

DENVER COLD WEATHER SHELTER ACCESS: SURVEY + REPORT

May 2024

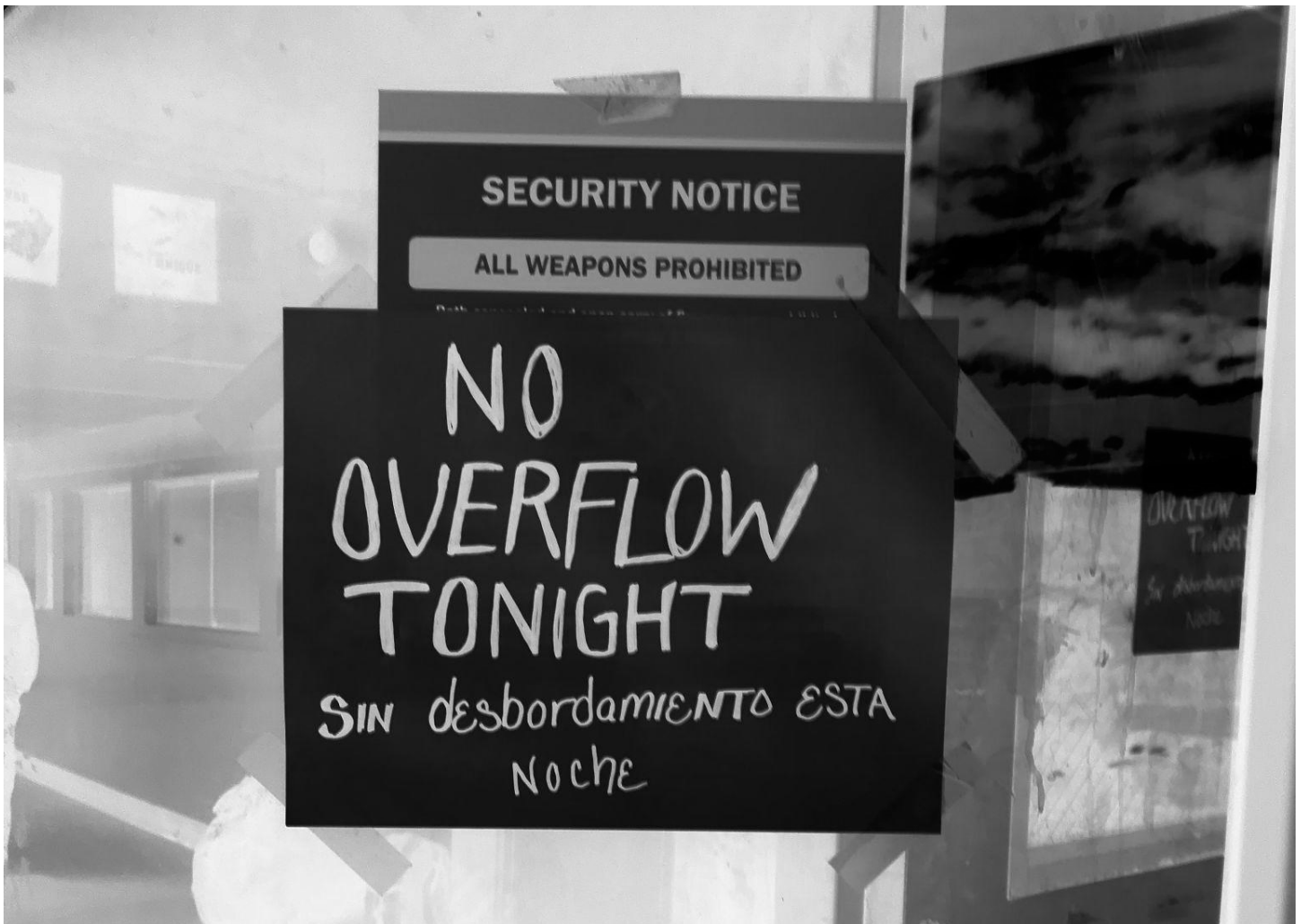


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Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey

Survey Background

In January and February of 2024, Housekeys Action Network Denver (HAND) surveyed 46 houseless people about cold weather sheltering. This survey asked 23 questions about access to cold weather shelter, experiences at cold weather shelters, and suggested improvements to these shelters. We surveyed houseless people in a variety of locations including near downtown shelters like St. Francis Center and Denver Rescue Mission, at day centers like The Gathering Place, at large encampments, and at scattered street locations where individual houseless people spend time. All surveys were done in Denver. Houseless people who did the survey were given a bus ticket as compensation for their time.

Insightful comments were written in, both prompted and unprompted, that elucidated meaning behind the answers given and have been included underneath/next to relevant statistics in quotation marks and bolded.

Survey Results

HAND asked questions about both day and night shelters.

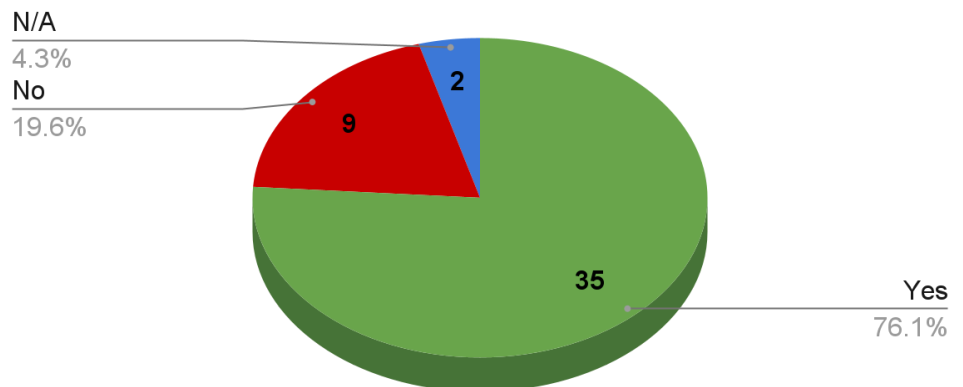
Day Shelter Access

When asked *“Have you tried to access an indoor day shelter in the cold?”*

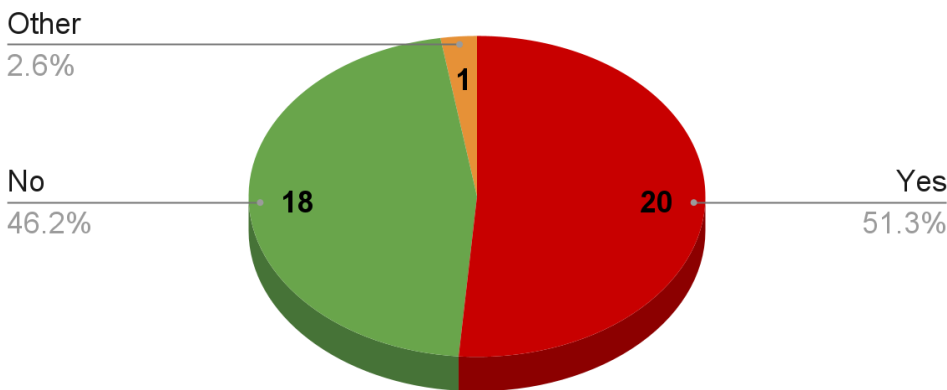
76% (n=35) answered **Yes**, 20% (n=9) answered **No**, and 4% (n=2) answered **N/A** (not applicable).

One person noted **“had to get there in a wheelchair”**.

Percentage of people who have tried accessing day shelters during cold weather



Percentage of people turned away from day shelters, including during cold weather emergencies



When asked "Have you ever been turned away, even when it is cold?"

51% (n=20) answered **Yes**, 46% (n=18) answered **No**, and 3% (n=1) answered **Other** - noting that they would never go, regardless of weather conditions.

