



## StreetMessenger.ca Final Report August 31, 2018

### Street Messaging System – Introduction

Cellphones are more of a lifeline than a lifestyle and this presents a great opportunity. **Outreach can be fast, effective and relevant as** everyone reads their texts.

The Street Messaging System – now [StreetMessenger](#) - is a mass text messaging tool for at-risk communities that can be used to:

- quickly and easily alert clients to opportunities or threats in their community
- send one text message to many community members instantly
- provide in real-time extreme weather alerts, housing opportunities, flu shot clinics, overdose alerts and much more

Developed and hosted in Canada by the [Vancouver Community Network](#) (VCN), a charitable technology provider, the StreetMessenger looks to support your work getting vital information about shelter, food, community events, jobs/training and emergencies and now - harm reduction and missing persons into the community. The system was designed to fill the gap which exists between that exist for individuals looking for right-timed opportunities for change and the ability of the agencies providing that change connecting in meaningful ways. It's understood that no one really reads e-blasted emails, posters are glanced at for 3 seconds or less but the open-rate on text messages is 100%.

Interested agencies register in about two minutes online. VCN will vet the registration ensuring the platform remains a tool solely for providers. Once the registration is live, agency staff can send a message as a broadcast into the community. As the StreetMessenger has a profile builder for each client's cellphone number, clients will only receive an alert relevant to their age, gender identity and location. Agencies can also send one or more targeted messages on their curated lists of their own clients, professional networks and staff. Plus there is a 'notes' section which allows any case management notes a worker may have that will help others in the organization.

Conversely, those that want to receive updates, alerts and message (Clients) can register simply by text their city name to the system number which has a local number for each city. The messages arrive wherever the client happens to be. Text messages can be forwarded to others in the community. In Calgary and Vancouver, street outreach teams were able to sign up large numbers of clients by visiting shelters, drop-in centres and other locations where potential clients congregate. A key advantage for Clients is that the messages are scrollable and searchable so clients can refer back to the information. Alerts can be copied and pasted into translation apps for infinite reach. With one quick message you will ensure your outreach plans and reminders are done. Quick and Easy.

Employment and Social Development Canada and the Canadian Internet Registration Authority provided funding for the initial sign-up efforts.

### Key elements of this report:

- Brief overview of project
- Social Service provider sign up and follow through – user experience of the system
- Social Service provider feedback on outreach – what do clients have to say
- Social Service provider stories of how the SMS changed their approach to outreach

- Social Service provider success stories and detractors which need to be addressed
- Social Service provider unforeseen benefits/challenges (i.e. receiving information from other agencies posting global messages which will reduce silos)
- Client sign up and use of information
- Client feedback on impact and awareness raising
- Client success stories

## Brief Overview of Project

The Project Start date was July 7, 2017. With this start date VCN immediately began implementing on the planned activities. Highlights were:

- 2017 July issued a call for proposals from Ruby on Rails developers in Code Core Academy and the local Ruby Forum (~500 members) as well as on LinkedIn. Retained a skilled developer 2017 August 25.
- 2017 July – issued an internal release to the subscribers to the Street Messaging System. The re-brand to the new name of StreetMessenger and move to the new domain was pivotal news to our early adopters.
- 2017 July - Sought ESDC approval and contribution for a national news release which formed the cornerstone of our outreach work across Canada. The work was spearheaded and translated into French by our funder the Canadian Internet Registration Authority. News release issued 2017 August 22.
- 2017 July – met with bc211 to initiate working with them for communications and outreach especially around the shelter availability map.
- 2017 July – initial Skype meetings with Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver.
- 2017 July - Issued a job posting at SFU school of social work and Alder School in Vancouver. By 2017 September 15, we interviewed and offered the position to a succession of three candidates but were unsuccessful in attracting a new team member. The timeframe of the contract and the scale of outreach work itself seemed to be the biggest detractors.
- 2017 August – a Client Relationship Management (CRM) system was established to track agencies contacted and provide contact information as we made introductions.
  - 695 Vancouver agencies and shelters added (many are from project work prior to launch)
  - 103 Calgary agencies and shelters added
  - 242 Toronto agencies and shelters added
- 2017 August 25 - Had final approval and cheque for the remainder of the funding for the project.
- 2017 August - project management tools, social media outreach strategy and video planning.
- 2017 August - (UPDATED from previous report) Initial engagement with new social service providers in Calgary, Alberta was followed up on and received the acknowledgement from the Calgary Homeless Foundation that they would take on the outreach and awareness raising of the tool. This proved more desirable as they would have the ability to require their fund recipients to use the innovation. Also started conversations with Toronto's 211 (FindHelp) and the City of Toronto's Patricia Anderson. She expressed skepticism the system would be of benefit in TO.

