



REPORT

From the office of the...
Associate Vice President
(Services)

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Justin Phung, Associate Vice President: Services
Mitchell German, Vice-President (Administration)
SUBJECT: SWHAT Review
DATE: **Thursday, March 23, 2023**

INTRODUCTION

To the Esteemed Members of the Executive Board of the McMaster Students' Union,

The following report is a review of the McMaster Students' Union (MSU) service known as the Student Walk Home Attendant Team (SWHAT).

The aim of this review is to give an overview of how successful the service is in fulfilling its purpose and mandate. Surveys were conducted of the general student body as well as volunteers and employees of the service to gain an understanding of how the service functions, how it is perceived, and what programming/services it delivers to the student body. This review contains an analysis of those results, as well as a summary of external research that has been done. The external research took a focus on other university student unions in Ontario to understand if they offer clubs or services with strategies which can be adopted by SWHAT. The result of this internal and external research is summarized to give a series of recommendations made in concert by the Services Committee, VP Administration, and AVP Services.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Service Purpose

1.1 To improve travel safety at night for members of the McMaster community.

Service Operating Parameters

2.1 The SWHAT shall be a student run service, providing free accompaniment at the request of anyone moving within the approved boundaries, and patrols around campus to aid in keeping the McMaster students safe;

2.2 The boundaries of the SWHAT shall be set by the Coordinator and approved by the Executive Board;

2.3 The operating hours of the SWHAT shall be set by the Coordinator and will run during the academic school year.

Service Structure

3.1 The Coordinator, who shall:

3.1.1 Be responsible for managing all activities of SWHAT;

3.1.2 Perform duties outlined in the SWHAT Coordinator job description;

3.2 The Public Relations Coordinator(s), who shall:

3.2.1 Be responsible for all activities directly related to the marketing and promotion of SWHAT on and off campus;

3.2.2 Perform duties outlined in the SWHAT Public Relations Coordinator job description;

3.3 The Volunteer Affairs Coordinator(s), who shall:

3.3.1 Be responsible for volunteer recruitment, training and management;

3.3.2 Perform duties outlined in the SWHAT Volunteer Affairs Coordinator job description;

3.4 The Volunteer Logistics Coordinator(s), who shall:

3.4.1 Be responsible for organizing, managing and updating all SWHAT files;

3.4.2 Perform duties outlined in the SWHAT Volunteer Logistics Coordinator job description;

3.5 The Dispatch Operations Coordinator(s), who shall:

3.5.1 Be responsible for dispatcher recruitment, training and management;

3.5.2 Perform duties outlined in the SWHAT Dispatch Operations Coordinator job description;

3.6 Volunteers, who shall:

3.6.1 Provide attendance to those wishing accompaniment while walking on and off campus within the boundaries;

3.6.2 Perform duties outlined in the SWHAT Volunteer job description;

3.7 Dispatchers, who shall:

3.7.1 Provide prompt service to all requests for accompaniment and be responsible for all equipment on their shift;

3.7.2 Perform duties outlined in the SWHAT Dispatcher job description;

INTERNAL RESEARCH

Volunteer and Executive Survey

The executive and volunteer survey consisted of 36 questions to gauge how effectively SWHAT's executives and volunteers view its functioning and the delivery of services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the leadership and volunteers of SWHAT perceive the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where areas for improvement exist. There were 40 responses to the survey which represents approximately 50% of all executives and volunteers within SWHAT.

Science represents the faculty from which the greatest number of respondents originate, with 45% from that faculty, followed by Health Sciences at 30% of respondents from that faculty. All respondents were full-time undergraduate students, with 87.5% of them being permanent residence Ontario students and 10% being from outside Ontario. 77.5% of respondents live in off-campus housing near McMaster, with 12.5% living in McMaster campus residence and 10% living at home and commuting. Third year students represent the year with the greatest number of respondents (40%), followed by second year (35%), first year (10%), fourth year (10%), and fifth year (5%) students.

In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the three largest ethno-racial groups were White/European (35%), South Asian (30%), and East or Southeast Asian (22.5%). Cisgender women made up a clear majority of respondents (62.5%), with most others identifying as cisgender men. 70% of respondents were heterosexual, with the remainder identifying as bi/pan/polysexual, homosexual, and Queer.