We then asked "If so, which day shelter(s)?" to which these were the answers given¹:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Samaritan | 21% (n=5) |
| 2. SFC (St. Francis Center) | 17% (n=4) |
| 3. 48th Street Shelter | 13% (n=3) |
| 4. Crossroads | 13% (n=3) |
| 5. Non-specific (in general) | 8% (n=2) |
| 6. Boulder Shelter | 4% (n=1) |
| 7. Gateway | 4% (n=1) |
| 8. Haven of Hope | 4% (n=1) |
| 9. Holy Rosary | 4% (n=1) |
| 10. McNichols | 4% (n=1) |
| 11. R3 (Recovery Works) | 4% (n=1) |
| 12. TGP (The Gathering Place) | 4% (n=1) |

HAND then asked respondents "If so, why did the shelter say they turned you away?" They answered:

- Capacity 56% (n=10)
 - "Just no room"
- Rules 28% (n=5)
 - DNR'd² (n=2)
 - "(Fight) woman kept touching me"

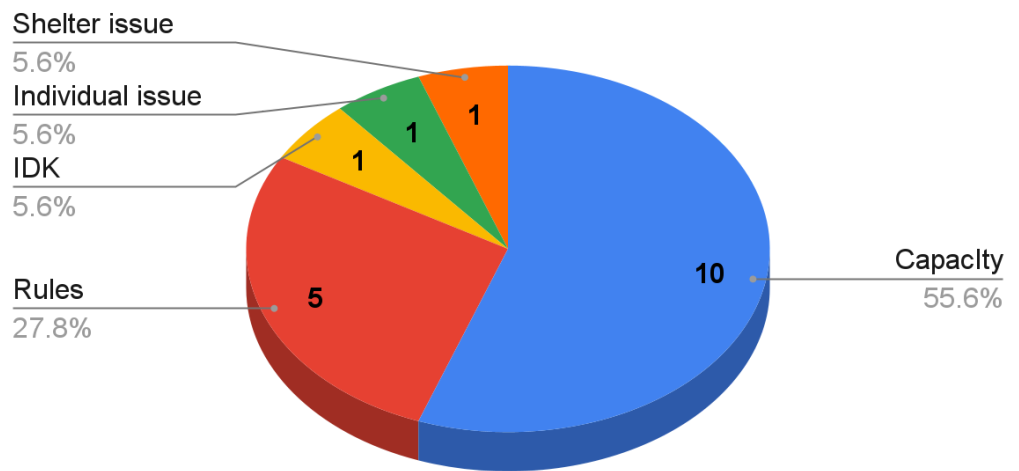
¹ Some of these are both day and night shelters. Also, some people did not remember the names of the shelters that turned them away.

² DNR stands for "do not return", and is a status that disallows individuals from returning to the shelter at all. This is often given out liberally and at the discretion of individual staff members, resulting in many not being able to access any available shelters for indefinite periods of time.

- Too much personal property ($n=2$)
 - **“I would leave my things”**
- Needed to have an appointment ($n=1$)
- Couples not allowed ($n=1$)
 - **“Because I was with my husband”**
- Unknown reason 6% ($n=1$)
- Individual fault 6% ($n=1$)
 - **“That my ways are wrong”**
- Shelter fault 6% ($n=1$)
 - **“They play head games”**

It is of note that “capacity” was the reason given by respondents in over half of these cases.

Reasons for why people are turned away from day shelters



Next we asked, “What did you do when you were turned away?” People responded accordingly:

- Slept/stayed outside 56% ($n=14$)
 - **“Froze”**
 - **“Used trash bags to stay warm”**
 - **“Go back outside to find a place to shelter myself”**
 - **“Walked to see if there was another one. no help, slept in the cold”**
- Experienced emotion 12% ($n=3$)
 - **“felt suicidal”**
 - **“Turn and felt sad”**
- Sought other resources 12% ($n=3$)
- Went to another shelter 8% ($n=2$)
- Went to a friend's place 4% ($n=1$)
- Went to the police 4% ($n=1$)
- N/a (not applicable) 4% ($n=1$)

Of note, the majority of people stayed outside in the cold when they could not get into the shelter.

We also asked *"Have you ever had to wait outside while the day shelter is open because they are at capacity?"*

61% (n=25) answered **Yes**, 37% (n=15) answered **No**, and 2% (n=1) answered **N/A**.

We then asked *"If so, at which day shelter(s)?"* Those who answered this question did so in the following:

1. SFC (St. Francis Center) 60% (n=12)
2. Crossroads 10% (n=2)
3. 48th Street Shelter 5% (n=1)
4. Comitis 5% (n=1)
5. Holy Rosary 5% (n=1)
6. Samaritan House 5% (n=1)
7. TGP (The Gathering Place) 5% (n=1)
8. Indecipherable/unclear 5% (n=1)

To get a deeper understanding of people's experience at these day shelters we asked *"What has your experience been like at cold weather day shelters?"*

We categorized the answers into negative or positive responses, then included subcategories about specific types of comments:

- Negative experience 55% (n=24)
 - Crowded (n=5)
 - **"Long lines, turned away"**
 - Bad staff treatment (n=5)
 - Negative in general (n=4)
 - **"Just beds no chairs, I had to go to sleep at 6PM"**
 - **"They treated everyone like we are in jail, and limit their to services to anyone"**
 - **"Not good ones. They weren't running it like a shelter should be. They were disrespectful to us & treated us like we were 5!"**
 - **"Standing in the cold, hands cold, feet cold, Didn't have enough gear, No cover, nose running. I keep asking when we can go inside, they give no answers"**
 - Negative in general (n=4)
 - **"Emotionally disturbing, overwhelming, crowded, uncomfortable"**
 - **"I don't want to go"**
 - No services (n=4)
 - **"I should be somewhere with physical therapy"**
 - Shelter temperature (n=3)
 - Chaos (n=2)
 - Shelter hours (n=1)
- Positive experience 34% (n=15)
 - Positive in general (n=7)
 - Basic provisions (i.e. roof over head, shelter, etc...) (n=2)

■ **“Nice to have roof”**

- Services provided (n=2)
- Shelter temperature (n=2)
- Good staff treatment (n=2)

■ **“Very good service, provide me w/ the things I need”**

- Indecipherable 7% (n=3)
- N/A 5% (n=2)

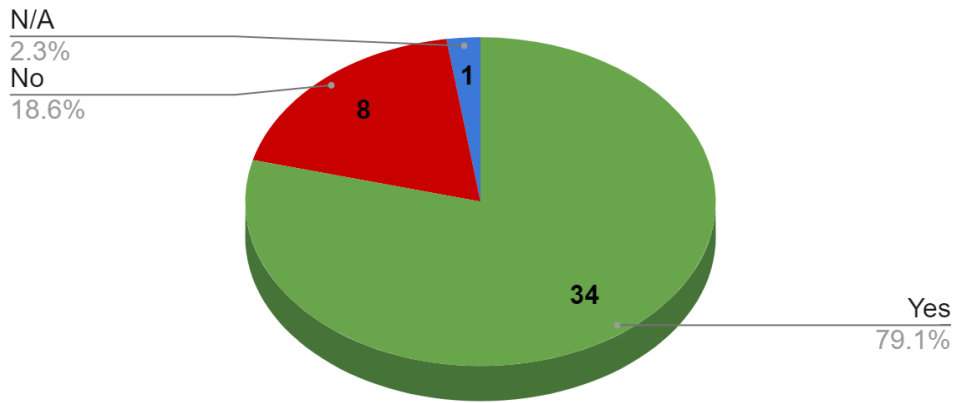
Night Shelter Access

The next section of the survey asked similar questions, but this time, regarding night shelters.

