Mid-Term Evaluation Report
Saweyihtotan's Phase 1 Pilot Project

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Key Findings

- Between November 2020 and early February 2021, Saweyihtotan Mobile Services (SMS) reported **477 interactions** with relatives, with **69 interactions resulting in housing; 5 of which was categorized as long-term**

- Program partners and staff, in response to an evaluation survey, provided overall positive opinions regarding the project to date, both for relatives and participating agencies

- Specific benefits included improved coordination and collaboration, increased engagement with relatives, greater understand of the benefits of an Indigenous-led and culturally-relevant approach, and addressing service gaps

- Key systems barriers to be addressed include the need for transitional housing and additional supports for mental health and addictions

Acknowledgments

As the author of this report, I acknowledge that my work on this evaluation report took place on Treaty 6 lands and the traditional homelands of the Cree, Dene, Lakota, Dakota, Saulteaux, and the Métis Nation. I pay my respects to those who have and continue to live here and hope that this work contributes to reconciliation in our community.

I would also like to thank those who shared their thoughts and experiences through the evaluation survey, Koralie Gaudry for her insights and support, and Saraih-Dawn Matthews for her assistance.

Project Overview

Saweyihtotan, "Let us bless each other through our show of respect for each", is an Indigenous-led pilot project designed to support the needs of individual relatives[1] who are unsheltered in downtown Saskatoon, with the aim of building longer-term solutions and addressing systemic barriers. The program is led by the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) in partnership with the City of Saskatoon, the provincial Ministries of Social Services, Health, and Justice, Saskatoon Police Service, Saskatoon Fire Department, Community Safety and Wellbeing Partners Group and the Interagency Response to Downtown Safety (a subcommittee of the Safe Community Action Alliance). Initiated in the fall of 2020, this partnership builds on recent successful collaborative projects in the areas of well-being and community safety, including the Safe Community Action Alliance (SCAA), the Saskatoon Interagency Response to COVID-19 (SIRC), and the community response to the closure of the City Centre Inn and Suites[2] and the resulting efforts to support individuals and families who had been living there.

In Phase 1 of this pilot project (October 2020 - March 31, 2021), Saweyihtotan aims to support relatives through two primary services, both based out of White Buffalo Youth Lodge (WBYL). **Street outreach** with relatives is led by the Saweyihtotan Mobile Services (SMS) team, which is complemented by **case management and wraparound support** provided through the WBYL HUB connection point that was established as part of the initial community response to COVID-19. Both services are designed to be "For Indigenous, By Indigenous", with an emphasis on providing supports and using case management approaches that are culturally relevant and culturally safe, including access to spiritual guidance and cultural supports.

Collaboration with program partners and other agencies is likewise built into the model, with core income assistance staff from the Ministry of Social Services assigned

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[1] This term (singular *wahkomakan*, plural *wahkomakanak*) is used by the program in place of "clients" or "participants".

[2] Commonly referred to in the community as the Northwoods (its former name).

to support the SMS team and ongoing collaborative work with agencies connected to the WBYL HUB. Additionally, the Saweyihtotan project team is supported by a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the project partners, and is connected to other community groups and initiatives such as the SCAA and the Community Safety and Well-Being partners table (CSWB).

Key identified deliverables for the pilot project:

- Street outreach system that addresses immediate needs of those who are unsheltered in that area
- Culturally competent HUB services and one access point to multiple services under one roof
- Culturally relevant holistic case management services
- Find short term shelter options, identifying housing needs and securing housing,
- Connected to social services including income assistance, and/or harm reduction-based service needs
- Client engagement and access to spiritual guidance and cultural supports.
- Coordination of Interagency team to support the reduction of system barriers, develop interagency solutions and sustainability to support population for the long term
- The current work is also intended to support the development of a Phase 2 pilot, which would focus on the development of a Long Term Transitional Supportive Housing Model.

(Source: Admin Report - Interagency Response to Downtown Safety and Well-Being – Saweyihtotan Pilot Project)

Evaluation Overview

This evaluation is designed to provide a summary of the Saweyihtotan pilot project to date and recommendations for STC and the partnership related to both the pilot project itself and future collaborative work in this area. As the pilot project is still in progress at the time of writing, this report does not represent a final summative evaluation of the pilot project: however, it does provide considerations for such an evaluation after the pilot project has been completed.