Responses spanned a broad spectrum for annual household income, with the average household income being between \$100,000 and \$149,999. Most respondents originated from family units composed of four (37.5%) or five (25%). The average age of respondents was 20 years old. 17.5% of respondents identified as having a disability. Over half of respondents were second generation students, with the remainder being first and third generation students.

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Many respondents indicated they were already familiar and knowledgeable of SWHAT. 92.5% of respondents agreed SWHAT's role as a volunteer service providing safe and confidential accompaniment on walks at night was suitable. Responses were mixed with whether the role should be expanded, with 35% disagreeing and 20% agreeing. Over 85% of respondents believed that SWHAT has a positive impact on the McMaster community, helping many people on campus and providing a safe(r) space while responders are on shift. A small minority of 5% or less disagreed with the above statements.

Most respondents learned of SWHAT through friends/acquaintances (35%), with others learning through the SWHAT Instagram (22.5%), MSU Instagram (15%), and on-campus SWHAT promotional material (7.5%). All respondents indicated good or

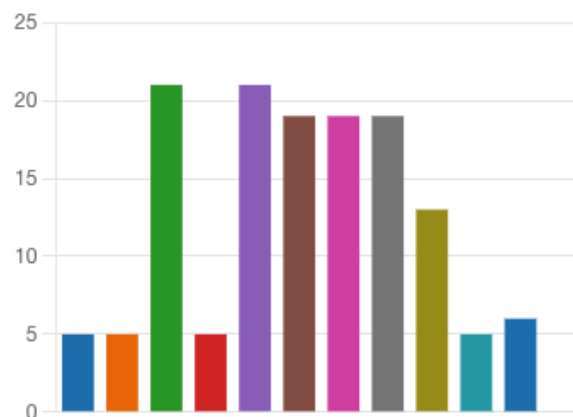
excellent social media and physical promotional material quality. Respondents cited the SWHAT Instagram (97.5%), friends/acquaintances (77.5%), on-campus SWHAT promotional material (75%), Clubsfest (50%), Welcome Week events (40%), and on-campus promotional materials (16%) to be the areas in where they had seen or heard of SWHAT the most. Figure 1 below indicates what respondents believe SWHAT should use to increase awareness of its services: Instagram (52.5%), TikTok (52.5%), physical promotions (47.5%), collaboration with other MSU services (47.5%), collaboration with McMaster University services (47.5%), and collaboration with student groups and societies (32.5%).

Figure 1. A figure to show platforms/methods which executives/volunteers believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.

23. I think SWHAT should use the following platforms/methods to increase awareness of its services:

[More Details](#)

No particular platforms/methods	5
Facebook	5
Instagram	21
Twitter	5
TikTok	21
Physical promotions (such as po...	19
Collaboration with other MSU s...	19
Collaboration with McMaster U...	19
Collaboration with student grou...	13
Collaboration with local, Hamilt...	5
Online communities (e.g. Discord)	6
Other	0



85% of respondents were volunteers, while 15% were executives. 75% of respondents indicated this was their first year working with SWHAT, while 25% indicated they have worked with SWHAT before. Overall, training was viewed favorably for the most part. Most indicated their job description was accurate, also believing the hiring process was fair and appropriate. 87.5% believed holding a SWHAT position didn't impact their academics, with 10% remaining neutral and 2.5% strongly believing otherwise. 2.5% also disagreed that there was adequate support from the executive team, although 92.5% agreed that there was enough support. 92.5% of respondents also believed the executive and volunteer training was adequate, with 2.5% disagreeing and 2.5% remaining neutral. Finally, 5% of respondents felt MSU-wide training was inadequate, with 82.5% believing it to be sufficient and 12.5% remaining neutral. Written feedback indicated a desire for training to be a group or synchronous activity rather than