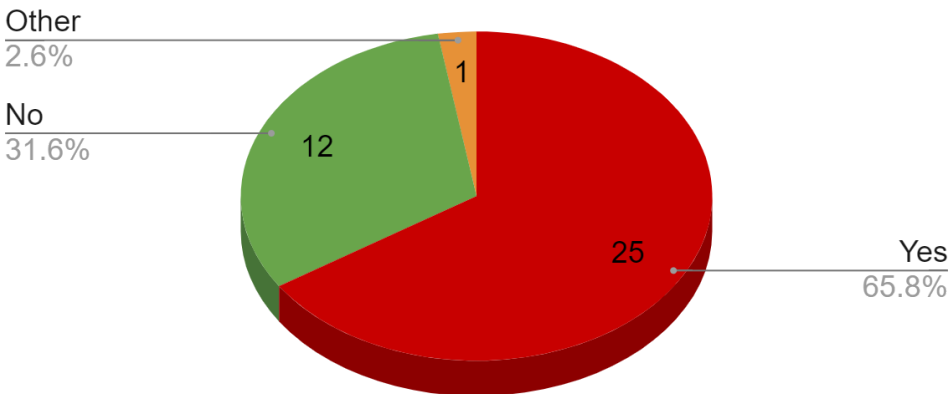
When we asked, *“Have you tried to access an indoor night shelter when it is cold?”*

79% (n=34) answered **Yes**, 19% (n=8) answered **No**, and 2% (n=1) answered **N/A**.

Percentage of people who have tried accessing night shelters during cold weather



Percentage of people turned away from night shelters, including during cold weather emergencies



When we asked, *“Have you ever been turned away, even when it is cold?”*

66% (n=25) answered Yes, 32% (n=12) answered No, and 3% (n=1) answered Other (writing **“I don’t like shelters”**).

HAND asked *"If so, which night shelter(s)?"* to which the following responses were given:

- 48th Street Shelter 25% (n=7)
 - 48th Street in general/ didn't specify (n=4)
 - 48th Street Women's (n=2)
 - 48th Street Men's (n=1)
- Samaritan House 21% (n=6)
- Crossroads 14% (n=4)
- Denver Rescue Mission 7% (n=2)
- SFC (St. Francis Center) 7% (n=2)
- Indecipherable 7% (n=2)
- Holly Street Shelter 4% (n=1)
- R3 (Recovery Works) 4% (n=1)
- Westminster 4% (n=1)
- Multiple shelters 4% (n=1)

We then asked *"If so, why did the shelter say they turned you away?"* and these were the answers:

- Capacity 64% (n=16)
 - **"No Room"**
 - **"No overflow"**
 - **"Capacity (that was a lie)"**
- Shelter fault 16% (n=4)
 - **"No reason"**
 - **"The person I was with is Trans"**
 - **"Not being nice, He was not letting no else in"**
- Rules 12% (n=3)
 - Curfew (n=1)
 - DNR (n=1)
 - Drunk (n=1)
- I don't know 4% (n=1)
- Not on list 4% (n=1)
 - **"Had to be on the list"**

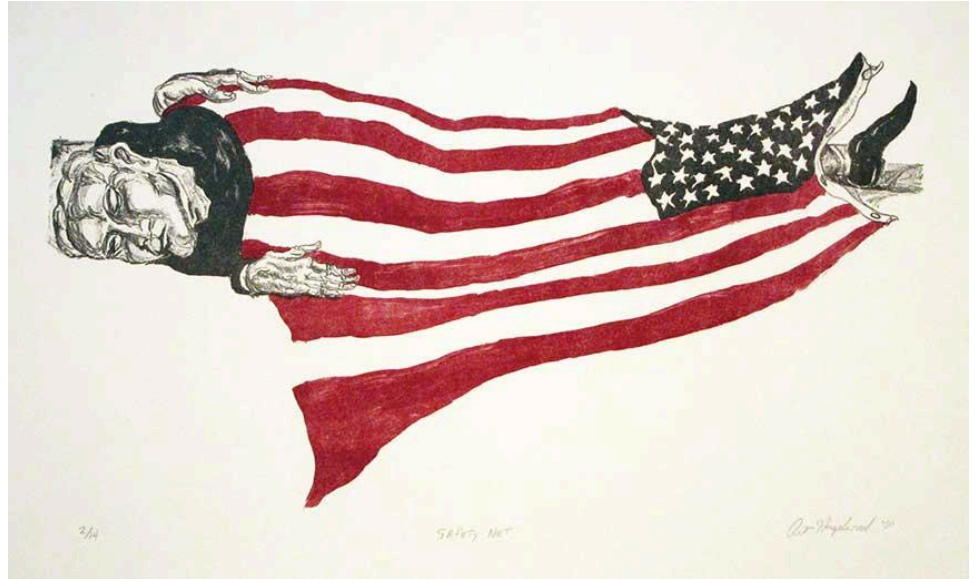
Of note: again, capacity was the reason given in over half of these responses.

Next we asked, *"What did you do when you were turned away?"* Here are people's answers:

- Slept/stayed outside 50% (n=13)
 - **"Slept in a tent"**
 - **"Passed out in alley"**
 - **"We stayed out in the cold"**
 - **"Sleep on sidewalk in front"**
 - **"Went back outside to camp"**

- **“Rode the busses to stay warm, slept on a bus bench”**
- Walked/wandered 23% (n=6)
- Went to another shelter 12% (n=3)
 - In general/didn't specify (n=2)
 - Emergency shelter (n=1)
- Experienced emotion 8% (n=2)
 - **“Felt suicidal”**
- Went to the police 4% (n=1)
- Visited a friend 4% (n=1)

Of note: again the majority of people stayed outside in the cold when turned away from the shelter - **at least 73%**!



To get a deeper understanding of people's experience at these night shelters we asked *“What has your experience been like at cold weather night shelters?”*

We first broke down the answers into main categories of either negative or positive responses, followed by subcategories regarding the content.

- Negative response 61% (n=34)
 - Experienced emotion (n=6)
 - **“Horrible, stress on people”**
 - **“Stressful, locked in”**
 - Negative in general (n=5)
 - Bad staff treatment (n=5)
 - **“Horrible, unacceptable treatment like I'm in jail”**
 - **“Management stops w/ petty rules and no space, no accommodations”**
 - **“They don't watch every thing, a lot going on, fighting, they try to rape you, no security”**
 - Chaotic environment (n=5)
 - **“CRAZY! No discipline as far as staff. No experience w/ houseless ppl”**

- Hygiene issues (n=3)
 - **“5 stalls & sinks for 48 people”**
 - Bedbugs (n=2)
 - **“Terrible bedbug”**
- Unsafe (n=3)
- Discrimination (n=2)
 - **“Very Bad, Threats of rape due to being trans”**
- Shelter temperature (n=2)
- Access issues (n=1)
- Crowded (n=1)
- Poor amenities (n=1)
- Positive response 29% (n=16)
 - Positive in general (n=10)
 - Basic amenities (roof, shelter, etc) (n=3)
 - **“Not freezing to death or frostbite”**
 - Food (n=1)
 - Safe (n=1)
 - Services (n=1)
 - **“So far so good, has proper care as disabled person (physical therapy, transportation) have medicare/caide”**



“It was snowing hard that night. It was around midnight, and I had just clocked out at my job in the kitchen of a restaurant. I knew that all the shelters had ended the program where you could show your time card for the day and be allowed in after curfew. That was no more, and here it was, after curfew, snowing, and I had nowhere to go. Just then I remembered being told that shelters

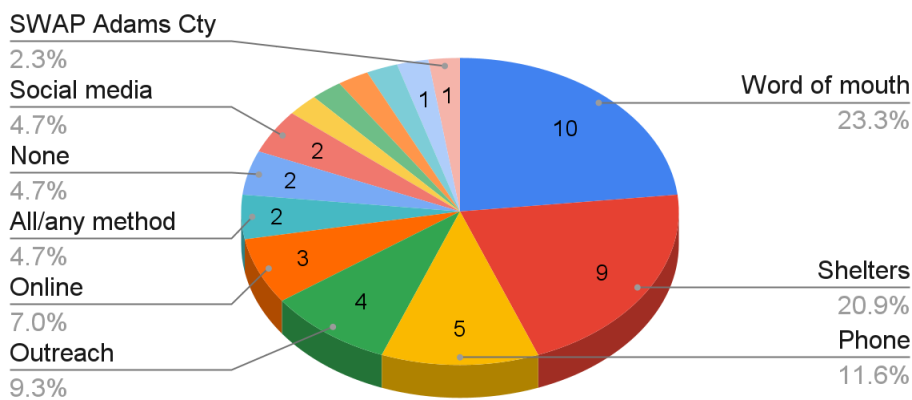
had to accept people that were brought by the cops or other emergency personnel. I called Denver non-emergency and explained the situation. They sent a cop to meet me. I had to be handcuffed to ride in the cop car to Crossroads, including being cuffed with the lights flashing right in front of my work! Needless to say how embarrassing it is to have to do this after working a 10-hour shift in a hot kitchen, just to get a dirty mat on a vermin-infested floor to sleep on, so I wouldn't freeze to death.” - Anonymous Houseless Person’s Story

