

West Vancouver shower program becomes support hub during pandemic

Mar 24, 2021 5:05 PM By: Ben Bengtson



1 / 2 West Vancouver introduced a shower program at Ambleside Fieldhouse after community centres closed last year. The program mainly serves people in the community grappling with homelessness. | photo courtesy District of West Vancouver

After the pandemic forced many public spaces such as community centres to [close indefinitely last spring](#), the District of West Vancouver stepped in with a new program for people to take a shower who otherwise wouldn't have access to any facilities.

The majority of the people who use the shower program are experiencing some form of homelessness or are facing a precarious housing situation, according to the district.

Since April, anyone who needs it has been able to access the Ambleside Fieldhouse – located on Pound Road between the grass and artificial turf fields, just north of the rail tracks near 13th Street – for a few hours three times per week for the purpose of taking a shower and accessing some essential social services.

"We have lots of folks who move across the North Shore who live in their vehicles, who couch surf, who may be in and out of the shelter for different reasons – there's lots of folks who need additional supports," said Arleta Beckett, the district's community services and community development manager.

Last spring, public community centres across the province, including West Vancouver Community Centre and Gleneagles Community Centre, were forced to close in order to help curb the spread of COVID-19.

Say it spring with ^ ' ~be Stock.



While that was deemed a necessary public health order at the time, it meant that people who relied on West Vancouver community centres for taking a shower and using the public washrooms were barred from doing so.

"All of a sudden we realized we had this crisis on our hands where a service that we were providing was no longer available and there was no other alternative in the community," said Beckett.

The shower program was introduced shortly after, said Beckett, who noted the roughly 10-year-old accessible facility was deemed to be the perfect fit for such a initiative.

The people who come to the shower program are also able to connect with other community resources and service providers, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, Vancouver Coastal Health and the Lookout Emergency Shelter.

"Providing that wrap-around service was part of the design," said Beckett. "It does sort of open up our eyes to community needs that we may not have seen before."

Case in point: between April 15 and Dec. 31 last year, the shower program had a whopping 932 visits by 73 unique individuals, according to the district.

Although West Vancouver community centres have partially reopened for some pre-registered activities, drop-in service – such as entering the facility just to take a shower – is still barred due to the pandemic. The shower program is therefore still ongoing, noted Beckett.

People who use the program are provided with toiletries and towels on-site, along with a fresh sandwich courtesy of the meal program at West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre. Participants have also received grocery cards and emergency clothing, when required.

The program follows COVID-19 protocols and each shower is cleaned and sanitized after each use, according to the district.

For Beckett, the program, which was developed following community consultations, reflects the nature of housing challenges all across the region and the importance of making sure people have access to basic but vital services.

“Homelessness and people who live in precarious housing is not an isolated situation. It happens all across the North Shore. We realized because of COVID that something was taken away from people – having a shower is just an issue around dignity,” said Beckett. “Under no fault of their own, something was taken away that they’ve relied on and we look to meet those kinds of needs in the community when we can.”

The shower program is funded through grants from the West Vancouver Foundation and Reaching Home organizations.

The district's shower program, located at Ambleside Fieldhouse, runs Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

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