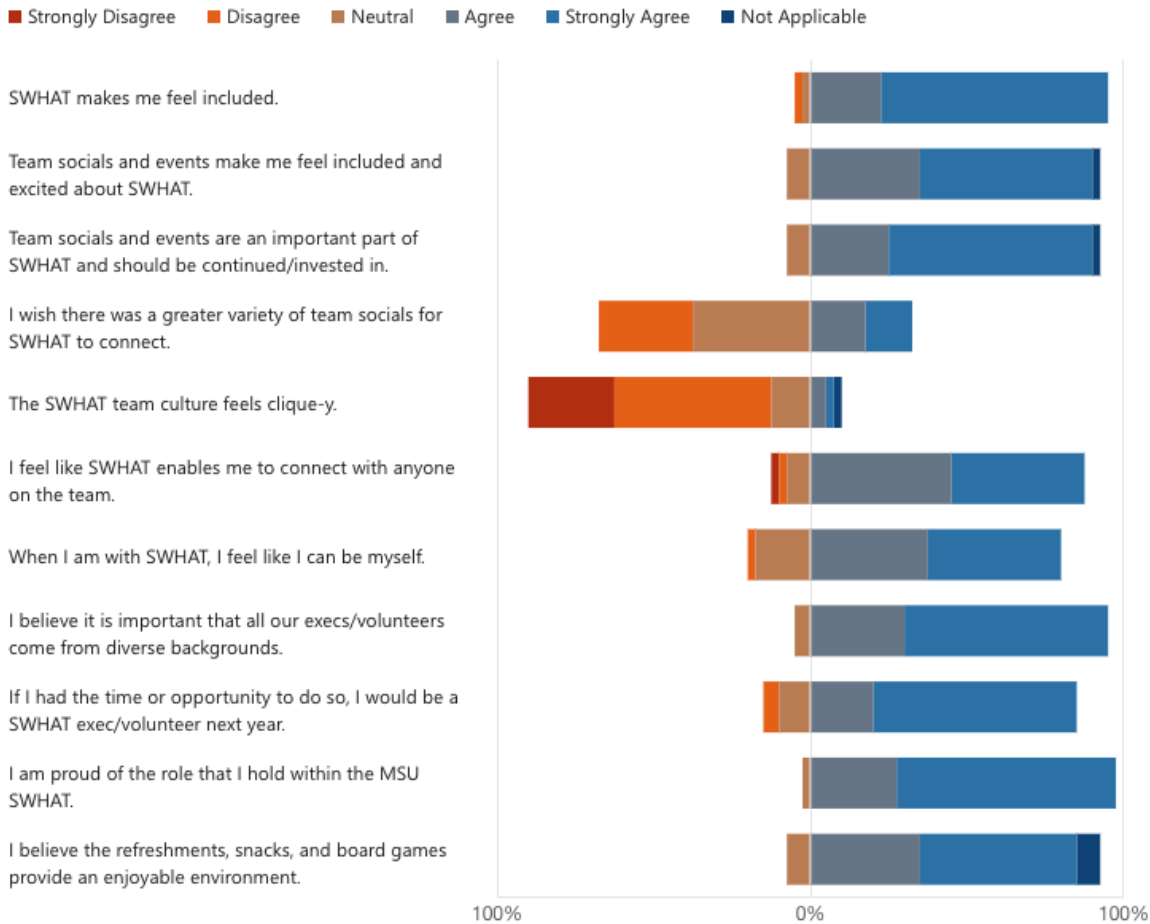
online modules or quizzes. Respondents also expressed it was unnecessary and effortful to complete during midterms.

Responses were positive regarding SWHAT's operations, with a majority of respondents indicating they believed SWHAT builds a strong team dynamic and values their input as volunteers, also noting there were ample opportunities to provide feedback. 5% of respondents indicated they felt burnt out because of SWHAT while 85% indicated otherwise. 5% of respondents also believed there was insufficient communication between volunteers and MSU Administration, although 72.5% believed it to be adequate. Responses were mixed in regards to funding; 32.5% of respondents felt SWHAT was inadequately funded, 35% of respondents felt SWHAT was, and 32.5% remained neutral on the matter. 55% of volunteers felt they could rely on the equipment SWHAT has, although 27.5% felt they couldn't. Overall, most executives felt the frequency of the bi-weekly/monthly meetings were just right. 80% of respondents also felt the collaboration and communication was just right, with 2.5% indicating it was too frequent and 2.5% indicating it to be too infrequent.