Accessing Information About Shelters

We asked, "How do you get information about cold weather shelters?" Here are the answers:

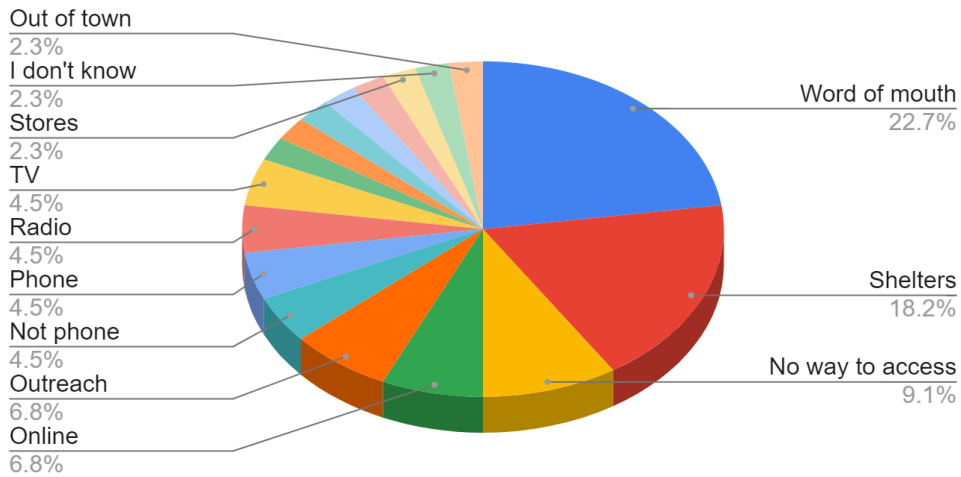
- Word of mouth 23% (n=10)
- Day shelter 21% (n=9)
- Calling 12% (n=5)
 - Call 211 (n=3)
 - Call 311 (n=1)
 - Call 911 (n=1)
 - In general (n=1)
- Outreach 9% (n=4)
- Online 7% (n=3)
- All/anywhere 5% (n=2)
- None 5% (n=2)
- Social media 5% (n=2)
- Activists 2% (n=1)
- CCH (CO Coalition for the Homeless) 2% (n=1)
- Church 2% (n=1)
- Hospital 2% (n=1)
- Online 2% (n=1)
- Security office 2% (n=1)
- SWAP in Adams County 2% (n=1)

Methods of accessing information regarding cold weather shelters



We asked this same question on a previous survey we did in December of 2023 with 34 houseless people regarding sweeps in freezing weather and these answers reflect those answers, as depicted in the following:

"How do you access information about cold weather shelters, warming centers, etc?"



In both surveys, "Word of Mouth" is the top method by which unhoused folks access information about cold weather sheltering, with "Shelters" being the second most answered method.

Traveling to Shelters

We asked people "How do you get to these shelters?" and asked them to circle all the answers that applied.

- Walk 44% (n=25)
- City bus 39% (n=22)
- Shelter provided bus 18% (n=10)
- Get a ride 7% (n=4)
 - "Uber"
- Other 2% (n=1)
 - "Train"

We then asked, "How long do you have to travel to get there (including time on a provided shelter bus)?"

The most frequent answer was "**1 hour**" and the average time listed was **1.7 hours**.

Some people answered with a distance, the most common of which being **1 mile** and the average distance being **3 miles**.

Two people simply answered, "**Long way**" or "**Lots of walking, hours**"

This is important to keep in mind, as any of this walking travel time is done in the cold. Additionally, hours of travel time may not be possible for some people's schedules.

Shelter Hours

To better understand people's ability to access cold weather shelters, we asked *"Do the hours the cold weather night shelter is open enable you to access the shelter?"*

44% ($n=15$) answered **Yes**, 41% ($n=14$) answered **Sometimes**, and 15% ($n=5$) answered **No**.

We then asked people to describe the situation regarding shelter accessibility in general more:

- Shelter hour issues 25% ($n=5$)
 - **"If I'm in time"**
 - **"Catch bus by 9pm at St. Francis"**
 - **"Can only be here X amount of time"**
- Capacity issues 20% ($n=4$)
 - **"Sometimes it's full"**
 - **"There is a line to get in, in some cases"**
- Curfew 15% ($n=3$)
- "No"/wouldn't elaborate 10% ($n=2$)
- Unhoused/outside now 10% ($n=2$)
- Chaotic conditions 5% ($n=1$)
- Good hours 5% ($n=1$)
- IDK (I don't know) 5% ($n=1$)
- Minor 5% ($n=1$)
- Only go to use bathroom 5% ($n=1$)

The primary answers here are general unspecified issues with hours, capacity issues (as described earlier in the survey), and curfew. Some of these comments on capacity under this question regarded them not being able to get to the shelter in time before the shelter is over capacity.

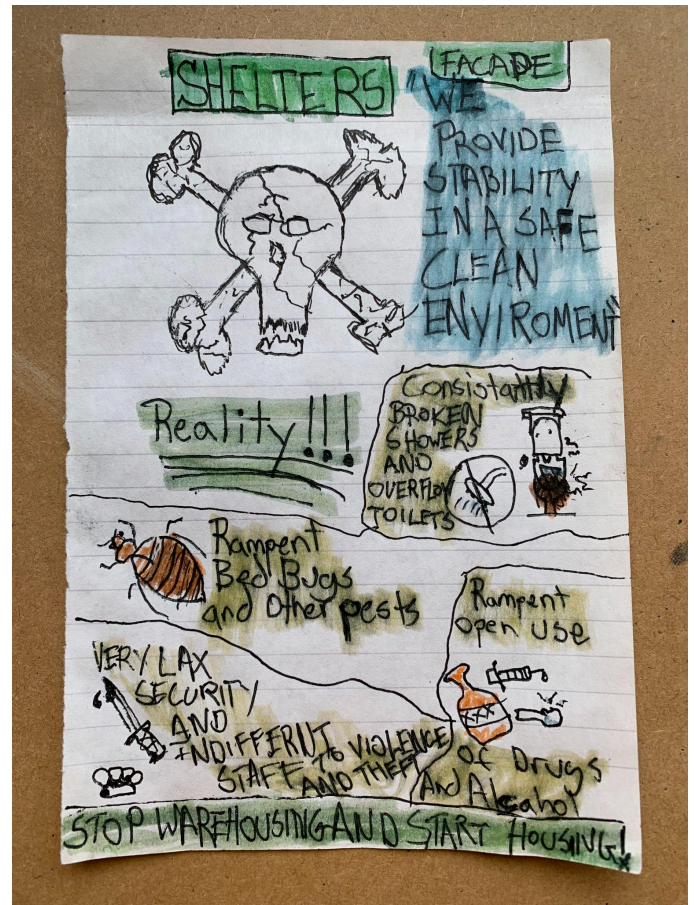
Reasons Not to Access Shelters

To understand the reasons people do not always go to shelters, we asked *"Are there reasons why you do not ever, or do not always, go to these shelters even in the cold?"*

58% ($n=25$) of people answered **Yes**, 26% ($n=11$) answered **No**, and 16% ($n=7$) answered **Unsure**.

We then asked "If so, what are the reasons?"

