SNOW REMOVAL FOR LOW INCOME SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN HAMILTON:
PROGRAM REVIEW AND EXPLORATION OF ALTERNATIVE MODELS

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1.0 Introduction

Cities in Southern Ontario have growing populations of seniors and many are aging in place in their homes for many years past retirement. For Cities that do not provide sidewalk snow clearing on residential streets and instead mandate this task to homeowners to ensure streets are safe and walkable after snow events. For many seniors who live in their own homes, the burden of snow removal becomes more challenging as they age, especially if they do not have nearby family or money to pay a contractor to shovel their snow. When snow accumulates around their homes, they risk fines from contravening the snow shoveling bylaw, and they may be trapped in their homes due to the safety risk of walking on unclear ice and snow. The lack of snow clearing also affects all other pedestrians in the surrounding neighbourhood.

Various approaches to this problem are currently used by cities, each with their own drawbacks and benefits. In Hamilton, a program was developed in 2005 to match volunteers with low income seniors and persons with disabilities to ensure that their snow is shoveled within 24 hours after a snowfall. Since 2006, Volunteer Hamilton has been the delivery agent of the program, named "Snow Angels", on behalf of the City of Hamilton. This volunteer program, however, has never been able to meet to satisfy all requests for snow removal service. In December 2013, Council asked staff to explore other models for meeting the needs of the community.

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton was contracted by the City of Hamilton to review the current model of delivery, evaluate its success and make recommendations for improvements.

2.0 Methods

To meet the evaluation objectives, a mixed-methods approached was employed, including:
- Key informant interviews and focus group with a total of 17 stakeholders including Volunteer Hamilton staff, neighbourhood Community Developers, staff of other snow clearing organizations, and City of Hamilton Neighbourhood Development Office.
- Open-ended telephone survey with 25 Snow Angels volunteers.
- Quantitative analysis of Snow Angels program data.
- Document review of seven City of Hamilton staff reports pertaining to snow removal for seniors and persons with disabilities over the last 10 years, including 2005 consultant report that led to the creation of Snow Angels, and 2009 city-led evaluation of the Snow Angels program.
- Email and telephone interviews with staff of 7 Ontario snow removal programs for seniors and persons with disabilities along with review of staff reports and newspaper articles about their services.
- Analysis of relevant demographic data from the 2011 National Household Survey.

3.0 Key Findings and Analysis

3.1 Enablers and barriers to recruitment and retention of Snow Angel volunteers

Through key informant interviews and document review, a review of Snow Angels' current model found there are features of the model that help recruit volunteers and features that may be dissuading volunteers.

3.1.1 Key enablers to recruitment and retention
- Dedicated volunteer recruitment staff. Staff also remain on call for volunteers during snow events in case of any problems encountered by volunteers
- In person meeting with all volunteers for personalized introduction to the program. (VH staff travels to convenient location for volunteer when necessary.)
- No police check required. Many cities require a police check, with the programs usually reimbursing fees, but this additional step adds weeks to the recruitment process and is a deterrent for volunteers. Due to lack of police check however, the personal interaction between clients and volunteers is very limited.
- Youth as young as 14 years old can volunteer. (In some cities the age limit is 16 or 18.)
- Map of which areas need volunteers available on website, so volunteers can easily determine for themselves if there is a client near them.
- News media: When Snow Angels is in the media they always get an increase in volunteers.
- Recruitment through friends and families of current volunteers has been one of most successful methods of finding new volunteers.
- Email newsletters sent to keep volunteers engaged.
- Shovel provided to volunteer if needed. Volunteer is not allowed to use client's shovel to prevent any conflicts if shovel is damaged or broken. (Most other communities do not provide shovel.)

In addition, interviews with volunteers showed that the biggest motivations for volunteering were:
- Altruism and helping others in need
- Physical exercise and enjoying the outdoors
- Benefit extends beyond client to all pedestrians using street

3.1.2 Potential obstacles to recruitment and retention
- Requirement for parents to attend when meeting volunteer younger than 18 to ensure parental consent. (Not required for teens volunteering in other communities.)
- The tagline for recruitment material, "It's the neighbourly thing to do", developed by City and has not changed since inception of the program. The message conveys duty and civic-mindedness but is not persuasive enough, because it does not emphasize two strongest aspects of Snow Angels: caring for vulnerable seniors or enjoying outdoors/exercise.
- Snow Angels website lacks any recruitment "pitch". Instead website is focused on the nuts and bolts of eligibility requirements, assuming people arriving to website have already decided they want to volunteer.
- Limited use of social media. (No specific account Snow Angels Facebook account, occasional use of Snow Angels twitter account, no presence on Reddit or Instagram.)
- VH developing relationships with business to help with recruitment in exchange for publicity is complex and time-consuming as city policies restrict who can sponsor municipal programs to ensure against lobbying conflicts.