72.5% of respondents indicated their typical/average shift length was 4 hours, with 15% of respondents indicating it was 6 hours, 10% indicating it was 3 hours, and 2.5% indicating it was over 7 hours. Most felt the shift length was just right (82.5%), with the minority of respondents indicating it was too long (17.5%).

From Figure 2 below, team dynamic seems to be excellent. All respondents indicated team socials and events made them feel included, also believing them to be an important part of SWHAT. All respondents also felt it was important that all execs/volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, with all being proud of the role that they hold within SWHAT and believing the refreshments, snacks, and board games to provide an enjoyable environment for them. 2.5% of respondents felt SWHAT did not make them feel included, although an overwhelming 95% indicated otherwise. 30% did not wish there to be a greater variety of team socials for SWHAT to connect, while 32.5% wanted there to be more and 37.5% remained neutral. Most respondents felt SWHAT team culture wasn't clique-y (77.5%), with 7.5% of respondents believing the opposite. 5% of respondents felt SWHAT did not allow them to connect with anyone on the team, but 87.5% of respondents believed SWHAT did allow them to connect with others. 2.5% of respondents felt they couldn't be themselves, but once again, 80% of respondents believed the contrary. Finally, 85% of respondents expressed they would be a SWHAT executive or volunteer next year, with 5% disagreeing. Overall, written feedback requested more socials and more snacks.

Figure 2. Likert scale statements assessing inclusivity and team dynamic.



Written feedback indicated concern for the walkers themselves, wishing to implement a buddy system to provide volunteers on shift a safe walk home as well. Promoting the service more was also emphasized since there were only signs for SWHAT on the second floor of the student centre. Ability to go on more walks was also mentioned. A sweater subtly indicating volunteers are SWHAT would help students identify the walker when meeting students; however, this would compromise the confidential service that SWHAT aims to provide.

Written feedback also emphasized the importance of radios and flashlights. Numerous responses indicated there should be more working radios — at least enough for the number of volunteers on shift — which would be beneficial for busy evenings. Without the radios, volunteers and service users would have to wait to be able to walk. One response also noted that volunteers would often need to rely on Facebook Messenger to communicate with dispatch and executives. However, not all members have access to Messenger at all times. Flashlights were also noted to be unreliable, and when working, would be quite dim. Another response suggested being able to choose the amount of hours you were able to commit to volunteering with SWHAT each week.

Overall, the written comments regarding SWHAT was overwhelmingly positive. Commendations were provided for the SWHAT Coordinator for going above and

beyond in his role. He ensured people were engaged in conversation, which created bonds between volunteers and strengthened the team cohesion. Considering the scope of SWHAT's operations, one response expressed SWHAT was very underfunded. They justified this by saying SWHAT operates more hours in a week than all MSU services except EFRT, which is budgeted higher. Other respondents felt the service maintains a safe(r) space on and off campus, believing it to be a rewarding and unique experience.

General Student Body Survey

The general student body survey consisted of 30 questions to gauge how effectively SWHAT delivers its services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the student body perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where there exist areas to make service delivery or communication with the student body more efficient. There were 119 responses to the survey, with the plurality from first-year students (34%).

The greatest number of responses came from Science students (39%) followed by Health Science students (13%). Approximately 87% of respondents were domestic students from Ontario with 8% from other parts of Canada or international students. 97% of respondents were full-time undergraduate students. 42% of respondents lived in off-campus student housing, with 29% commuting and 24% living in campus residence.

In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the three largest ethno-racial groups were White/European (32%), South Asian (25%), and East and/or Southeast Asian (21%). Cisgender women made up the supermajority of respondents (76%) with most of the remainder made up of cisgender men, and about 4% made up of individuals of various non-cisgender identities. About 74% of respondents were heterosexual, with the remaining 23% comprising various homosexual, asexual, questioning, queer, and bi/poly/pansexual identities.