- Others' behavior in shelter 26% (n=10)
- Shelter staff mistreatment 23% (n=9)
- Not preferred over... 21% (n=8)
 - Stated preferences over shelters:
 - Outside (n=4)
 - Other places, in general (n=2)
 - Actual housing (n=1)
 - Friend's place (n=1)
- Bugs 5% (n=2)
- Partner not allowed 5% (n=2)
- Distance 5% (n=2)
- Restrictive rules 5% (n=2)
 - Need to have ID (n=1)
 - Can't bring all their property (n=1)
- Specific shelter preferred 5% (n=2)
 - Emergency shelter (n=1)
 - Samaritan House (n=1)
- No capacity 3% (n=1)
- Shelter temperature (cold) 3% (n=1)



Of note, the most common responses given are related to issues with other people - both other shelter guests and shelter staff. This theme of not wanting to be around large groups of unfamiliar people is widespread and consistent.

Shelter Improvements Needed

Lastly we asked people "What would you like to see different in shelters so that you are able to access cold weather shelters when you need/want to?"

- Accessibility 24% (n=11)
 - Hours expanded (n=5)
 - **"Stay open + open hours"**
 - Capacity expanded (n=2)
 - **"More beds/availability"**
 - **"More accessibility, extra overflow for people"**
 - More locations offered (n=2)
 - **"Open close night shelters"**

Survey Key Findings

The Cold Weather Shelter Access survey of houseless people's experiences and their recommendations for cold weather sheltering reveal several key things.

1. First and foremost, a large number of houseless people are being turned away from shelter during cold weather.
 - While 76-79% of survey respondents have attempted to access cold weather shelters, either during the day or night, over 50% experienced being turned away from day shelters and nearly 70% experienced such from night shelters.
2. Most of these people stay/sleep outside when they cannot access shelter.
 - Over 56-73% of those turned away end up staying outside as a result, with those attempting to access night shelter making up the larger percentage.
3. Many people have to travel great distances, most often by foot, in the cold, to access shelters.
 - The average time to get to shelter was 1.7 hours while the average distance was 3 miles.
 - The majority of individuals do so by walking (or wheeling themselves in wheelchairs), followed by taking City buses - when they can get bus tickets.
 - The amount of time it takes to travel to shelters is not always possible for people's schedules, work or otherwise, and can be taxing on the body while moving in the cold... just to have a high likelihood of being turned away.
4. There are many reasonable explanations for why many people do not go to shelters, even in the cold, and why they might prefer to find ways to hunker down and stay warm outside.
 - The top reasons for not going to a shelter have to do with the chaotic, inhumane, and stressful environment created by other shelter seekers and disrespectful, authoritative staff.
5. Lastly, houseless people have many proposed improvements to shelters to make them more accessible, especially in the cold. The wide variety of improvements illustrates the keen insight and wisdom of those living in these environments, and them not needing people without that lived experience to be speaking on their behalf.
 - The top improvements are, in order: increasing accessibility by expanded hours, capacity, locations, and transportation; improving staff treatment towards shelter residents; offering more supportive services, including case management and community service opportunities; getting rid of curfew; improving communication to the people regarding shelter resources; improving hygiene, including by treating for bed bugs.

Shelter Capacity and Usage Data

The City keeps records of shelter usage and capacity. HAND was able to obtain records from HOST for the months of October 2023 through January 2024 for the following all-inclusive list of non-family shelters:

- 48th Men's
- 48th Women's
- Best Western
- Crossroads
- Delores Project
- Holly Center
- Holy Rosary
- Lawrence St Shelter
- Park Ave Inn
- Sinton
- Smith Road
- Urban Peak

The following are snapshots of that shelter capacity data:

Date	Total Guest Overall	Total Nightly Capacity	Date	Total Guest Overall	Total Nightly Capacity
10/1/2023	1779	1853	10/23/2023	1835	1853
10/2/2023	1814	1853	10/24/2023	1896	1853
10/3/2023	1759	1853	10/25/2023	1855	1853
10/4/2023	1767	1851	10/26/2023	1934	1853
10/5/2023	1794	1851	10/27/2023	1950	1891
10/6/2023	1828	1853	10/28/2023	1991	1891
10/7/2023	1804	1853	10/29/2023	1988	1891
10/8/2023	1817	1853	10/30/2023	1937	1891
10/9/2023	1800	1853	10/31/2023	1955	1891
10/10/2023	1829	1813	11/1/2023	1927	1891
10/11/2023	1829	1853	11/2/2023	1908	1891
10/12/2023	1881	1853	11/3/2023	1852	1891
10/13/2023	1863	1853	11/4/2023	1881	1891
10/14/2023	1881	1853	11/5/2023	1874	1891
10/15/2023	1858	1853	11/6/2023	1897	1891
10/16/2023	1843	1853	11/7/2023	1882	1891
10/17/2023	1802	1853	11/8/2023	1956	1891
10/18/2023	1859	1853	11/9/2023	1640	1891
10/19/2023	1833	1853	11/10/2023	1947	1891
10/20/2023	1849	1853	11/11/2023	2132	1891
10/21/2023	1844	1853	11/12/2023	1940	1891
10/22/2023	1858	1853	11/13/2023	1923	1928

Date	Total Guest Overall	Total Nightly Capacity	Date	Total Guest Overall	Total Nightly Capacity
11/14/2023	1932	1928	12/6/2023	1948	1924
11/15/2023	1954	1928	12/7/2023	1992	1924
11/16/2023	1961	1928	12/8/2023	1906	1924
11/17/2023	1934	1928	12/9/2023	1932	1924
11/18/2023	1934	1928	12/10/2023	1706	1924
11/19/2023	1990	1928	12/11/2023	2030	1924
11/20/2023	1973	1928	12/12/2023	1681	1924
11/21/2023	1969	1924	12/13/2023	2038	1924
11/22/2023	1932	1924	12/14/2023	2008	1924
11/23/2023	2029	1924	12/15/2023	2015	1924
11/24/2023	1947	1924	12/16/2023	1962	1924
11/25/2023	1946	1924	12/17/2023	1982	1924
11/26/2023	1954	1924	12/18/2023	1988	1924
11/27/2023	2041	1924	12/19/2023	1979	1924
11/28/2023	2018	1924	12/20/2023	1993	1924
11/29/2023	2021	1924	12/21/2023	2013	1924
11/30/2023	1944	1924	12/22/2023	2034	1924
12/1/2023	2036	1924	12/23/2023	1998	1924
12/2/2023	2019	1924	12/24/2023	1953	1924
12/3/2023	2024	1924	12/25/2023	1948	1924
12/4/2023	2002	1924	12/26/2023	2057	1924
12/5/2023	1976	1924	12/27/2023	2026	1924

Date	Total Guest Overall	Total Nightly Capacity
12/28/2023	2043	1924
12/29/2023	2025	1924
12/30/2023	1976	1924
12/31/2023	1909	1924
1/1/2024	1923	1924
1/2/2024	1963	1951
1/3/2024	1970	1951
1/4/2024	1944	1951
1/5/2024	1879	1951
1/6/2024	1901	1951
1/7/2024	1915	1951
1/8/2024	1936	1951
1/9/2024	1923	1951
1/10/2024	1923	1951
1/11/2024	1929	1951
1/12/2024	1886	1951
1/13/2024	2066	1951
1/14/2024	2073	1951
1/15/2024	2079	1951
1/16/2024	2043	1951
1/17/2024	2002	1951
1/18/2024	2002	1951

Date	Total Guest Overall	Total Nightly Capacity
1/19/2024	2051	1951
1/20/2024	2045	1951
1/21/2024	2021	1951
1/22/2024	2047	1951
1/23/2024	2002	1991
1/24/2024	2026	1991
1/25/2024	2021	1991
1/26/2024	1997	1991
1/27/2024	1988	1991
1/28/2024	1943	1991
1/29/2024	1937	1991
1/30/2024	1932	1991
1/31/2024	1944	1991

As indicated by the bolded red data, between October 1st, 2023 and January 31st, 2024 - for 82 out of these 123 nights, **67% of the time - Denver shelters were over-capacity**. That means that these shelters took in more people than they had beds, or mats, or space for. Additional people past capacity are usually squeezed into tight, uncomfortable spaces, like hallways or corridors - often with no mat, just a small blanket, if even that.