Interviews with volunteers indicated some problems that led to loss of motivation in volunteering for the program:

- Arriving when snow shoveling has already been completed.
- Distance of houses
- Salt not always provided by client and so snow clearing sometimes leads to icy sidewalks and walkways. Some volunteers bring their own ice, but that adds to complexity of volunteer task.

3.2 Results of current model

3.2.1 Rate of matched clients by year

The number of clients served by the Snow Angels program has fluctuated over the years, with an average of 208 clients matched with a volunteer per year. Many volunteers help more than one client, and the average number of volunteers has been 124 per year.

Every year there are hundreds of clients on the waitlist, with an average of 261 clients not matched to a volunteer and not receiving service. This results in an average match rate of 45%. Chart 1 gives an overview of the changes from year to year.

Chart 1. Client match rate for Hamilton Snow Angels program 2008-2015
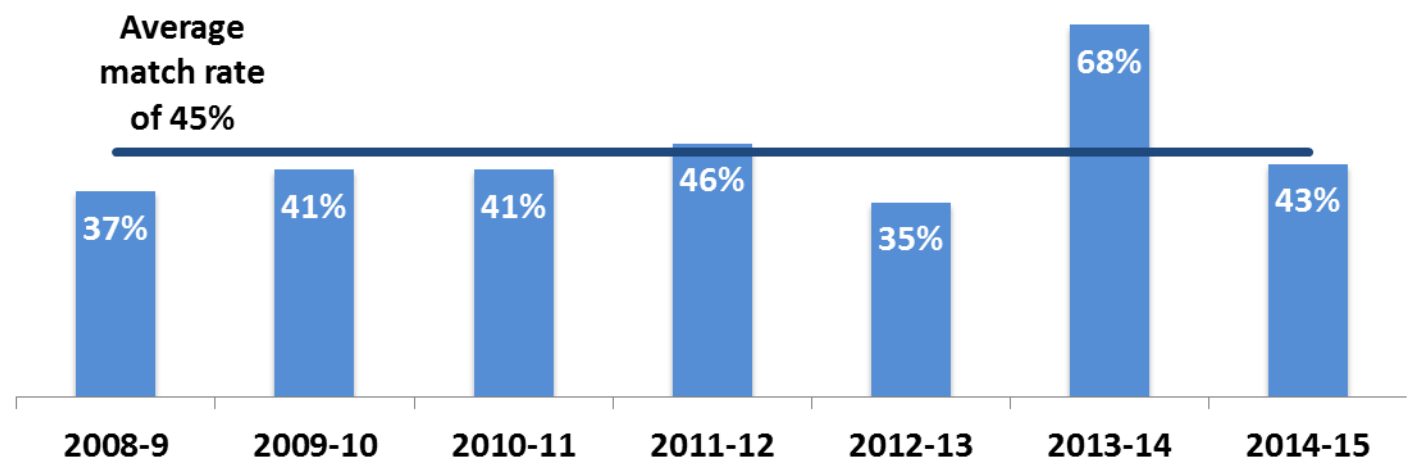
2013-14 was a particularly successful year for recruiting volunteers due mainly to additional media attention for Snow Angels for two reasons: 1) the unusually large amounts of snowfall, which prompted the media do more stories about snow and Snow Angels 2) Snow Angels was discussed at Council and was in the news more often because of that. This indicates that continuing to improve outreach to media is a key way to increase volunteer recruitment. The challenge is to find new ways to frame snow angels so that it is newsworthy and attention grabbing for the media, even during normal winters.

3.2.2 Results by area of Hamilton

Snow Angels' highest match rate is in the suburbs and rural areas (69% of clients were matched to a volunteer), in part because there is a much lower number of clients (39 across all six wards). The low number of clients stem from the fact that other local agencies are already serving clients in these areas including: Stoney Creek Outreach Services (SOS) (a paid service), Dundas Community Services (a free service), and Flamborough Information and Community Services (a free service sub-contracted by VH). Hamilton's second largest suburb, Ancaster, has no need for the program, as all sidewalks are cleared

by the city, a service that started in that area before amalgamation in 2001 and continues to be tax supported by Ancaster residents.

The lowest match rate was on the Mountain with only 35% of the 159 clients being matched with a volunteer.