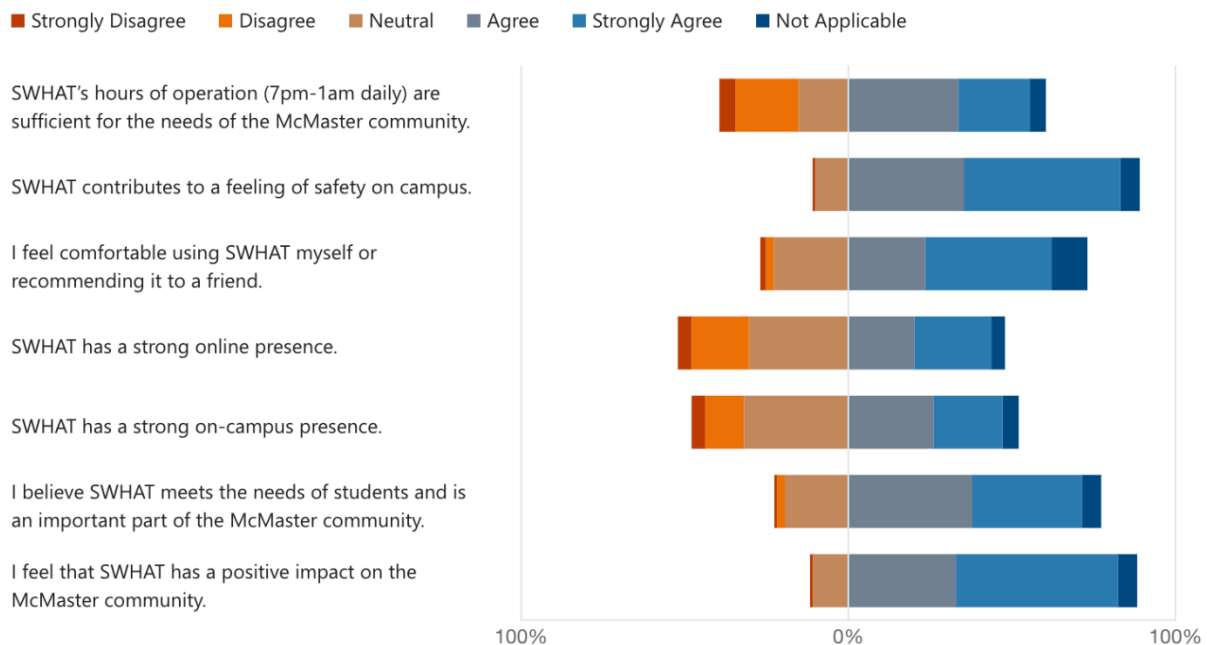
Average annual family income appeared to be within the range of \$50,000-\$99,999. Most respondents originated from family units composed of four to five individuals. Most respondents indicated they were aged 18-21. 18% of respondents self-identified as a person with a disability, with half of respondents indicating they were second generation students and the remainder being first or third.

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Generally, respondents were somewhat knowledgeable about SWHAT with the average familiarity score being 5.7/10. Most respondents felt the role was suitable, with over half of respondents indicating the role should be expanded. A large majority of students agreed that SWHAT contributes to a feeling of safety on campus, has a positive impact on the community, and meets the needs of students. Over half of respondents also agreed they would be comfortable using SWHAT and agreed that hours of operations were sufficient. About a quarter of respondents disagreed and felt SWHAT's hours of operation should be expanded. 40% of respondents believed

SWHAT has a strong online and on-campus presence, with less than 20% of respondents indicating otherwise. See Figure 3 below for a visual breakdown.

Figure 3. Likert scale statements assessing the role SWHAT plays in the school community and public perception of SWHAT



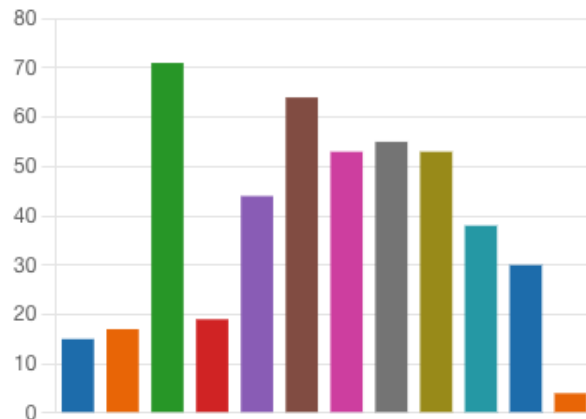
Most respondents initially learned of SWHAT through friends/acquaintances (19%), SWHAT Instagram (19%), on-campus SWHAT promotional material (15%), and Welcome Week events (13%). 59% of respondents also believed SWHAT social media and promotions to be excellent or good quality, with no respondents indicating they were poor or unacceptable. Respondents have generally heard of SWHAT through friends/acquaintances (47%), followed by the SWHAT Instagram (39%), on-campus SWHAT promotional materials (38%), Welcome Week Events (30%), on-campus promotions (27%), informational emails (24%), and professors/teaching assistants (17%). Most students believed Instagram to be the best platform to increase awareness of the service, followed by collaborations with MSU or McMaster services, collaborations with student groups or societies, and TikTok.