This also means that many people were turned away from shelters. While data does not show the number of people turned away due to lack of space, direct, first-hand experience (as revealed in the survey findings) shows us that this is what happens. For example, the Denver Rescue Mission has an overflow room that fits 40 mats. Men line up down the street to get into the overflow room, but if they are past number 40 in line, they do not get in and are told there is no room - they are out of luck for the night.



You can also see records of usage at the additional emergency cold weather shelters here:

	Coliseum	New Directions	Total
28-Oct	232	80	312
29-Oct	283	82	365
30-Oct	190	90	280
	Coliseum	New Directions	Total
24-Nov	225	95	320
25-Nov	274	104	378
26-Nov	320	93	413

	Denver Navigation Campus	New Directions	Total
30-Nov	185	70	255
	Denver Navigation Campus	New Directions	Total
8-Dec	180	94	274
9-Dec	150	82	232
	Denver Navigation Campus		Total
24-Dec	217		217
25-Dec	247		247

	Denver Navigation Campus	New Directions	McNichols	Total	
5-Jan	220	0		220	
6-Jan	230	0		230	
7-Jan	254	0		254	
8-Jan	312	0		312	
9-Jan	259	14		273	
10-Jan	225	70		295	
11-Jan	280	81		361	
12-Jan	289	88		377	24-hour begins 1/12 7pm
13-Jan	255	71		326	
14-Jan	308	88	31	427	
15-Jan	300	92	67	459	24-hour ends 1/16 10am
16-Jan	288	13	28	329	
17-Jan	275		22	297	
18-Jan	307	15	25	347	
19-Jan	268			268	

As opposed to the general shelters, these shelter spaces - the Denver Coliseum, New Directions' lobby area, Denver Navigation Campus, and, at times McNichols - are only opened when it is under 20 degrees outside. For the most part, you must be bussed to these shelters in a provided shelter bus, unless you happen to catch a ride from an advocate, outreach worker, or the police.

Within this cold weather timeframe, for every night that these shelters were open, there were between 217 and 459 people who stayed at the cold weather emergency shelters. You can also see from this data that in January, the City utilized the McNichols building for additional cold weather shelter because the other two available cold weather emergency shelter spaces were maxed-out and additional space was needed. The use of the McNichols building as emergency shelter was unfortunately (and irresponsibly)

not advertised to the houseless or the public at all - it was only used by outreach, police, or shelter staff to place additional people.

It is also important to note that, for many of the nights that the traditional shelters are over-capacity, the emergency cold weather shelters are not open. This means that those seeking shelter who cannot get into the traditional shelters are left to fend for themselves on the streets or other such places, as there are not any additional emergency shelters open.

It could not possibly be more clear from this data that Denver shelters are over-capacity. There are more people seeking shelter than there are shelter spaces - leaving many without hope for a safe, indoor place to rest their heads at night.

Direct Accounts of Shelters Turning People Away

This past winter, while assisting houseless people seeking shelter, HAND staff witnessed many of these people be denied from every shelter. The following stories offer a snapshot into the constant struggle experienced by houseless people who are turned away when seeking shelter, told they have to instead sleep on the streets. As can be seen from our Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey data, 56%-64%³ of people said they had been turned away due to shelters being full. As seen in the City shelter data, shelters are over capacity for 67% of winter month days. There is no denying the fact that Denver shelters do not have space for all people seeking shelter.

First-HAND Experiences

In this section of the report, we've included some of HAND's past press releases and posts that describe, in detail, the experiences of unhoused individuals being denied shelter. To read more press releases, you can find them on our website at <https://housekeysactionnetwork.com/hand-blog/> and sign up to receive future press releases, real-time as they happen, here: <https://housekeysactionnetwork.com/contact/>

The first of these is a press release recounting the day when 10-15 individuals were denied shelter due to them all being over capacity - even with attempted assistance from not just advocates, but also the Mayor's office.

³ 56% of people had been turned away from day shelters due to capacity, while 64% of people had been turned away from night shelters for the same reason.

This is then followed by a post published on the same day that describes the simultaneous occurrences and various systemic failures that led to an elderly, disabled black man named David finding himself denied from every shelter - one of the reasons for which was a system-wide alert that considered him “unhygienic” for falling ill to Covid during the height of the pandemic.

Finally, the third included press release describes shelter options supposedly being offered to migrants and some of the reasons why it was either not available, or did not meet the needs of the community. Beyond what’s included in the article, migrants have continued to reveal the sort of inhumane conditions being offered, such as thin mats on the floor (with no exception for disabled or pregnant people), Sheriffs sleeping in the same room as residents and preventing them from playing music, and an offensively meager diet that has left many children, let alone adults, suffering from malnourishment and being unable to supplement their diets due to rules forbidding outside food - including in some instances baby formula, apples, milk, etc.

To further the mistreatment of migrants, the City chose to close 6 migrant shelters in a 1-month period... resulting in many hitting the streets, flooding the already over-capacity unhoused shelters, being scattered across Denver in often unsafe situations with many experiencing the harsh winter climate for the first time in their lives... Denver must reckon with the damage they've done and

February 22, 2024 - Absolutely No Shelter Available The Night After Warming Center Pilot Program Ends, Many Stranded: Confirmed by Mayor’s Office

On Friday, February 16th, the Mayor’s week-long pilot program for a warming center at the Coliseum ended. This had been a space that individuals and couples without children could access during freezing temperatures. The Mayor had promised to conduct this program after shooting down the Warming Center Bill proposal which would have guaranteed warming centers could be accessed in under 32 degree weather year-round. Despite the program only lasting 1 week, it did provide much needed refuge for hundreds of unhoused individuals. This was also uniquely one of the only places that couples were allowed to stay together and wouldn’t be separated. This was seen as essential, as many couples said they would not shelter despite the cold if they were to be separated, some citing safety concerns and prior instances of rape/sexual assault when they had split up to shelter.

The very next day, Saturday the 17th, advocates showed up half an hour before the 9am time when the shelter was supposed to close. At that time, the temperature was below 15 degrees and snow was on the ground. Folks standing outside reported that they had been rudely awakened and hurried out by Bayaud staff as early as 7:30am, with some workers bragging that they wanted to go home and calling shelter residents ungrateful. Two to three large buses showed up to take individuals to St. Francis, a day shelter that closes in the late afternoon. After interviewing some of the guests, it became clear that many had no idea where they were going to go that night, some lacking proper survival gear to be able to make it outdoors.



That evening at around 7pm, between 10-15 individuals were freezing outside the Coliseum. Temperatures were still dangerously low, and many had shown up under the impression that it would be open once again. Individuals and even a migrant family with small children had been dropped off by Denver police, who also thought it was open. Thankfully the family was able to quickly move back indoors into hotel shelter. As for everyone else, advocates had to act fast as the temperature continued to drop to try and find somewhere safe for people to go.

A representative from the Mayor's office was called and pulled into contacting every single shelter to determine capacity. In every case, even with the influence of being from the Mayor's office, not ONE shelter accepted these individuals!!! Locations that normally had overflow capacity claimed that they were either full, or that overflow was not activated for the night. One man who is a black disabled veteran and had been assigned a medical respite bed at Crossroads the week after arriving from the hospital in a wheelchair was told that he could not be found in the system and his bed had likely been reassigned days before - while the individual was staying at the Coliseum. Even a working shelter that required payment for folks to stay said that they could not help for the night.