The area with the largest number of clients is the lower city (183 total clients), and the match rate is slightly higher than the average for the city (42% vs. 41%). Appendix 1 shows these same results broken down by ward and shows large variations in match rates across wards. The ward with the highest match rate is Ward 1 (79% of clients matched), in large part because of the large number of university students living there, which VH has found are a group with high interest in volunteering for Snow Angels. Wards 4 and 5 in the lower city have the lowest match rates in the city (19% and 18% respectively). To increase volunteer recruitment over 7,000 postcards were delivered door-to-door by Volunteer Hamilton volunteers, including 2,500 postcards in Ward 4, but only a handful of volunteers signed up through this campaign. In key informant interviews, Community Developers in East Hamilton reported that one of the reasons for low recruitment in this part of the city may be the high rate of manual labour occupations, including landscaping and outdoor work in these neighbourhoods. Community Developers suggested workers in these occupations may not be interested in volunteering to do snow shoveling as it is so similar to what they do during work hours. In addition, the postcard itself lacked a persuasive recruitment pitch and was not clear enough in its focus (one side was to attract volunteers, the other side gave information on how to become a client).

Table 1. Snow Angels program data by area in Hamilton (2014/15)

	Lower city (Wards 1-5)	Mountain (Wards 6-8)	Suburban and rural (Ward 9-15)	Total
Total clients	183	159	39	381
Matched clients	76	55	27	158
Unmatched clients	107	104	12	223
Overall match rate	42%	35%	69%	41%
Senior clients only (aged 65+)	161	153	37	351
Senior clients who are matched	71	49	24	144
Match rate for seniors only	44%	32%	65%	41%

3.2.3 Comparisons to potential client base by area of Hamilton

To compare different areas of the city it is important to consider the different context and demographics in each area, as well as potential client base, which may be different across the city. To estimate the potential client base, an analysis of 2011 National Household Survey data was performed at the ward level to examine the number of seniors who are both homeowners (thus responsible for snow clearing of their sidewalk) and living on low incomes, in this case household income of $20,000 or less, which was the income category which came closest to matching the current income eligibility test for Snow Angels' senior clients. Due to differences in data availability, this analysis could not be performed to estimate the potential clients under age 65 who have a disability. However, current experience shows that approximately 10% of Snow Angel clients are under age 65 and living with a disability, so adding

10% to the estimated client base to factor in persons with disabilities should be considered if this estimate is used more broadly.

In Hamilton's suburbs, the overall senior poverty rate is relatively low (5%), due in part to the lack of affordable rental housing. But among suburban seniors who are living in poverty, there is a much higher proportion living in homes they own compared to other areas of the city (again due to the differences in availability of rental housing across Hamilton). More specifically, the analysis found that approximately 340 seniors in Hamilton's suburban and rural wards could be potentially eligible (excluding Ancaster due to city sidewalk clearing there).

The lower city has a relatively high senior poverty rate (16%), but because most low income seniors in that part of the city live in rental housing (thus not responsible for snow clearing), the lower city only has a slightly higher number of potential Snow Angels clients than the suburbs: about 415. The Mountain has about a 6% senior poverty rate, and approximately 330 potential Snow Angels clients.

Combining the estimate of the potential client base of a total of 1,085 senior clients across Hamilton with Snow Angels program data, two indicators can be developed: program reach and program impact. Program reach measures how much of the estimated potential client base knows about Snow Angels and asks for service. Program reach ranges from a low of 11% in the suburbs and rural wards (which may be due in part to other organizations providing similar services), to a high of 46% in the Mountain wards. Program impact measures how much of the estimated potential client base actually receives service. Program impact ranges from 7% in the suburban/rural wards to 17% in the lower city. Appendix 1 provides these indicators by ward, which show tremendous variation at the local level.

Table 2. Estimated Snow Angels client base, program reach and impact by area in Hamilton

	Lower city (Wards 1-5)	Mountain (Wards 6-8)	Suburban and rural (Ward 9-15)	Total
Poverty rate among seniors (2011 NHS data: LIM after tax poverty line)	16%	6%	5%	8%
Estimate of potential senior clients (based on 2011 NHS data: senior-led households who own their home and with income < $20,000)	415	330	340	1,085
Program reach: Total senior clients (matched and unmatched) as a % of estimate of potential senior clients	39%	46%	11%	32%
Program impact: Matched senior clients as a % of estimated potential senior clients	17%	15%	7%	13%

3.2.4 Cost effectiveness of program

Key performance indicators for this program include:
- **Total clients served**: indicating how many clients know about the program and are eligible and receive service.
- **Total clients not matched**: indicating how many clients are on waiting list and not receiving service.

- **Match rate**: how successful the program is at meeting needs of clients who request service
- **Total number of volunteers**: indicating success of recruitment efforts
- **Program cost**:
- **Cost per volunteer recruited**: The total cost of the program divided by the number of volunteers. This does not include any analysis of how much of the program's resources are dedicated to volunteer recruitment, so is only a broad measure of the cost to recruit each volunteer recruited.
- **Snow fall required for service**: an important feature of each program that determines how often volunteers have to shovel snow.
- **Cost per client per snow event**: indicating how much work volunteers perform and the cost effectiveness of the program.