Figure 4. A figure to show platforms/methods which students believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.

23. I think SWHAT should use the following platforms/methods to increase awareness of its services:

More Details

● No particular platforms/methods	15
● Facebook	17
● Instagram	71
● Twitter	19
● TikTok	44
● Physical promotions (such as po...	64
● Collaboration with other MSU s...	53
● Collaboration with McMaster U...	55
● Collaboration with student grou...	53
● Collaboration with local, Hamilt...	38
● Online communities (e.g. Discord)	30
● Other	4

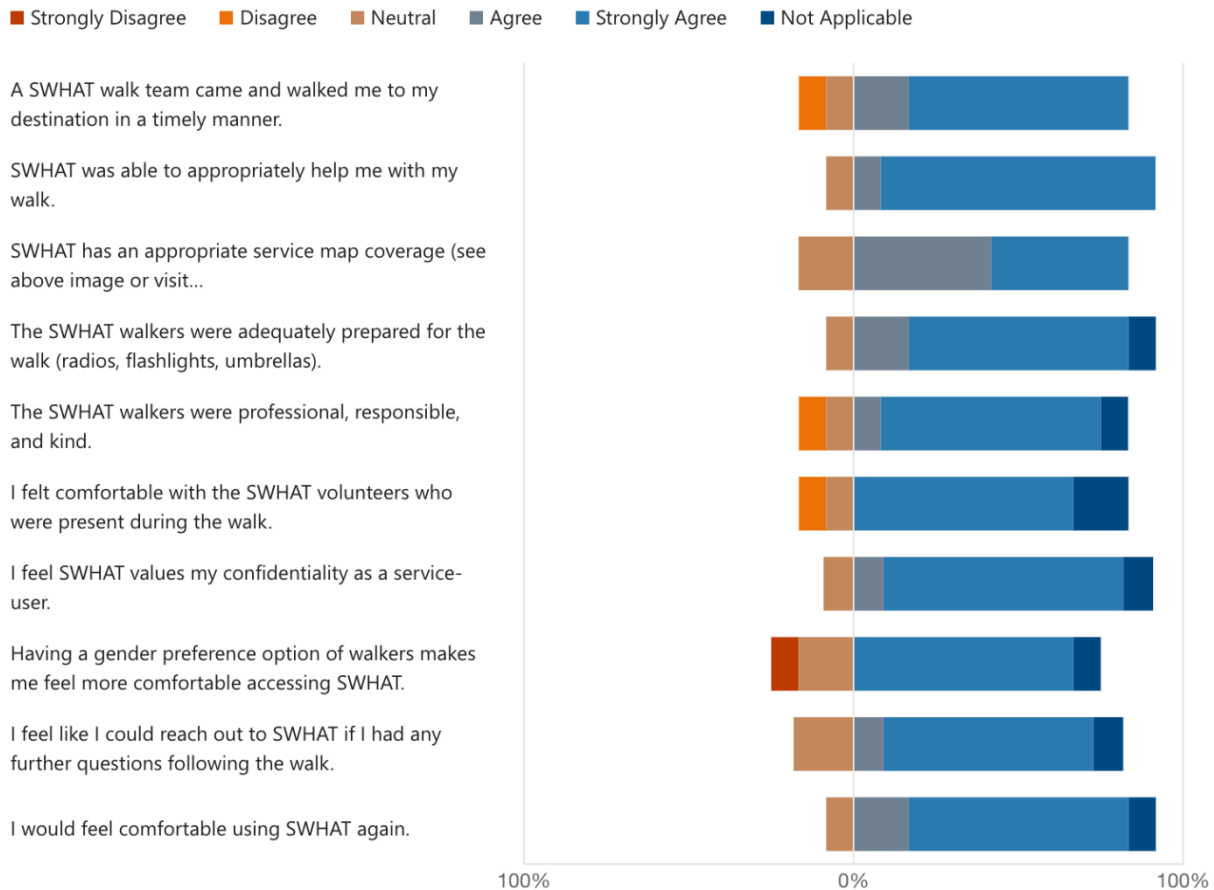


Of the 119 responses, only 10% of respondents have used SWHAT themselves. 66% of those who have used SWHAT cited feeling unsafe walking home at night is the primary reason for calling. However, 25% of them called SWHAT because they wanted a person to chat with, and 17% indicated they called because they were unfamiliar with the McMaster/Hamilton community. Three quarters of respondents did not live in Hamilton before attending McMaster.

As a whole, most respondents felt that contact methods for SWHAT were clear and sufficient, with all respondents feeling comfortable answering the questions regarding their walk. A quarter of respondents felt SWHAT's office was not easy to locate, with half of respondents believing it was easy.

From Figure 5 below, the SWHAT walk request response seems to be very positive. Almost all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that SWHAT appropriately helped them and had an adequate service map coverage. Walkers were also prepared for the walk, with respondents indicating SWHAT values their confidentiality and they'd feel comfortable using SWHAT again. A minority of respondents (8.3%) felt they waited too long for a SWHAT walker, with some concerns for the professionalism and comfortability around the walkers. 8.3% of respondents felt having a gender preference option made them less comfortable accessing SWHAT. However, it is felt by the Services Committee that the emphasis should be on the overwhelming number of positive responses (strongly agree) received.

Figure 5. Likert statements assessing the SWHAT response