Finally, one man mentioned that the Wellpower Crisis Center mobile unit may be able to pick up individuals to be assessed and potentially have somewhere safe to stay for the night. Upon calling Wellpower's Crisis Center, we found out that their mobile unit will ONLY show up to a specific

housing address, not a public place - so what happens when someone suddenly finds themselves in crisis without a home after conflict with a partner or parent?!? This discriminatory practice led advocates to take folks directly to the Crisis Center to be evaluated. Once there, we found a young woman who was also in crisis and poorly dressed for the outdoors who had been dropped off by police earlier. She, along with around 8 others, were forced to wait outside (despite there being comfy and warm seating available immediately in the lobby) as Allied security assessed people and all their belongings one-by-one for weapons. One indigenous trans woman felt uncomfortable being there/ with the process and wanted to leave, choosing instead to find a hiding spot near a shelter on the streets with little to no protection. Ultimately, after about 45 minutes, nearly all the individuals were told there was no capacity and kicked back out, given bus tickets but nowhere to go. They did not even receive proper assessments, with one man being denied despite pressing for someone to talk to. While advocates continued to try and coordinate with the Mayor's office, Crisis Center security eventually came outside to tell us that they were going to call the cops on us for sitting inside our cars in the parking lot.

Eventually the Mayor's office reached out to Denver PD for P-cards, which would allow them to stay in a hotel for a few days. Police declined to help. Some individuals were so desperate they started to discuss which hospitals were open and would allow them to sleep in the lobby without having them arrested. In the end, HAND used funds to pay for 2 nights of shared hotel rooms. Advocates asked if the City would be able to reimburse the bill, given that they confirmed that absolutely no shelter in Denver was available otherwise. We were told not to count on it. It wasn't until nearly 1am that advocates were able to leave and folks were settled into their hotel rooms.

February 22, 2024 - David Kicked to the Streets from Shelters after surgery for "Inability to care for self" & ^%

February 21st on outreach we met a man named David outside of Crossroads shelter. He was not allowed to stay at Crossroad after having a surgery on his foot for frostbite because the shelter said "he could not care for himself and the staff could not provide needed care." So instead he was kicked to the street expected to care for himself and his healing foot (which doctors told him to stay off of after kicking him to the streets with no respite). You can watch our interview with him on this here:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/C3oBx9PLPn6/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==

Later that evening we came back to bring him supplies and he wanted to try to get into another shelter, so we took him to the Mission to try to get into there. When there, we went to the overflow line to wait. When staff came out they told him he could not get in this night because he had not pre-registered and to come back tomorrow to register. When we asked them to look him up in the system to confirm if he was already registered with them or not, they found him in the system, but said that he was ATL (bared) because of a "health and hygiene" issue from over a year ago. This "health and hygiene" issue was from when he caught covid at the shelter and did not know it and then was asked to leave. Now, over a year later, he is being refused shelter because of that!@%



This man was put out of the hospital onto the streets with nothing, walked to a bus stop, and told "Good luck".

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At that point he had no option but to sleep on the streets - so we took him to a hotel for the night where he can rest his healing foot as is medically needed. You can watch our interview with him on these events here <https://www.instagram.com/p/C3omh0IMQQt/>

January 4, 2024 - Update from Zuni Camp Migrant Sweep Wednesday

Yesterday, January 3rd 2023, the City closed the migrant camp of 400 people near Quality Inn. Fencing was put up around the whole area before 7am. Many camp residents believed it was ICE putting up the fence and ran in fear – leaving all their belongings. Because of this heavy handed sweep approach, these people lost their property and did not go to the shelter. Throughout the day at least 60 cops were present – many with riot gear.

Residents of the camp were told they could store their tent and belongings or trash them – even though they also should have the option to take their tent and belongings, or to donate them to the community to be given back out. These last two options were not told to residents.

Camp residents were given no choice but to get on a bus and go to the new congregate shelters which opened that day. No other options were offered to them. (Some people have been able to apply for the housing assistance recently where the City is paying one to three/six months on rent



depending on the situation, but this takes more time and was not offered as an immediate housing option during the sweep.)

Even though outreach teams have been present for a few days at the camp, this was the first day most people got actual information about the shelter.

People expressed great dislike and concern when they learned it would be an “open format” with mats on the floor. Many people had been expecting a room like they had stayed at in hotel shelters, and were not happy to learn of the warehouse style shelter.

Later in the afternoon, after some of the buses had already taken hundreds of migrants to the shelters, people began to show up back at the Zuni camp because they did not feel safe at the shelter. One couple showed up distraught as the young women expressed feeling very unsafe in a big room sleeping

next to a bunch of men. She said she felt safer in their private tent and wanted to come back to the camp. This couple told us that there were around 30 more people from the shelter leaving also. We met some of these people, including more couples, as they came back to the camp looking for somewhere else to stay. City outreach workers would only try to convince them to go to one of the shelters – no other option was offered.

At 5pm the City “closed” the camp and would not allow people to remain inside the fence area. Anyone who was at work during the sweep, or for whatever reason were not there, would have to know to find the cop who would be parked there all night and ask to get in to get any stuff needed, but would not be able to stay in their tent. In reality, people showing up after 5pm likely lost all their property and will not know where to go that night.

Today, City workers are going to start going through the camp and trashing or storing tents and property. Yesterday they marked tents with an “X” (for trash) and an “I” (for information). Tents with an “X” were supposedly “contaminated” and tents with an “I” were supposed to get more information to decide if they were contaminated or not. Tents that the owner did not ask to store

that are not contaminated are supposed to be donated back to the community. (However, as I type this reports are coming in of tents with an "I" being trash regardless of quality).

With what we have been told is 320 spots at the shelters, and with about 400 migrants living in the camp prior to yesterday, the numbers do not add up. Even with many people leaving these shelters due to not feeling safe or comfortable in a congregate setting (as well as issues like the lack of showers or rules), with hundreds more migrants coming every week, these shelters will be over capacity in no time.

Furthermore, people are only given 30 days at the shelter – so where are they supposed to go after that? The City says they will connect people with housing in that timeframe, but we have been told 1 out of every 10 people applying are being denied, the process takes time for those who can get it, and funding is not secured indefinitely for all. This housing opportunity is a great step forward, but it simply will not secure housing for everyone timed out of the shelters at 30 days.

The sweep of this camp was posted for 5 days, yet only one of these days was dedicated to moving people – the last 4 days are being used to clear the property. Having been to hundreds of sweeps over the year, we can say definitively that this sweep was one of the most chaotic, poorly planned, rushed sweeps. While a 7 day notice was posted for this sweep, residents of the camp were given no real information about the shelters they were expected to go to until the day of the sweep. Furthermore, the shelters that they were moved into were not opened until the day of the sweep. This sweep was also conducted when it was as low as 22 degrees – instead of waiting until the sun had warmed up. More time should have been given for residents to get full information about the shelter and other options to make informed decisions on what is best for them and their families.

Most importantly, no sweep or closure should have happened. The resources the City is providing for shelter and some housing could have been offered camp residents in such a way that they can choice to go to the shelter if they wish or not if they do not wish, and in such a way as to keep – at least some – of the tents up and available for those who do not feel safe at shelter and for the hundreds more migrants coming to Denver every day who will need somewhere to be. The reality is, without this (or another) tent site as a backup, countless people are going to be scattered through the City with nothing, freezing on the streets with no support.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Reports directly from houseless people seeking shelter, data from City shelter records, and experiences of advocates assisting houseless people seeking shelter all collectively paint the same picture - a Denver that does not have enough shelter space for all houseless people seeking shelter in cold weather. HAND's Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey results showing 66% of people being turned away from night shelters aligns with the City-acquired shelter data showing shelters being over-capacity nearly 67% of nights.

Until Denver secures enough real housing for *all* in need - which would be the best way forward! - Denver needs to open enough emergency shelter space for everyone seeking shelter, especially in the winter.

Furthermore, as houseless people speak to in our survey, top priority needs for this sheltering include:

- Open shelter access to all hours (with no curfew)
- Open shelters in various parts of town to reduce travel time
- Offer transportation to shelters (though not mandated to get in)
- Have better treatment by staff
- Allow people who have been ATL'd from other shelters

At the same time, survey respondents are clear that there are many reasons for why individuals (24% of survey respondents for day shelters and 21% for night shelters) do not stay at shelters - even in the cold. While some of these reasons can be addressed by improving the shelter system, the number one reason given - not wanting to be around a lot of people, whether other guests or abusive staff - cannot truly be addressed within the shelter system unless individual rooms are provided. Real housing, or at least emergency hotel rooms in cold weather, must be secured in order to address the full cold weather shelter need. Any emergency cold weather hotel rooms must be tied to outreach, transportation, a halt of sweeps in cold weather, and emergency gear for those for whom going indoors is not a viable option.