The most comparable programs to Hamilton in terms of city size and use of volunteers are Guelph and Windsor. Table 1 summarizes the key performance indicators for the three cities.

Table 3. Key performance indicators

	Guelph	**Windsor**	**Hamilton**
Operator	Volunteer Guelph	City of Windsor	Volunteer Hamilton
Year	2014/15	2014/15	Average results since 2009
Total clients served	132	115	209
Total clients on waitlist	0	476	255
Match rate	100%	19%	45%
Total volunteers	51	73	124
Program cost	$58,000	$25,000	$99,000[1]
Cost per volunteer	$1,137	$342	$798
Snow fall required for service	10 cm	3 cm	3 cm
Cost per client per snow event	$146	$27	$63

The results show that Hamilton's program is the largest among the three cities and recruits the greatest number of volunteers. Hamilton's program performs in the mid range on cost effectiveness indicators. Windsor's program is the most cost-effective, but also has the lowest match rate and the highest number of clients on the waitlist. Windsor's program is now run entirely by the City, which could in part explain the low cost of the program. For example, a city-run program may have greater reach in terms of social media networks – messages to recruit volunteers may reach the over 6,500 followers on the City of Windsor's twitter account, compared to just over 1,900 followers of Volunteer Guelph's twitter account. Another factor may be that because the program in run internally by the city (paying partial salary of an full-time employee), many costs may be are absorbed and not accounted for, such as extra time during busy periods or other department staff contributions (Corporate communications for example).

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[1] Volunteer Hamilton is paid $100,000 by the City of Hamilton to deliver Snow Angels. VH further sub-contracts $1,000 to Flamborough Information and Community Services. The Flamborough client data is not included in this chart, so the cost analysis is based on the net $99,000 retained by Volunteer Hamilton.

3.3 Comparison of models across Ontario and Hamilton

A review of other cities in Ontario shows a variety of models that assist in helping seniors or persons with disabilities, with some targeted towards this population, and others aiming for much broader goals.

Table 4. Comparison of snow clearing models in Ontario

City	Eligibility							Work performed	Who performs work	Annual City and client cost	Clients served	Comments
	All	Seniors	Persons with disabilities	Home owner	No others in home who could clear snow	Income test	Asset test					
Guelph		✓	✓			✓		• Driveways and walkways after significant snow events only (10 cm) • Within 24 hours	Volunteers	City: $58,000 Client: Free	132 clients	City of Guelph has both city sidewalk clearing and a volunteer program for low income seniors and persons with disabilities to clear walkways and driveways (contracted to Volunteer Guelph).
Hamilton		✓	✓			✓	✓	• Sidewalk and walkways • 3 cm accumulation • Within 24 hours	Volunteers	City: $100,000 to Volunteer Hamilton, Client: Free	Average of 208 per season clients	Volunteers Hamilton sub-contracts $1,000 to Flamborough Information Services to operate Snow Angels there. (Client total does not include Flamborough.)
Kingston								• Up to neighbour	Neighbours	Minimal for city. Free for "clients"	N/A	No clients, as program only recognizes informal helpful neighbours through nominations and awards. 620 neighbours recognized and thanked through program in 2014.Strong community building benefits, including increasing neighbourly connectedness and positive image for City.
London	✓							• Sidewalk only • 8cm accumulation • Within 24 hours	City's Public works department	City: about $2,000,000 Clients: Free	N/A	All residential sidewalks cleared after large snow events. No need to apply or reveal income to get benefit.