A large portion of the written feedback was focused on increasing hours of operation. Responses mentioned having earlier hours of operation from 5:00pm or 6:00pm to 1:00am, especially in the winter months when it gets darker earlier. Some also suggested keeping services open until 2:00am. Other comments also mentioned expanding service area coverage. Commuting with students on the bus was brought up multiple times, especially to destinations outside of the service coverage. Friday and Saturday nights were also emphasized as important nights to stay open for longer, although service usage does not reflect this given that evenings are actually slower for the service.

Accessibility was another focus of the written feedback. Requesting walkers by name was brought up as a possibility, with another comment indicating that their gender preferences were not able to be met. A possibility would be to ask whether students would still like a walk should their gender preference not be met. One response also said that asking if they were a previous SWHAT executive/member in the past to be unnecessary. Another suggestion mentioned the booking form should be easier to find instead of going through Instagram and Linktree, wondering if the link could be put on McMaster's Safety app.

Finally, awareness of the service was another emphasis. Sitting in more common areas or attending events that run late at night was one suggestion. Respondents also

suggested more advertising regarding SWHAT's services on-campus such as emails, posters, and other accessible platforms. Another possibility was to create informational social media posts, providing safety tips to people that walk or take the bus alone at night. Overall, respondents also wrote commendations for SWHAT's role as a service and coming back to life after the COVID-19 pandemic.

EXTERNAL RESEARCH

As a part of the external research strategy, the Services Committee aimed to review all undergraduate student unions of universities in Ontario. The following aims to compare SWHAT to its equivalent at other universities and assist in providing any recommendations.

Universities that do not have an equivalent service include the Algoma University Students' Union, Brock University Students' Union, Carleton University Students' Association, Nipissing University Student Union, and the Scarborough Campus Students' Union.

Lakehead University has the Safe Walk Program, where individuals can be accompanied to their vehicle or bus stop by Lakehead Orillia security team. OCAD has a walk-safe program for anyone to be escorted by security.

