

Executive Summary: Safe N Sound Emergency Shelter Feasibility Assessment & Early Overnight Warming Center Pilot Learnings



November 20th, 2024

Introduction:

The Safe N Sound's Emergency Shelter Feasibility Study, conducted to assess the viability of establishing an emergency shelter in Owen Sound, highlights a critical need for increased emergency shelter beds in Grey County. The county-funded Overnight Warming Center Pilot and motel accommodations provided a measurably positive impact to the community. The feasibility study and pilot have successfully identified the urgent need for an additional 28 bed low-barrier emergency shelter facility with necessary support services in Owen Sound.

Problems:

The findings from the Feasibility Study and Pilot Program show there is a need for more low-barrier shelter beds that provide overnight support for homeless community members.

- *Lack of Space:* 257 individuals were turned away from the Short-Term Shelter Program in the year ending July 2023.
- *Vulnerable individuals:* Currently, approximately 55 individuals require emergency housing each night, while only 35 can be accommodated in Owen Sound through the short-term shelter program. This leaves a nightly gap of about 20 individuals who are without adequate shelter.
- *Overnight Warming Centre Pilot Usage:* Between November 1st 2023 – March 31st 2024 SafeNSound provided over 3,000 nights of respite from the winter elements. So far in this year, between November 1st – November 20th 2024, 77 unique individuals have accessed the overnight warming center with a total of 435 stays.
- *Health Concerns:* While accessing the Overnight Warming Center, participants at Safe N' Sound do not have access to a bed, resulting in negative health outcomes compared to those who have access to a bed.
- *Program Compatibility:* For some individuals, living in motels can lead to social isolation, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and making it difficult to access essential services and support networks.

Solutions:

The proposed shelter would adopt a low-barrier, housing-focused model to serve individuals with high needs, including those with mental health and substance use issues. This shelter would provide not only overnight accommodation but also essential services such as food, hygiene facilities, and access to health and wellness support. The focus would be on quickly transitioning individuals into transitional or permanent housing, supported by case management and personalized plans. The shelter's design would ensure safety, privacy, and inclusivity, with ideally separate areas for men, women, and non-binary individuals.

Considerations:

Despite the evident need, there are significant financial challenges. The feasibility study estimated the cost of constructing a new purpose-built combined emergency shelter and drop-in space at \$2.96 million, with an annual operating cost of approximately \$840,000. Alternatively, an appropriate building could be purchased and retrofitted to meet the needs of an overnight program. The SafeNSound intends to apply for a \$500,000 capital grant from Reaching Homes, an application that is due December 17th, 2024. With a less intensive model of service than the one suggested in the study, a lower annual operating cost can be achieved. These ongoing operational costs could be met through a variety of funding streams including: SafeNSound's limited fundraised dollars, grants and further support from Grey County. While potential funding sources have been identified, securing these funds remains the primary critical hurdle.

Space Requirements:

Based on typical space standards and best practices for shelter design, a 28-bed shelter should be approximately 7,000 square feet. The following provides a breakdown of each function within a potential emergency shelter.

- Entry and Reception Area
- Professional and Administrative Spaces
- Facilities and Utilities
- Sleeping Accommodations
- Common Space

Proposal:

SafeNSound is looking for the county's support in the form of a letter to be provided in support of our Reaching Homes application.

Notes- The feasibility study was completed by J Consulting Group and funded by the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund which was locally distributed through the United Way Bruce Grey.