City	Eligibility							Work performed	Who performs work	Annual City and client cost	Clients served	Comments
	All	Seniors	Persons with disabilities	Home owner	No others in home who could clear snow	Income test	Asset test					
Oshawa		✓	✓		✓			• Sidewalk: 2.5cm. Windrow: 20cm high • By midnight the day after the snowfall ends.	City's Public works department	Annual operating budget $115,000 (does not include winter control staff, as no dedicated staff – see comments) Client: Free	Approximately 2,200 clients	2013 staff reports: Program is performed on a "best effort approach" and the level of service is based on an "assistance" program – which means staff clear clients' sidewalks after all winter control activities are completed, "on the assumption that many locations would be completed either by neighbours or other family members". Internal review of program found that there was "significant levels of dissatisfaction" with the program among clients. The City does not have any dedicated staff to deliver the program. Staff recommended investigating user fees to offset costs. Council approved a $45,000 pilot program to increase service in specific areas but have had problems finding interested contractors.
Ottawa		✓	✓		✓	✓		• Negotiated between client and worker • Snow is cleared within 15 hours of snow event	City sub-contracts to agencies who recruit and match contractors	City: Up to $250 per client Approximate budget: $55,000 for snow clearing subsidies only (does not include administration). Client: 50% of cost up to $250 per season. 100% of costs above $250.	121 (3 people were on the waitlist) for Snow Go Assist only (i.e. subsidy program)	City of Ottawa clears all sidewalks, but in addition runs a "Snow Go" and "Snow Go Assist" program for private driveways and walkways. City pays a total of $65,000 to 9 LHIN funded agencies to coordinate and match seniors with contractors, with the vast majority of clients paying full cost of snow removal (Snow Go program). Contracts are set for season and generally cost between $350 and $600 per client in urban areas ($1500-$2,000 in rural areas). For low income households, Snow Go Assist program subsidizes half the cost of snow removal. Income test: $31,500 for single, $39,200 for two or more persons.
Toronto		✓	✓		✓			• 5cm Nov and Mar. • 8cm Dec-Feb • Within 72 hours	City's Public works department	City: $1,116,000 (only for Toronto and East York). Client: Free	5,900 clients	Snow removal bylaw makes exceptions for homes registered under this program so they are not ticketed. Staff report estimated cost if program was extended to entire city would be approximately $4,500,000.

City	Eligibility							Work performed	Who performs work	Annual City and client cost	Clients served	Comments
	All	Seniors	Persons with disabilities	Home owner	No others in home who could clear snow	Income test	Asset test					
Waterloo		✓	✓		✓			• Negotiated between client and worker • 24 hours, but client must call worker for each snowfall (to avoid conflicts when snow cleared by friendly neighbour)	City staff recruit and match contractors	Staff coordination costs funded by LHIN. Client: $14 per hour	80 clients	Estimated coordination for snow clearing part of program takes 1 staff person 4 months of year (March/April for client intake and August/September for contractor recruitment).
Windsor		✓	✓					• Within 12 hours (by-law requirement)	Volunteers	$50,000	115 clients	Program was taken over by City of Windsor in 2014 due to high demand and not enough volunteer recruitment. City staff now coordinate volunteer recruitment. So far, no substantial change in match rate.

Note:

The Kingston neighbor recognition program is modeled on the same program in Calgary. An evaluation of the Calgary neighbor recognition program showed that it was immensely well received by citizens, but that it may not actually lead to any additional clearing than what was performed before program began. The findings of a survey of neighbours recognized for their service showed that 65% were already shoveling for neighbours before the program, and 95% said the program had no impact on how much snow clearing they performed. [2]

[2] City of Calgary (2008). Raising Awareness, Raising Shovels: The City of Calgary's Snow Angels Campaign Evaluation Report. http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/snow_angels_report.pdf?noredirect=1

There is also a wide variety of programs within Hamilton that help seniors and persons with disabilities with snow removal, although not all are free.

Table 5. Comparison of snow clearing models in Hamilton

Agency	Eligibility							Work performed	Who performs work	Funder and client cost	Clients served	Comments
	All	Seniors	Persons with disabilities	Home owner	No others in home who could clear snow	Income test	Asset test					
Volunteer Hamilton		✓	✓			✓	✓	Sidewalk and walkways Within 24 hours	Average of 124 Volunteers per year	City: $99,000 Client: Free	Average of 208 per season, many clients on waitlist	
Stoney Creek Seniors Outreach Services		✓	✓					At least 5 cm Sidewalk, walkways, and driveways	Approximately 14 paid workers.	Ontario Trillium Foundation grant purchased equipment. Client pays: $15-20, 1 for $30 - starting a $10 one time registration fee to help offset the cost of repairs	132 clients no waitlist	Workers are provided snow blowers owned by Stoney Creek Seniors Outreach Services. Workers must have their own truck for transportation.
Dundas Community Services		✓	✓			✓			Approximately 5-10 volunteers.	Very small program with no specific funding, Free to client	About 10 clients and 10 on waitlist	
Flamborough Information & Community Services		✓	✓						8 volunteers	$1,000 sub contracted by Volunteer Hamilton	8 clients	

