehensive support. These partnerships were instrumental in creating a coordinated response that centered the dignity and needs of each individual. At The Junction, Outreach provided consistent access to essential services such as food, safe supply, medical care, housing applications, and outreach supports. The Junction served as a reliable and welcoming space where community members could access what they needed without judgment or barriers, helping to build trust and long-term engagement.

One of our most meaningful initiatives this year was the launch of our Peer Program, developed in partnership with SOLID Outreach. This program was designed to empower individuals with lived and living experience by offering opportunities to contribute to the community in valuable and visible ways. Participants played key roles in outreach activities, harm reduction supply distribution, and regular community cleanups — all while receiving compensation that acknowledged their work and leadership. The Peer Program not only created pathways for personal growth and stability but also fostered a stronger sense of ownership and pride within the community. By recognizing and uplifting the expertise of those with lived experience, we helped to build a more inclusive and responsive system of care.



Business

Weekly visits to local businesses aimed to foster open communication and strengthen trust between the unhoused population and the broader community.



Peer Program

Empower individuals to give back to their community, develop essential life skills, and take ownership of the places they live, fostering a stronger, more connected community.



What We Seen

Our guest took pride in the community, giving back through clean-up efforts and meaningful peer-to-peer interactions.

INSIGHT

Business Check-Ins:

Checking in with local businesses around the shelter proved to be beneficial. Several businesses appreciated the outreach and expressed that they felt supported, knowing they could reach out if any issues arose.

However, not all businesses were equally receptive. Some showed little interest in ongoing communication and did not fully engage with the process.

Additionally, a couple of businesses raised concerns regarding the shelter's operating hours. They mentioned that the shelter appeared to be open at times inconsistent with the schedule they were originally provided, leading to some confusion and frustration.

Peer Program Impact:

The Peer Program had a positive impact. It provided our guests with a sense of pride and purpose, equipping them with tools to contribute to their community and build a sense of belonging. Notably, some guests went above and beyond by using part of their compensation to purchase items for their peers, demonstrating a strong desire to give back.

Take away

Local Businesses

To enhance future collaborations, more structured planning around business check-ins would be beneficial. Ongoing education and engagement with local businesses to better understand the demographics we serve can significantly improve mutual understanding and compassion. Regular meetings and consistent check-ins between Lookout and local businesses will help nurture these relationships and support continued growth moving forward.

Peer Program

Additionally, the Peer Program at the EWR Cumberland Shelter would have greatly benefited from earlier planning and a clearly defined framework. Establishing a solid plan from the outset would help foster the program's development and ensure its success.



Incident Reports

EWR Incident Summary Report

Duration: 46 Nights of Operation

Total Incident Reports: 17

Incident Types:

- Abuse to Guest: 1
- Abuse to Staff: 1
- Guest Injuries: 5
- Guest Assault: 1
- Overdoses: 2
- Aggression to Staff: 1
- Other: 6

Resolver

Severity Breakdown:

- Critical Incidents: 2
- Non-Critical Incidents: 13
- Standard Follow-Up Reports: 2 (due to unannounced Police/Paramedic presence)

Notes:

- The majority of incidents stemmed from events occurring off-site. In these cases, staff provided appropriate follow-up and guest support in coordination with emergency services.
- Paramedics were called in both overdose cases. Guests were transported to hospital, treated, released, and returned safely to the shelter.

EWR REPORT

- All incidents were handled with a compassionate and trauma-informed approach, and appropriate supports were provided throughout.



Staff Training

Staff received comprehensive training through an Operation Guide, organizational policies, peer-to-peer shadowing, weekly follow-ups, and an 8-hour Mental Health First Aid course—equipping them to respond to crises with calm, kindness, and meaningful connection.

Recommendations

While it is noted that staff have received initial training, it is recommended that EWR (Extreme Weather Response) staff be provided dedicated time to complete shadow shifts prior to the official opening of the EWR site. This will help ensure familiarity with site operations, protocols, and expectations.

In addition to the current training, the following areas are recommended for further staff development:

- **Naloxone Administration:** Refresher training to ensure all staff are confident and prepared in overdose response.
- **Lookout Society Policies:** A more in-depth review of organizational policies to ensure alignment and understanding.
- **Emergency Drills:** Regularly scheduled drills to prepare staff for fire, medical, or behavioral emergencies.
- **Written Reporting:** Training on proper documentation practices to ensure accurate, consistent, and professional incident reporting.

These steps will enhance staff readiness and contribute to a safer, more supportive environment for both clients and team members.



Lookout
Housing + Health Society

TAKE AWAY STORIES

Stories That Stayed with Us

- One guest showed up early every morning — sweeping floors, handing out blankets, and greeting staff with a “good morning” and a smile. “When I’ve got something to do, I stay out of trouble,” they told us — and they meant it.
- Another guest, previously restricted in the community after a serious incident, proved their commitment to change by supporting their peers, connecting people to services, and partnering with SOLID. With their consent, Outreach worked with their probation officer — and those efforts resulted in reduced limitations and a second chance at rebuilding community ties.
- And then there was the guest who used to sleep rough before the shelter opened. Not only did they begin cleaning camps each morning after leaving the shelter, they also repaired a broken fence gate at The Junction — saving repair costs — and became a word-of-mouth ambassador, spreading shelter info to others who needed it most.