Two primary sources of information were used to inform this evaluation. **Program data and documents**, including program statistics, briefing notes, and project reports, were provided by our primary contact at STC for this project and were reviewed to understand the project's history, successes, and challenges. The second source of data came from an **online survey** created and distributed by Saweyihtotan to project

partners in early February, 2021. Questions in this survey focused on assessing how the pilot project has contributed to community engagement with relatives, provision of culturally-relevant supports and services, and reduction of systems barriers preventing access to services: respondents were also asked to provide recommendations for the future and invited to share stories related to their involvement in the project.

14 responses[3] were received from project partners and staff, representing the following organizations and sectors:
- Saskatoon Fire, Police, Emergency Management Operations (EMO): 5
- STC staff (including WBYL and SMS): 4
- Provincial Ministry or body: 3
- Other non-profit organizations: 2

Findings

This section provides an overview of the data reviewed for this evaluation, divided into 3 primary areas of focus: primary program outcomes for relatives, outcomes for partners and other agencies, and systems barriers (including those that the program has addressed and those that require further attention). Recommendations arising from these findings are provided in the final section of this report.

Program Outcomes for Relatives

Based on data provided by Saweyihtotan, the project has recorded **477 interactions** with relatives between November 17, 2020, and February 4, 2021 (the most recent date that completed data was available for). As the data was anonymized for the purpose of this analysis, it is possible that some of these data points may represent multiple interactions with one relative.

The majority of interactions through the program were with Indigenous (77%) or Métis (6%) relatives. 3 in 10 interactions were with relatives in the age

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[3] One additional response was received from a non-project partner. The response from this individual was reviewed along with those from project partners but not officially included in the analysis.

range of 40-50, followed by 23% with relatives aged 30-40: 20% were categorized as 50 or older.

Out of the 477 interactions[4], a large majority (78%) were coded as "Daily check in and conversation", while just over half (53%) included a meal delivery. Most importantly for the purpose of this evaluation, **69 interactions were coded as resulting in Housing**, while 68 resulted in the creation of a Case Plan. Although information was not available for this evaluation on what supports individual relatives were referred to or connected with as part of the Case Plan or Housing, the Saweyihtotan project is connected to at least 12 non-profit organizations, municipal agencies, and provincial teams through Community Care Team Meetings, along with other agencies directly or through other partnerships such as SCAA, CSWB and the Saweyihtotan project partnership group.

According to an internal STC briefing note (prepared January 31, 2021), the project **housed 5 relatives in long-term housing for more than 1 month**: additionally, the outreach team also mediated 32 possible evictions of individuals living in long-term housing. A separate report on Saweyihtotan's involvement with the Cold Weather Strategy (CWS) indicated that SMS transported 87 relatives to safe housing in response to requests from 10 agencies and businesses during the week of February 3-10, 2021, which saw extremely cold temperatures.

The impact on utilizing a **culturally-relevant and -safe approach** to supporting relatives was highlighted by survey respondents and in internal program documents. Speaking about the Northwoods closure, one program partner noted that "Providing a cultural foundation for the process helped to increase the respectful re-homing of our relatives", while another survey respondent shared the story of bringing a relative who had just left treatment to a cultural event, which helped create a sense of pride and interest in connecting more with his culture for that relative. Although hosting cultural events has been made difficult due to pandemic-related public health restrictions, the value of using this approach can help increase ownership of the process for relatives and act as a foundation for their healing journeys.

Program Outcomes for Partners and Other Agencies

Based on their responses to the survey, program partners overall expressed positive opinions regarding the project. With the exception of one respondent who was new to

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[4] Each interaction could include multiple activity codes.

the project at the time of the survey, all respondents noted an increase in engagement with high risk and difficult to house individuals. As one survey respondent noted, *"[Saweyihtotan] identified relatives at risk during extreme cold weather and has provided a nimble and flexible response to the safety needs of relatives without housing"*. Other respondents shared how the project has assisted with transportation of relatives to their services and programs, as well as provided guidance on how to best work with unsheltered relatives.

Other benefits for partners and other agencies reported through the survey's open-ended questions include:
- Improved understanding of and connections to culturally relevant and appropriate supports
- Ongoing communication amongst partner agencies (as well as other services and supports), including connecting for specific assistance or further information
- Improved collaboration and coordination to address service gaps and ensure follow-through with specific relatives

Survey respondents were also provided an opportunity to share personal stories from their involvement with the project: such examples included the positive outcomes of SMS workers advocating on behalf of relatives with doctors to and connecting relatives with cultural activities and events, individual stories of relatives accessing long-term housing through the project, and the **personal impact of the use of the word "relative"** instead of "client" or "resident":

> *"I want to share what a profound impact moving from the term "client" or "resident" to "relative" had on my personally. This simple language change brought me to tears. When we see people as connected to as in a kinship relationship, when we see people as part of our family it deeply impacts how we work and our worldview. Thank you"* - Survey respondent