| Helping Hands | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | Recipients of OW or ODSP – receive no hourly wage for their work, but do get an additional employment related benefit on their monthly cheque. | Subsidized by City and Province through social assistance benefits. Free for clients if they meet income and asset test. | | Volunteer Hamilton reports that clients they cannot serve are referred to Helping Hands, which reports that they do not have a waitlist, indicating that most people on the Snow Angels waitlist are probably served by Helping Hands. Helping Hands however reports that recruiting additional workers to expand the program would be difficult, given the barriers to employment faced by their pool of workers (OW and ODSP recipients). |
| St. Joseph Home Care | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | • Negotiated between client and worker | Contractors | Coordination cost funded by LHIN. Estimate average of 2 days per week (all year) to administer recruiting and matching. Client: pays pay $24 for the first hour of snow clearing, and $12 after that (not subsidized). | | St. Joseph Home Care reports no problems in recruiting enough contractors if clients register before snow season. They do have a waitlist when clients call in January and February, as they generally cannot accommodate these clients until the following season. Although the snow removal through their program is not subsidized, they report that seniors prefer to find snow removal contractors through the agency, as all contractors have a police check and there is no risk of scams (which is not the case if the clients try to find and hire a contractor directly). The agency also reports that the fees clients pay to contractors matched through this program are generally lower than seniors would be able to find otherwise. |

3.4 Challenges of volunteer and paid models for Snow Angels

The wide variety of models for a Snow Angels program across Ontario and Hamilton shows that there is no ideal model and every way of implementing the program has drawbacks. Most programs have a waitlist of clients either due to not recruiting enough volunteers or cost containment pressures.

The review of all the different ways that a Snow Angels program aimed at low income seniors and persons with disabilities can be delivered shows that one of the most basic differences is if the program is implemented by volunteers or by contractors.

Findings from key informant interviews are summarized below and show how each of these models has unique drawbacks that make implementing a large scale Snow Angels program difficult.

3.4.1 Issues that make volunteering for Snow Angels unique and more difficult to recruit than most other volunteer programs

- **Limited skill development.** In a competitive volunteer market like Hamilton where there are multiple opportunities for potential volunteers to choose from, many prefer volunteer opportunities where they will learn new skills that they can add to their resume to improve their employment prospects. Adding Snow Angels to a volunteer's resume is generally not perceived to be valuable to

employers and so makes it more difficult to recruit volunteers, especially youth and newcomers looking to add experience to their resume[3].

- **No relationship with clients or other volunteers**. Snow Angels is one of few volunteer opportunities where there is almost complete independence. Some volunteers appreciate the solitary nature of snow shoveling work. But in general most people interested in volunteering prefer more personal interaction to feel the effort of giving their time is worthwhile and appreciated. Even in other volunteer settings were they may not meet individual clients, volunteers are often in groups with other volunteers or supervisors enjoying camaraderie, developing friendships and networks. This does not occur with Snow Angels.

- **No set schedule**. The unpredictable nature of snow events makes it difficult for volunteers who prefer to plan their time and responsibilities in advance, which is the preference of many people who are interested in volunteering. A smaller group of volunteers appreciate the flexibility inherent in Snow Angels, such as having 24hours after a snowfall to get their shoveling done.

- **Liability, safety and confidentiality concerns conflict with goal of building community and intergenerational links**. In a world free of potential criminal activity, Snow Angels could be an ideal way to help isolated seniors and people with disabilities by combining the physical help of snow shoveling with a social visit that would help build relationships and potentially extend the benefits of the program. But due to the small risk of either a client or volunteer with nefarious intentions, the program does not allow anything more than minimal contact between clients and volunteers. Specifically, volunteers cannot accept food from clients, or enter a client's house. In addition, the program's clients are among the city's lowest income and most vulnerable seniors, and care is taken not to reveal their status (for example to neighbours).

Key Informants from the Neighbourhood Action Strategy were asked about the possibilities of integrating Snow Angels into neighbourhood plans, an option discussed by City of Hamilton Special Supports staff. The consensus was that the current volunteer model would not be a good fit for the Neighbourhood Action Strategy, as their focus is on resident-led actions and engaging residents who want to lead their own projects, not on recruiting volunteers for existing services. They noted that Snow Angels is a service for individuals which requires dedicated focus, and that and this service has not been brought up by residents as one that the Neighbourhood Action strategy should focus on.

Key Informants from the Neighbourhood Action Strategy did react positively to the possibility of a hybrid program that incorporates aspects of a recognition program for neighbours who help nearby seniors and persons with disabilities clear their snow.

3.4.2 Issues that make Snow Angels difficult to manage and implement as a social enterprise or business

- **Locations are all over the city.** Locations are addresses spread out in a general random fashion. Travelling between locations takes just as much time, or sometimes more time than actual snow clearing. This adds significant cost to the program.

- **Snow clearing requires on-call staff.** Because snow falls are intermittent and unpredictable, and snow must be cleared the same day in most cases, snow clearing staff cannot take vacations during winter months, or even leave town for a weekend as they must always be available on short notice. Workers require compensation for this intrusion into their lives even if little snow actually falls.

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[3] One of the three key recommendations from a 2009 evaluation of Snow Angels by the City of Hamilton was to target youth and newcomers to be volunteers. This approach has not been successful, in part due to the factors listed above.