### September 2017

- Started revision on marketing plan with analysis of social media engagement. It has been largely well received in terms of likes and follows but it is better when we direct message, email and actually call organizations to speak directly with operations or communications management.
- Attended a Telecommunities teleconference to discuss the project with people across Canada in attendance. Worked with Courthouse Libraries to develop a webinar presentation with their expertise in online learning.
- 2017 September = attended StartUp Week and an invent attracting funders with Tech Ladies of Vancouver to get a better understanding of the project's inputs needed past the funding for more effective scaling. Also met with representatives from Amazon Web Services to discuss and chance to have a free alternative for hosting the system with their cloud based technology.
- Moved most of the LinkedIn networking to Project Manager's personal account as there was a much larger network and more people would engage with a person than follow an organizational page.

### October 2017

- Worked further on our opportunity to take on a leased space in a tech hub – office shared work space.

- Participated in the City of Vancouver's Homeless Action Week – went to various events to discuss the system with presenters and at booths. Had an iPad and an 'ask me' sign to attract people experiencing homelessness to introduce them to the system – approximately 50 added then.
- Started working with bc211 to take over and manage the communications plan for the Shelter Availability Map with their internal clients. They continue (to date) to use the system to make their call out record pdfs (these pdfs are sent to shelters twice daily to inform the shelters of where spaces may be available. The also committed to engaging the community to use the map. The system was added to the Community Resource Guide by the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre. Potential upgrades to the system were considered at a locally hosted hack-a-thon in Vancouver; having a shortcode number, two-way messaging and the ability to send images were their only real recommendation.
- Travelled to Toronto to meet with Covenant House, FindHelp, Toronto Harm Reduction, RaisetheRoof | Chez Toit and the Toronto Bad Date Coalition.
- Travelled to Calgary to establish a work plan and meet with Calgary Homeless Foundation and the Calgary Dropin Centre to discern how they would work together with the project there. Gave a workshop to about 20 local Executive Directors and 15 staff members about the system and how to use it. Followed up with emails to all that missed it with intro presentation slidedeck.
- Travelled to Winnipeg for the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference. Attended many workshop distributing information sheets, business cards and otherwise networked extensively about the system.
- Created a mobile display booth we used to take with us as we attend meetings in Calgary and Winnipeg as well as Vancouver.

#### **November 2017**

- Attended the Vancouver' BC Tech Summit – distributed about 200 business cards and information cards and sought out tech-engagement examples to learn a better approach to introducing innovation.
- Featured at the Homeless Connect Information fair in Toronto by FindHelp. Started a dialogue with StreetHealth in Toronto.
- Added more organizations engaged in Homelessness abatement to our CRM for BC, Alberta and Ontario – as well as all attendees to the CAEH Conference.
- Started a dialogue with Ray-cam Community Centre after learning of Covenant House's program review and delay in starting with the System.
- Engaged the developer and tech manager to look at a shortcode number option which would provide a better way to scale and faster implementation in other areas as there would be one number to promote across Canada.
- CHF (Calgary) launched their engagement team to introduce the system and start registrations. This was on-going for two months.
- Attended the BC Non-Profit Housing Association's Shelter Conference in Richmond, BC
- Attended Western Innovation Initiative workshop to get information on post-funding opportunities for help move the StreetMessenger from the later stages of research and launch/development to the marketplace.
- Connected with Toronto Free-Net, Eva's Initiatives, and the Bad Date Coalition (again) to offer funding to either work to launch the program or on-board their own profiles and stand as an early adopter in the region. Eva's and the Bad Date Coalition wished to foster the system internally. Also established ties with the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness.
- Hosted a community workshop at Ray-cam Community Centre and 3 information sessions with; core staff, board members and the teen action committee.
- Calgary social service agencies start to sign up and use the system – primarily for weather alerts.
- Created an assignment tracker in our ticketing system so we can more quickly respond to help-desk and information requests from the StreetMessenger site.
- Vetting of new org registrants accelerated and is on-going.
- Sent posters to 36 leading agencies across Canada with information sheets in each tube – BC, AB & ON

