

# Survey to inform design of drop-in programs for inner-city populations in Winnipeg

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## Introduction

Marginalized inner-city populations experience many barriers to accessing health care and social services. Programs designed specifically for these populations may reduce these barriers and increase program acceptability. However, assumptions about homeless people frequently drive the design of programs intended for “marginalized populations”, and these programs may lack mechanisms to identify and respond to changes in the needs of the population. As part of a review of services ten years after the establishment of Sunshine House, a survey was undertaken to better understand the lives of current clientele, to inform updates in service delivery and program design.

## Methods

Sunshine House, a drop-in centre in inner-city Winnipeg, was established in 1999 to serve as a practical support venue for people at risk for or living with HIV and HCV. In Summer 2009, a sample of 31 core clientele completed a survey which included demographics and lifestyle, opinions about current service delivery models, service needs, and goals.

## Results

Sixty-eight percent of respondents were male, 71% identified as Aboriginal, and 26% had slept in a shelter the night before. On average, respondents used services at 4 different organizations. Word of mouth was the most common way clients learned about Sunshine House (94%); the remainder were referred by another organization. Respondents liked the availability of good food and coffee, supportive staff, and the company of friends in a calm clean atmosphere with a television.

Features Appreciated in Drop-in Centres	Frequency of Mention	
Food/drinks (coffee, good food)	19	61%
Staff (supportive, cool, friendly, polite)	14	45%
Company of friends	13	42%
Entertainment (tv, movies, radio)	8	26%
Atmosphere (friendly, peaceful)	8	26%
Cleanliness	6	19%
Services (women's groups, detox, help with problems)	6	19%
Internet/computer access	6	19%
Place to sleep	4	13%
Safety	3	10%
Laundry	3	10%
Volunteer opportunities	2	6%
Availability of clothing	2	6%
Will take anybody	1	3%
Open all the time	1	3%
Access to a telephone	1	3%

Features that respondents disliked included the presence of intoxicated people, lack of cleanliness, rude staff, and arguments.

Features Disliked in Drop-in Centres	Frequency of Mention	
Presence of intoxicated people	12	39%
Dirty/smelly facilities and people	10	32%
Dislike other clients, bullying, arguments, stealing	10	32%
Rude staff	9	29%
Rules (too many or unfair)	5	16%
Bad/limited food	4	13%
Physical environment (stairs, too small and crowded, hot, no privacy)	4	13%
Lack of a services	4	13%
Long lines	2	6%
Too religious	2	6%
Excludes intoxicated people, kids	2	6%
Short sleep hours	1	3%

The majority of respondents had a plan for the future and identified practical issues that needed to be addressed. Those issues included health (staying on medication, seeking psychiatric referral) and broader determinants of health (housing, education, having a better diet, employment, saving money).

Planning for the Future	Frequency of Mention
Avoid drugs and alcohol	6
Live one day at a time	6
Get and keep a job	6
Education	4
Get and save money	3
Get a permanent address	3
Better diet/health	2
Leave the city and go home	2
Volunteer work	2
Support network, good friends	2
Stay away from bad areas	2
Find a partner or move in with a partner	2
Make a phone call	1
Psychiatric referral	1
Stay on medications	1

## Conclusions

Survey responses identified a set of services needed by clients of Sunshine House, which can either be provided directly or through facilitated referrals to other service providers. In response, Sunshine House retained its vision of “creating a place where people can grow,” but changed its program mandate to act as a community resource, with a focus on addressing the determinants of health of clientele. However, until there is a comprehensive plan for dealing with the multiple issues associated with homelessness in Winnipeg, the specific role for Sunshine House remains unclear. Sunshine House will continue to provide a safe and predictable environment for clients, and has the potential to be part of a wider strategy to address the many needs of its clientele.