- **Other customers complain if their work is put aside for snow clearing jobs.** It's easier to put aside an organization's internal work for snow clearing, but if an organization has customers for other services, they will discontinue their business if their jobs can't be completed on time due to staff needing to clear snow during snow events.
- **Hamilton's weather does not produce enough snow to make snow clearing a sustainable way to earn a living.** There are years where there is a large amount of snow, but on average, the snow accumulation is too low to earn a living that pays enough to be considered a real job. Therefore contractors are reliant on workers doing snow clearing as a side business, which means that they can't guarantee their availability for snow clearing at all times. Coordinating staffing from a pool of workers who are intermittently available adds costs to an industry where there is very limited revenue stream.

The largest and most successful social enterprise in Hamilton, Good Shepherd Works (GSW), has tried to incorporate snow clearing into as one of their services offered to clients, but found "there is no business model that it can make it work", according to GSW Director Andy Skrypniak. He sees immense value in the program's aim to help clients who are elderly or disabled and that the program is becoming more important as the population ages, but in his 25 years experience in landscaping and outdoor services career, he says snow clearing is "the most difficult business to be in." GSW does not do any snow clearing even internally for Good Shepherd Buildings and Good Shepherd maintenance staff now does that task because internal maintenance work is easier to put off when staff are needed for snow clearing, as compared to work from external clients of Good Shepherd Works.

On the other hand, St. Joseph Home Care reported that they encounter fewer problems recruiting enough contractors for their snow removal service, which is part of their Home Maintenance Program. Most of their contractors do multiple services for the same clients, which may mitigate the issues encountered when snow removal is run as a standalone program.

3.5   Potential and limits of hybrid models

No city has found the ideal model for a Snow Angels program, which shows the need for innovation in this area to find more cost effective ways to deliver the important social benefits that this program aims to achieve. Two hybrid models were discussed with key informants, but only one has potential to increase the success of the program.

3.5.1 Hybrid Volunteer and Contractor model: unlikely to be successful
Interviews with key informants revealed that there is one innovation that is not worth investigating: creating a hybrid program using volunteers and supplementing with contractors where volunteers cannot be found. This was the model proposed in a staff report to Council in 2014.

Volunteers offer their time because they want to make a difference. If a contractor will be hired to in areas where volunteers aren't found, then volunteers are not actually making a difference, except saving money for the City. Volunteers are much harder to recruit if they know that if they don't volunteer a paid staff person will do the work in their place. There is also the important consideration of the legality of such a model. The Ministry of Labour if clear that "if you perform work for another person or a company or other organization and you are not in business for yourself, you would be considered to be an employee, and therefore entitled to ESA rights such as the minimum wage."[4] The only exceptions are for training programs where the employer gains little or no benefit from the volunteer's labour.

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[4] Quoted from: *Are Unpaid Internships Legal in Ontario?*
http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/pubs/internships.php While the information is focused on unpaid internships, these same protections exist for volunteer positions if they are sometimes carried out by paid staff.

3.5.2 Hybrid Volunteer and Neighbor Recognition Program: worth further exploration and testing
Key informants were more positive about a hybrid combining the best features of a volunteer program with the neighbor recognition model used in Kingston and Calgary.
A potential way to create a hybrid of these models would be to:
- Recruit volunteers interested in being neighbourhood or ward captains who would be given list of addresses where no volunteer is available.
- Neighbourhood Captains would visit these streets during a snowfall event and take note of addresses where neighbours are either very diligent about snow clearing early and/or use snowblowers (noticed by tracks left in snow).
- The Neighbourhood Captain would drop postcard in mailboxes of these diligent neighbours first congratulating them on their snow clearing efforts and then asking if they would be interested to help a neighbour who is unable to clear their own sidewalk.
- Interested neighbours could call to be signed up as volunteers over the phone (reducing volunteer signup burden). Because there may not be an in person screening done by coordinating agency, clients would have to consent to agency asking their neighbours to become volunteers without in person screening.
- Even without Neighbourhood Captains, neighbour invitation cards could be used by volunteers to distribute in nearby homes when they arrive after client's snow has already been cleared.
- In addition, a broad advertising and awareness campaign could invite neighbours across city to nominate people who have been informally helping them with snow shoveling. These informal neighbours could be used as group to increase the number of formal volunteers, by either asking them to sign up or distribute the recruitment materials in their own social and family networks. (The recognition/awards program should have a different name than Snow Angels, as differentiating the two programs will be a challenge).