#### **December 2017**

- Sent a postcard with the StreetMessenger information to every address we had in the CRM
- Started discussions with the Fort St John Women's Resource Society to discuss the opportunity to use the StreetMessenger for missing persons' alerts in the region. Idea was well received and we implemented a quick change to the system to allow registrants to only receive messages about missing persons.
- Toronto - 3 webinars given to interested orgs. More comprehensive talks with Toronto Harm Reduction about alerts for opioid crisis alerts – messaging during spikes etc.

- Engaged with The Migrant Worker's Association and the Binner's Project to suggest usage scenarios for their work. Also a spike in interest in Victoria.
- Reviewed implications for the System with the introduction of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), non-issue for us.
- Was told that the mass broadcast (f>360 people received the message) or Calgary's 'Longest Night of the Year' substantially increased participation far beyond expectation with many clients happily showing their message.
- Started the research to consider the tax implications for invoicing should for when the system is not free
- Applied for and was listed as a 'volunteer' opportunity with Telus. Across Canada Telus staff can now take time off of work to assist with this project.

### **January 2018**

- Started outreach work for clients with Ray-cam's street team
- Revised the communications approach a social media was very disingenuous. People liked but did not engage. Switched to comprehensive and focused web searches of organizations to find the right person to approach within their org to introduce the system. Cold calls were made and emails were sent to reach them specifically.
- Continued to work with Ray-cam, Calgary Homeless Foundation, FindHelp, and bc211.
- Offered and gave webinars upon approval – engaged a videographer to update our video – contractor left project after about 3 weeks. We left the project to review in March.
- Send another round of postcards to those in the CRM. Updated the CRM with final submissions prior to admin staff support leaving the project,
- Toronto Freenet regretfully had to stop working on our project due to family health issues.
- Invited to be a poster presenter at BCNPHA next conference in June.
- Met with the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy to discuss their wished for changed to the Shelter Availability Map and work they would do to foster the StreetMessenger once their transition to the Homelessness Services Association of BC was more stable – approximately in June.
- Attended the Small Business Expo (booth) to let non-profits know more about us.
- Completed a survey on the use of cellphones in Calgary and Vancouver by homeless or inadequately housed
- Started talks with the Portland Hotel Society to discuss using the system in their shelters and housing alerts – most typically for access inference like elevators out-of-order etc. We offered funding to on-board their internal profile. Also engaged with three local sexual worker support group to offer our system with support/funding to engage with the system as well.

### **February 2018**

- Featured in the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Program
- Re-approached talks with the City of Toronto; Eva's initiative ready to start in March –FindHelp (TO) hosted a webinar and sent an information blast email again. I went through and gave copies of the slidedeck used during webinars to both FindHelp and Calgary Homeless Foundation to share as they wished.
- BC Housing engaged their tech staff to create a proposal to integrate the system with theirs.
- Continued to have interested organizational staff reach out for information and the slide deck
- Shortcode work stalled due to extreme expense.
- Started work on revisions on the Shelter Availability map to make it more interactive –aka allow social service workers to 'find' shelter with filters for gender, age and special needs.
- Engaged a TechSoup representative to advertise the system to his 3000+ followers.
- Attended a local MLA's event - Sam Sullivan's Public Salon to network.
- Engaged with PeaceGeeks - A Google award winning group also using messaging but with refugees.