Human beings are not built to live outside during cold Denver winters without protection from the elements and additional heat. Humans get sick - hypothermia, frostbite - and even die. In fact, 2023 was a record year in terms of unhoused deaths (at least 311 reported), the majority of which were overdoses⁴. Last year, a scientific study in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) published data illustrating what those on the streets and their advocates/providers have known forever - the existence of

⁴ Data from CCH annual report titled [we will remember 2023](#).

a strong correlation between increases in overdoses and sweeps of unhoused people with nowhere to go⁵. Denver should not be a City where death is considered acceptable if you are poor and houseless... Especially not when the City considers it “too expensive” to secure needed shelter but instead uses the City budget for increased policing and pickleball⁶. Allocating sufficient resources so that all Denverites can have basic access to protection from the freezing cold is the bare minimum that should be done.

Every human being needs access to shelter in the cold... Period.

⁵ [Study Shows Involuntary Displacement of People Experiencing Homelessness May Cause Significant Spikes in Mortality, Overdoses and Hospitalizations.](#)

⁶ https://original.newsbreak.com/@david-heitz-561257/3204476320097-pooing-more-important-than-pickleball-residents-tell-denver-council-during-budget-hearing?s=ws_rd

Image Descriptions & Citations

Page number	Image description	Source
1	Inverted black & white image of a sign on the door of a shelter stating: "Security Notice: All weapons prohibited", followed by a taped paper sign stating: "NO OVERFLOW TONIGHT - SIN Desbordamiento ESTA Noche"	Photo taken by HAND member Terese Howard outside of Crossroads Shelter
3	Tri-colored pie graph titled "Percentage of people who have tried accessing day shelters during cold weather" with data showing 76.1% (n=35) answered "Yes", 19.6% (n=9) answered "No", & 4.3% (n=2) answered "N/A"	HAND original graph based on data analyzed from Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey 2024
4	Tri-colored pie graph titled "Percentage of people turned away from day shelters, including during cold weather emergencies" with data showing 51% (n=20) answered "Yes", 46% (n=18) answered "No", 3% (n=1) answered "Other"	HAND original graph based on data analyzed from Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey 2024
5	Five-colored pie graph titled "Reasons for why people are turned away from day shelters" with data showing 55.6% (n=10) answered "Capacity", 27.8% (n=5) answered "Rules", 5.6% (n=1) each answered "Shelter issue", "Individual issue", "IDK"	HAND original graph based on data analyzed from Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey 2024
7	Tri-colored pie graph titled "Percentage of people who have tried accessing night shelters during cold weather" with data showing 79.1% (n=34) answered "Yes", 18.6% (n=8) answered "No", 2.3% (n=1) answered "N/A"	HAND original graph based on data analyzed from Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey 2024
7	Tri-colored pie graph titled "Percentage of people turned away from night shelters, including during cold weather emergencies" with data showing 65.8% (n=25) answered "Yes", 31.6% (n=12) answered "No", 2.6% (n=1) answered "N/A"	HAND original graph based on data analyzed from Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey 2024
9	Illustration of an unhoused Uncle Sam covering himself with the American flag as a blanket	"Safety Net" by Artist Art Hazelwood with Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) https://wraphome.org/art-hazelwood/
10	Photograph of police car parked on curb next to houseless encampment with cops forcing unhoused people to pack their items & keep moving in a foot of snow with visibly strong winds	Unicorn Riot; https://unicornriot.ninja/2015/homeless-force-d-tents-snowstorm-denver-police/
11	Multi-colored pie graph titled "Methods of	HAND original graph based on data analyzed

	accessing information regarding cold weather shelters" with data showing 23.3% (n=10) answered "Word of mouth", 20.9% (n=9) answered "Shelters", 11.6% (n=5) answered "Phone", 9.3% (n=4) answered "Outreach", 7% (n=3) answered "Online", 4.7% (n=2) each answered "Social media", "None", "All/any method", 2.3% (n=1) each answered "Activists", "CCH", "Church", "Hospital", "Security office", "SWAP Adams Cty"	from Cold Weather Shelter Access Survey 2024
12	Multi-colored pie graph titled "How do you access information about cold weather shelters, warming centers, etc?" with data showing 22.7% (n=10) answered "Word of mouth", 18.2% (n=8) answered "Shelters", 9.1% (n=4) answered "No way to access", 6.8% (n=3) each answered "Outreach", "Online", 4.5% (n=2) each answered "TV", "Radio", "Phone", "Not phone", 2.3% (n=1) each answered "Advocates", "Family", "Hospitals", "Stores", "Didn't answer", "Out of town", "I don't know", "Undecipherable"	HAND original graph based on data analyzed from No Freezing Sweeps Survey December 2023 No Freezing Sweeps Survey Key Findings - Housekeys Action Network Denver
14	Illustrations of skull & crossbones, overflowing toilet, shower head encircled & crossed off, bed bugs, alcohol, injectable drug, bubbler, bloody knife, & brass knuckles respectively placed next to the associated text: SHELTERS - FACADE "WE PROVIDE STABILITY IN A SAFE CLEAN ENVIRONMENT" [versus] Reality!!! Consistently BROKEN SHOWERS AND OVERFLOW TOILETS, Rampant Bed Bugs and Other Pests, Rampant open use of Drugs And Alcohol, VERY LAX SECURITY AND INDIFFERENT STAFF TO VIOLENCE AND THEFT. STOP WAREHOUSING AND START HOUSING!	HAND member Ana Gloom original artwork as featured in HAND Housing Report 2022 titled "Pipe Dreams and Picket Fences: Direction from Denver's Houseless People on Housing Needs and Priorities in the Context of Today's Public Housing" https://housekeysactionnetwork.com/pipe-dreams-and-picket-fences/
17-18	Data tables with columns titled "Date", "Total Guest Overall", "Total Nightly Capacity" with respective data starting from date 10/1/2023 & ending with 1/31/2024 with red, bolded numbers under the "Total Guest Overall" column depicting the instances (82 out of 123 dates) when the number of guests overall was greater than the total nightly capacity	Email sent from HOST (Department of Housing & Stability) representative to Terese Howard, HAND member, on February 6th of 2024 titled "shelter capacity data"
19	Photograph of man sleeping on his side on the floor of shelter against the wall wearing jeans & long sleeve shirt, no blanket, backpacks propped under his legs & lying over his face	Submitted to HAND on November 29th, 2022 by Salvation Army Crossroads Shelter resident
19-20	Data tables with left-most-side column listing dates & top row labeling cold weather shelter names (Coliseum, New Directions, Denver Navigation Campus, McNichols) with listed	Email sent from HOST (Department of Housing & Stability) representative to Terese Howard, HAND member, on February 6th of 2024 titled "shelter capacity data"

	numbers of guests per each date at each site next to Total numbers of guests per date	
23	Photograph of migrant sleeping outside/against the lit up Denver Coliseum shelter site, on the ground on a thin white sheet covered by thin gray blanket with a backpack being used as a pillow & a few personal items near their head	Submitted to HAND on April 15th, 2024 by migrants staying at the Denver Coliseum
25	Photograph depicting severely blackened, frostbitten foot missing toes with text stating: This man was put out of the hospital onto the streets with nothing, walked to a bus stop, and told "Good luck". <i>Denver Must Open Warming Centers in Under 32 Degree Weather!</i> housekeysactionnetwork.com	HAND original image with text created using photograph of frostbitten foot submitted to HAND by Mutual Aid Monday
26	Illustration of giant-sized businessman in suit with money bag for head looting houses & storing them in a sack as a few small stick people behind him rally, all above 4 tents with the words "WHERE DO WE GO?" written across them, with text headlining the image stating "We Will Not Disappear, Stop the Sweeps"	"Where Do We Go?" by Artist Art Hazelwood with Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) https://wraphome.org/art-hazelwood/