3.6   Current income test for eligibility

Even looking at all current clients (ignoring the difficulty recruiting enough volunteers) the snow angels program remains quite small, and one the main reasons is that the criteria for eligibility are very restrictive, which was noted by some key informants. The income test for seniors is set at a maximum of $16,500 individual income, and has not been adjusted for inflation. In comparison, Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) for an individual is currently $23,861, so individuals in deep poverty receiving an income of only 70% of the LICO (about $16,700) is not eligible for the Snow Angels service. The minimum income that most seniors in Canada can receive even if they have not held a paid job during their lifetime is about ($15,088) from Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement[5]. If they have worked and are thus receiving even a minimal CPP pension payments their income would be above the Snow Angels income test too high and would not be eligible. In addition to the income test, Snow Angels also has an asset test to ensure that an individual has no more than $5,000 in liquid assets. Hamilton is the only community reviewed that has both an income and asset test for eligibility determination for a snow removal service.

4.0   Recommendations

See: Kwasniewski, B. W. (2014). Charity Bulletin No. 339: Unpaid Internships Under Ontario Ministry Of Labour Scrutiny http://www.carters.ca/pub/bulletin/charity/2014/chylb339.htm

[5] Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2009). *Profile of Vulnerable Seniors in Hamilton.*
http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Profile-of-Vunerable-Seniors-in-Hamilton-Full-Report-Corrected-January-2013.pdf

Test hybrid of volunteer and neighbor recognition programs
- Using outreach to recognize helpful neighbours in positive way and encourage formal participation (with a low barrier enrolment process), so that volunteers can be matched to someone without such helpful neighbours.
- Use informal neighbour recognition/nomination program as way to increase community building and distribution of recruitment materials.

Improve website to increase volunteer recruitment
- Include more information about what Snow Angels program is and why clients need the service.
- Emphasize benefits to volunteers (physical activity and enjoying outdoors) and to community (helping people, making walking safer in neighbourhood), including use of testimonials.
- Communicate the simplicity of being a Snow Angel, and reduce emphasis on screening process and in person interview at Volunteer Hamilton from main Snow Angels page (this information can be communicated after volunteer signs up).

Lower some barriers to volunteer recruitment
- Change volunteer form to ask for reference contact info instead of letters.
- Remove requirement for parent to attend in-person meeting during recruitment (print forms and send by mail, with postage paid return envelope).

Refine recruitment communications: increase use of volunteer testimonials
Examples from other cities:
- "Removing snow and ice for a neighbour in need is a wonderful way to show you care - and that we live in a community of care"
- "Great way to get some exercise and help your community!"
- "Great way for families to volunteer together"
- "Just volunteered for #GuelphSnowAngels.... why? because its cheaper than a gym membership. Also cause its helping out others!"
- One volunteer interviewed said that Snow Angels: "should be framed as a really easy way to make a difference that's really effective. Communicating the value of volunteering as a snow angel, and how it can impact someone (both the client, and pedestrians in the neighbourhood) in such a positive way is important (a big sell). The genius of the program, is in 'simplicity plus impact'; there are few things I can do that are as simple that can make as big of a difference."

Improve process for clients
- Consider revising income and asset eligibility test to align with most other communities that only ask for income information. Adjust income test for inflation and consider increasing budget to allow all seniors living in poverty to access program.
- Improve website and paper communications to ensure not overpromising that match with volunteer will be made. Consider developing closer relationship with Helping hands to ensure "warm referrals" when Snow Angels cannot find volunteer in their area, so clients don't have to give their information twice.

Seek funding relationship with LHIN for this service

- LHIN does fund administration of recruiting and matching services for snow removal to help seniors stay in their homes, but they do not fund the snow removal cost itself. For example Home Support Services run by the City of Waterloo and St. Joseph Home Care in Hamilton are both LHIN-funded to recruit and match contractors to clients for a variety of services including snow removal.
- Alternately, if the City no longer wants to rely on a volunteer model for Snow Angels, the City should explore a relationship with St. Joseph Home Care to determine if they can expand their current recruitment and matching of contractors to add additional clients, and City could direct its current funding to solely subsidize cost of snow removal by contractors for low income seniors and persons with disabilities.

5.0 Conclusion

Unless the City invests in snow removal for all sidewalks as is done in London, Guelph and Ottawa for example, there will be continuing demand for snow removal for low income residents who cannot shovel their own snow. The aging of the population and increasing focus on walkability and complete communities where residents can walk to destinations instead of driving, are trends which will not abate and cannot be ignore by the City. This review has found a wide variety of opportunities to increase client satisfaction through specific improvements to the current Snow Angels program or by implement alternative models. Regardless of the option chosen by the City, it is clear that no model exists that is both inexpensive and delivers high quality of service to a large number of clients. The financial investment in a snow removal program for low income seniors and persons with disabilities brings more than help individual clients, is also creates the important the community benefit of more walkable streets for everyone.