### **March 2018**

- Began to work with the Downtown Community Courthouse in Vancouver to have them use the system with their clients, Gave \$4000 to offset their on-boarding and admin costs. Eva's Initiatives in Toronto accepted on \$2500 for their efforts. The Bad Date Coalition has yet to invoice us for the \$1000 they felt was adequate for their efforts.
- Immigration Support Services of BC of reached out to ask about using our system for their work after making a few necessary changes on a separate and dedicated site.
- Reviewed again and abandoned the shortcode consideration after reviewing with another aggregator
- Started to identify an interesting challenge where clients were registering as providers. Thy wanted to be registered to receive the info and had searched for us specifically to do so. We disabled the web-

registration of clients as we worried there may be abuse in terms of people signing up their friends as a prank. We will review this in the near term.

- Purchased a larger store of the text credits from our aggregator as the supply was running lower. Discovered a bug that if an org didn't have enough credits to send the message the system didn't alert them to ask for more. Worked to resolve the frustrating issue.

#### **April 2018**

- Primarily worked with the organizations that had engaged and continued the cold calling.
- Worked on the Newcomer.info project for re-purposing of the system to help refugees and immigration seekers.
- Re-started work on the white board animation with a sense we could use it to introduce the outreach feature of the StreetMessenger which may not have been communicated as well as we had hoped. This was to be released in June 2018 as a paid ad on LinkedIn.
- Hosted ESDC staff member for financial review

#### **May 2018**

- Started to receive messages from US organizations looking for a system like ours.
- Engaged with Vancouver Coastal Health to review our opportunity to help with their harm reduction strategy.
- Supplied the Sex Workers Advocacy Network with information, outreach materials and support as they attended a conference in the US with one workshop listed as thinking to create our existing solution
- Attended the "Restoring Right Relationships Workshop – to learn and speak to the use of our system to increase connectivity for on-reserve and off-reserve communities.
- Hosted a 30 person workshop at the Downtown Community Court to suggest best fit strategies to use the system.

#### **June 2018**

- Attended the Digital Non-profit workshop to promote the StreetMessenger.
- Had to rework the voice over on the whiteboard animation – not complete until June 30<sup>th</sup> – posted to LinkedIn as a clickable ad – see animation here: <https://youtu.be/4-hlL-8Vn0M>
- Final project financial accounting

#### **July & August 2018**

- Started internal review of the project and looked for what more we could do. Decided to focus on Newcomer.info hoping to use the successful momentum to have organizations give this another go. It should be noted – ISSofBC attracted \$60,000 to work on the system in-house.
- Sent survey monkey to providers for more feedback – with a \$50 gift certificate to incentivize responses – less than 25% response. Unfortunately, >25% of the registrant's emails bounced telling us they had moved on. Staff turnover at this rate was not well-considered by us when we considered the 'threats' to its use,

## **Social Service provider sign up and follow through – user experience of the system**

Previous feedback from the Midterm report has not changed much. Our Survey Monkey results ease of use and responsiveness to tech support for questions remain -

- excitement for the shelter availability map;
- staff time savings to perform outreach
- client excitement about receiving messages in this way

In December 2017 after many months of trying to establish contact with people working in this sector, I came to realize the biggest drawback to adoption was twofold; staff turnover, lack of middle management willingness to assign tasks away from their usual funding and grant streams which is really just a lack of an internal budget to truly engage in the application. If I had to do this project over again, I would find and work with a number of organizations to support their application for funding within their own organizational budget so they would be more willing (and more accountable) to take up the innovation.