Systems Barriers

Survey respondents were asked to identify how Saweyihtotan helped address systems barriers for relatives, as well as lessons learned for addressing such barriers and additional recommendations going forward. A key strength of the project in this area was **bringing representatives of different organizations and services, both frontline and managerial, together**. These connections were useful in supporting individual cases as well as to providing opportunities to identify, discuss, and address

barriers: as one respondent noted, "*We are able to meet with managers/partners to discuss barriers we are seeing and to give input on making changes*". Additionally, survey respondents noted that the project helped guide relatives through potential system barriers (such as referral processes) and thus **shortening the time for relatives to access services and reducing the possibility of missed connections or referrals**.

At the same time, survey respondents and Saweyihtotan staff (through internal reports) identified gaps and issues in current systems that pose a barrier for relatives to move into housing and address other challenges that they face. The need for **transitional housing** that provides support between being unsheltered and independent living was mentioned by multiple respondents: this gap is connected to a need for **improved mental health and substance use supports**, as the below quote illustrates.

> "*People need safe housing and shelter before they can even begin to address the underlying causes of their current situation. You can't stabilize and address mental health when you are living in constant survival mode. And you can't address it when you only get one night of shelter at a time. People need long term stabilization options available and then we can work on mental health and addictions.*" - Survey respondent

The ongoing **COVID-19 pandemic**, while helping to foster collaboration among community agencies in Saskatoon, has also enacted further barriers for the provision of services and the ability of relatives to access supports. Restrictions related to COVID were noted in internal reports as reducing the program's ability to provide transportation and cultural supports, due to restrictions for events on the land and reduced access to elders. The same reports also noted that the outreach team's capacity at times was reduced due to staff illness, while the availability of transitional housing and informal housing through friends or family members was also reduced due to public health restrictions. One survey respondent shared a story of helping a relative who was going through alcohol withdrawal and seeking assistance, but was unable to access detox as a result of a COVID-related reduction in capacity. Finally, an internal program document identified the need for the program to connect directly with the

provincial Ministries of Health and Mental Health, due to SHA's primary focus being on their direct response to the pandemic.

Notwithstanding the earlier-reported positive outcomes, some respondents identified **communication and relationships** as an area for further improvement, both within the partnership and with external agencies. In the latter case, the existence of strained relationships among some of the service providers working with relatives in Saskatoon may have its roots in the circumstances leading to the creation and funding of Saweyihtotan, as well as systemic factors such as resource availability and ongoing shifts in relations between Indigenous-led and settler-led organizations. Working from a common understanding and goal of supporting relatives in Saskatoon will hopefully create opportunities to begin the work of healing and restoring such relations.

Conclusions and Next Steps

"When the Northwoods closed … I felt helpless because I knew my organization had no ability to meet these people in that time of need, and provide for them what was lacking. The city was looking to us for help, but we had little to offer. If I could have created a response to the need, it would have been Saweyihtotan. Now they are here, and I have a renewed hope." - Survey respondent

Based on the review of available program and survey data, there is preliminary evidence that Saweyihtotan is **contributing to positive outcomes for relatives**, both specifically in the area of **securing housing** and more generally in **enhancing service coordination** between project staff, partner agencies, and other services. Benefits cited by program partners include improved engagement with relatives, increased understanding of relatives' needs and contexts, and greater appreciation for the use of culturally-responsive and Indigenous-led approaches to supporting relatives.

Moving forward, it is important to recognize that Saweyihtotan exists within broader systems of services, resources, organizations, policies, relationships, structures, and other systemic factors that directly and indirectly affect relatives and our community as

a whole. As a pilot project, Saweyihtotan will be assessed in part on the tangible outcomes it directly creates for relatives: at the same time, **creating and strengthening relationships, enhancing understanding of Indigenous case management approaches, and demonstrating the value of culturally-relevant and -safe methods** are also key outcomes to consider for the final evaluation.

For the final evaluation of Phase 1 of the Saweyihtotan project, we recommend:
- Ensuring that the evaluation incorporates an Indigenous lens throughout, including in its choice of key evaluation questions, methods, analysis, and presentation
- Grounding the evaluation in the stories of relatives themselves, in addition to staff, partners, and other key stakeholders
- Evaluating the experiences of the relatives in the program, specifically to improve our understanding of how relatives interact with SMS and the HUB and the benefits of utilizing an Indigenous-led and culturally-relevant approach
- Assessing how the program made a difference compared to "business as usual" through contribution analysis.