## Social Service provider feedback on outreach – what do clients have to say

As of the end of August 2018, we sent an email to the 81 providers. September 5, 2018 we sent an email requesting any provider stories on how the StreetMessenger and how it changed their approach to outreach. We did not receive any responses so we attempted to review broadcasted messages to see what the content was to discern how they were electing to use the system. We found that the overwhelming majority of messages sent were not in a broadcast method we could read but internal-only. It appears the strongest users had very distributed but focused membership such as:

1. the Migrant Workers Association of BC, this organization approached us as they didn't feel they were necessarily within the scope of the project. They are is a non-profit organization dedicated to legal advocacy for migrant workers in BC. The Migrant Workers Centre facilitates access to justice for migrant workers through the provision of legal information, advice and full representation. The organization also works to advance the labour and human rights of migrant workers through public legal education, and law and policy reform. Using the internal lists; they created their own listing of workers and used the system to provide alerts, mitigate rumours and let them know of events.
2. The Binner's Project; Binner's Project fosters social and economic inclusion, builds community resilience and stronger networks, and engages on sustainability issues. Through their programs, the Binner's Project empowers binner's as part of the circular economy. The administrators here also connect their clients with the system within the internal messaging feature. They were able to connect with everyone who was working their 'trap-lines' regardless of where they were to primarily alert them to meetings. They also had a number of specially crafted carts that were being distributed. The system helped to get those who wished to use the carts to the location for pickup. Thoughts are now on using the system in concert with a 'Binner's Truck" which would alert the binner's to the location of a truck in their region which would alleviate the long walk and burden of bringing their bottle deposit finds all the way back to recycling depot.
3. The Sex Workers Advocacy Network Vancouver, SWAN is a regional network unites NGOs and sex worker groups in their effort to fight for human rights for sex workers. Their members work with male, female and transgender sex workers, their clients and third parties, while as a network it also targets decision-makers and builds capacity of individual sex workers' rights activists to be vocal about issues in their countries and Vancouver. Again – making use of the internal messaging only boards, the staff worked with their clients in first-language to send out bad date alerts of abusive 'johns' or robberies. The biggest challenged faced was receiving reports as there was a cultural worry for 'loss of face' perceived in the community when the sex worker is abused or not paid. They do not want to be 'laughed at'. Also the system would potentially be better if it was able to send images (MMS) as well.
4. The Bad Date Coalition in Toronto – is a social action group committed to improving safety for people involved in sex work. Their wish to use the system is based in the aim to provide real-time information, reduce the amount of paper/stale 'bad date' info sheets in a sex workers bag (which could land her/him in trouble with their employer and break information barriers across a large geographic region. Information provided by the volunteer to us helped us understand the gap in reporting that happens from region to region as abusive johns circulate outside of one area then enter another to operate without worry of their habitual actions being shown as a pattern. The ability to list a license plate number or some identifying features and to scroll/search for the information prior to accepting a date could reduce this situation a lot.

With indicators and feedback almost entirely based on the contents of messages. It was anticipated that the messaging would follow one specific category - information/message providers select a category that their text is most related too and we'd be able to get a count for each. But this proved quite difficult - without reading every message and having access to the internal messages to aggregate the messages within categories as most messages were sent with more than one category selected.

In September, we sent a Survey Monkey around to the entire provider registrants. Of 81 Providers - 15 of the messages bounced back as the staff person registered no longer worked there and 7 responses were received. Responses were overall positive. The providers who responded found the site easy to use and believed it would be part of a significant move forward in terms of practical applications to their outreach work in the near future.



## Social Service provider stories of how the SMS could change/changed their approach to outreach

While it was a challenge to reach people to discuss their feedback we were encouraged by the extent of the partnerships built. We established much stronger bonds with many agencies across Canada. We conducted in excess of 120 workshops and webinars and created a Customer Relationship Management CRM database of nearly 200 Homeless agencies in Vancouver, Toronto and Calgary. The strongest ties were established with bc211 and FindHelp Toronto (Ontario 211), The United Way Lower Mainland. The Calgary Homeless Foundation, Ray-Cam Community Centre, The Downtown Community Court, Portland Hotel Society, Downtown Eastside Street Market, Family Services of the Lower Mainland, Embers Ventures The Calgary Dropin Centre, Calgary and Toronto Raise the Roof, Eva's Initiatives, The City of Toronto -Homeless Action Committee and the team behind the HIFIS system. We know these ties will lead to great engagement with the system in the near term.

Lessons learned about “Building Stronger Ties in the Community” was that it is largely done by voice-to-voice or face-to-face communications. Social media postings may lead you to the right organization to interact with but their social media staff are not in the role of actually entering in anything new. Once connected with the right person to lead adoption/change in the organization it is vital to show you’re there to make their life easier not add to the burden and consider these key features with innovation:

1. Emphasize the local nature of the approach. Every single agency told us they had special challenges with their client-base and that trust was hard won. They needed to overcome the notion that this solution would apply in the context and in their local area specifically. We established local telephone numbers for the clients to recognize as within their region and forged connections with sector leaders.
2. Hire local people. The only meaningful way to connect with providers/clients is within a trusted or known entity, face or voice. If you are going to Being introduced to an opportunity by a co-worker or network friend is more effective than cold calling a complete stranger. That said cold calling someone then telling them you will be following up with an email is a solid option.
3. Advertise in the local media. While local ads may not have a dramatic impact on adoption, they can endear your initiative to a cohort that has a significant say over its implementation. A locally-focused media or ad campaign is likely to stand out and cause people to start talking.
4. Bring meaningful ‘gifts’. In this community, those who receive free gifts will be more ready to discuss the initiative and sign up. This is certainly true for the Clients who would receive candies and – if they took a survey - \$2 for their time. This also helped overcome the outreach fatigue many Clients feel as they can be asked for a lot of data by varying levels of government or local agencies who are trying to find a better fit for the services they provide.
5. Proactive crisis management. Ours is a new system, and not every variation on how it works (or doesn’t) can be tested in an controlled office environment. Our proactive approach to issues that arose was what really shaped opinions on the system when something didn’t work as expected. This really helped us craft a better system as well.

## Social Service provider success stories and detractors which need to be addressed

One of the best stories was during the Longest Night of Year Event last year. The Community Engagement team at the Calgary Homeless Foundation had been working really hard to get the community registered in the system. These were nine individuals with lived experience who were jointly employed by the project funding and were really keen to have a communications tool like this active in the region. In just 3 weeks they had over 350 people registered to receive StreetMessenger alerts! Just prior to the Longest Night event a broadcasted text was sent to everyone registered to attend the vigil remembering those who had passed away while experiencing homelessness. The event was a big success with a lot of attendees many of whom were sharing their cellphone screen showing the text they received from the StreetMessenger. This really shows the power of the tool to activate a community and the great use of project funding to empower and employ people like those who made this system a reality in Calgary.

A strong detractor for the project’s success which needs to be addressed is how to keep the momentum within an organization up after they get started. Many would send one or two messages and be really excited about seeing the messages received. We asked 3 providers about the fall off once they tried the system and in each case, they said

that the perceived potential cost of the system into the long-term made them wary of becoming reliant on it. We have been developing other sites to offer a way to keep the system free and also sent a message to all informing them that a large donation has made their continued use free for a long time. We have been seeing more frequent activity after this information was shared.

## Social Service provider unforeseen benefits/challenges (i.e. receiving information from other agencies posting global messages which will reduce silos)

What was unanticipated was co-opting the code for this system and repurposing the platform for use in the Refugee and Immigration community. This new system actively sends an average of 750 messages a week from one organization alone. There have been request to join the new system from other agencies across Canada which is now possible as the pilot project is complete across Canada which is now possible as the pilot project is complete.

We anticipate having more one-on-one discussions with providers in the coming months as we received a large sustaining donation to allow us to continue our work to enable better, faster more accurate messaging to reach street-involved and homeless individuals across the country. That said, we did find that during the project was that finding a gap-filling technology that will save time and money for organizations in the non-profit sector is worthwhile but exceedingly difficult to build if the human resources gap isn't also a challenge. We have so many frontline people wanting to make a difference and use this tech but they really don't have the time to dedicate to its setup. We had much more productive interactions with groups where we provided funds to support their internal messaging system. We will look to continue to build along that path.

## Client sign up and use of information

In every instance, clients quickly sign up to receive messages. While this project has proved to be incredibly difficult to foster, we know the system is vital for those who receive the messages. We have been asked and believe that we need a super success hook for the system and will work with CrimeStoppers and Vancouver Coastal Health in the Fall of 2018, after we integrate the ability to send images. Once this is complete we can send pictures of missing persons and images of the overdose causing substances that are circulating.

## Client feedback on impact and awareness raising

Most of our feedback was for the Shelter Availability Map and taken in via bc211. For the most part, there was a strong wish to see more filter functions on the map and a bigger push for the shelter providers to use the text-to-update feature so availability can be seen in real time. We anticipate the Shelter Availability Map being more broadly used across BC as we add the interactive component to it and enlisted into service in Calgary although there are few shelters to select.

Ontario 311 has asked we consider making the Map show rehabilitation centres rather than shelter as they already have a phone in system that helps locate shelter. We are looking at this as it would require more development costs which are not forth-coming from that region.

## Client success stories

We have no reports to share. No one responded to the email we sent to the 242 clients that had actually elected to add their email to their profile. Not one. Simply stated, we're not sure what more we can do to get this kind of feedback.

## Conclusion

The StreetMessenger launch project has been a fascinating and exceptional learning opportunity. As a charity with a mandate to increase relevant communication in accessible ways, we are deeply grateful for the chance to bring technical innovation to a sector where communication has a myriad of barriers to overcome and not a lot of time or energy to dedicate to a new thing. While our innovation intended to alleviate the outreach burden was almost always initially seen as a great opportunity, it frequently proved to be significantly inhibited by operational oversight and finding the money, time or staff power for already overburdened resources. However, as is often the case in innovative



processes, the initial multifaceted system has given rise to more directed and simple solutions which we are confident will have lasting impact given more outreach on our part and others seeing the StreetMessenger and Newcomer.info platform and Shelter Availability Map working for others.

We found that the best opportunity for implementation was found in actually providing funds directly to agencies to implement the system for their own use. Hiring street teams to educate people was fine but without a ‘hook’ in the community it left Clients who wanting to be alerted confused about why they didn’t receive more frequent updates from their community. While Providers who wanted to use the system awaiting the greenlight to use it at all. Operational management often did not take the clear directives from their executive to implement or were at a loss for how to delegate it to overburdened frontline staff to try a new thing.

Ultimately it is clear the social service Providers want this kind of innovation and Clients want to get information in this way however, taking the step from idea to implementation likely will remain a venture for only those most invested in the change. Perhaps as the more specifically oriented organizations like Immigrant Services Society of BC show the value of fast and effective communication more organizations involved in alleviating the suffering the people experiencing homelessness will take up the innovation. Our sense is that in the coming months, as more and more Providers see that text messaging is to be the primary means of communications they will circle back to the opportunity and use it. Until then, we will remain available to help with adoption and largely work with the co-created systems we developed from the project – [www.Newcomer.info](http://www.Newcomer.info), [www.OurBuilding.info](http://www.OurBuilding.info) and [www.BeReady.info](http://www.BeReady.info).

## Raw Data

Number of clients registered/vetted to send messages	Vancouver– 590 Calgary – 347 Toronto – 69
Number of providers subscribed to send/ alerts*	81
Number of health related groups posting notifications**	
Number of homeless shelters and transitional housing updating their availability**	
Number of food provision organizations providing updates**	
Number of skills-building, training and employment opportunity updates**	

\* It's actually not possible to tell if a provider has registered to receive messages.

\*\* It is now understood that we can't easily unpack the number of messages sent in each category (Shelter, Food, health, jobs, emergency) as there are often multiple categories selected for a message. This could be a function of the majority of the public messaging appears to be for community events so outreach is the objective rather than limiting the number of free texts the org can send.



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