Ontario Tech has the Campus Walk program which enables students, staff, faculty, or visitors to have a trained escort accompany them to their car, residence or other campus location on weeknights. Escorts are provided by student teams who are employed and trained through Career Services. All members work in pairs and can be identified by their vests with Campus Walk printed on the back. The Alma Mater Society of Queen's University has Walkhome, which provides confidential service to students who need to walk home at nighttime with a safe and comfortable way to travel within Kingston. To maintain confidentiality, their staff do not wear any clothes in which individuals can identify them as a Walkhome team. They welcome students who feel unsafe to walk home at nighttime, allowing students to call them or visit their office to schedule a walk

The Guelph Central Student Association has Safewalk, which is accessible through the use of campus phones, pushing the Safewalk button on payphones on campus, pressing the talk button on any emergency pole, or approaching Safewalk volunteers at night on campus. The boundaries remain on campus, and they can try and accommodate off-campus escort when possible.

The University of Ottawa Student Union has Foot Patrol, which provides services very similar to our SWHAT program. There is also a map indicating the boundaries which Foot Patrol can be used. Students can request a walk up to 45 minutes away from campus walking or up to 30 minutes busing and 15 minutes walking, and it operates from 8pm to 11pm, Monday to Friday. Their social media includes Facebook and Instagram.

The University of Toronto has TravelSafer, which provides phone numbers for free escorts on or around campus. The Mississauga Students' Union has Walk Safe and the Work Alone Program which provides free escorts or security. The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association has the Digital WatSAFE app that provides students with emergency contact info, a personal safety toolbox, including flashlight and alarm, safety and emergency resources, campus maps, etc. The University of Western has the Mustang Express which is a shuttle that takes students home from the downtown area. The University of Windsor has Walksafe, which has volunteers to walk students back home at nighttime. It is open to all students, faculties, staffs, and visitors at University of Windsor. Wilfrid Laurier University has Foot Patrol, a volunteer-run safe walk program under the student union. Volunteers are sent out in teams of two to walk students and staff from the Laurier community, much like SWHAT does for the McMaster community.

The York Federation of Students has GoSAFE, which accompanies York community members to and from any on-campus location. Volunteers will meet students at pick-up location within 10 minutes of call and will wait until bus or transportation arrives or car starts.

Although most of these universities have some sort of escort program, some are run by the university, not the student union, and involve campus security rather than student volunteers.

CONCLUSION

From the information gathered through surveying of the student body, volunteers, and executives of SWHAT, it is evident that SWHAT plays an important role for the McMaster community. Nevertheless, this review has unveiled a few areas in which the SWHAT service delivery can be improved.

1. Expand service hours, particularly during the winter

Among many students' primary concerns was not being able to access SWHAT during earlier hours of the evening, specifically during winter when it would get darker earlier. As a result, shifting the operating hours up to around 6:00pm is a possibility. Others also suggested keeping services open until 2:00am. Nonetheless, the SWHAT Coordinator alongside executives should analyze usage rates and feedback to determine whether expanding or shifting these hours would be worth it, considering the availability of volunteers.

2. Increase accessibility in booking a SWHAT walk

Accessibility can be improved in a number of ways, with many suggestions provided by the general student body. Investigating if the booking form can be put on McMaster's Safety app should be investigated by the SWHAT Coordinator and the executive team. If possible, finding another room for SWHAT to be located or providing more signage is crucial, especially since not everyone traverses up to the second floor of MUSC. Sitting in more common areas or attending notable evening events is also a possible avenue to

explore. Clarifying aspects of the booking form such as the ability to use the HSR and gender preference is also important, adding a question addressing if they would still like a walk should their preference not be met. Ensuring the form is concise is also best practice, cutting out unnecessary questions such as being a previous SWHAT executive/member. By improving accessibility, word-of-mouth will spread service awareness.

3. Offer safety tips or launch safety campaigns on social media

Another area of focus that falls under SWHAT's purview is safety at night in general. Launching safety campaigns or posting safety tips or guides may be helpful for SWHAT to establish in their operations, serving as another way in which to engage with the student community. Informational social media posts providing safety tips to people that walk or take the bus alone may prove helpful to students commuting home late at night. Curating a set of resources for students on Instagram may also be beneficial.

4. Designate minimum number of working flashlights and radios for every shift

There should be a clear minimum number of working flashlights and radios for every shift to ensure every walker who walks is safe and has the necessary equipment to safely travel wherever SWHAT requires them to. Backups of this equipment should also be available if possible. Nonetheless, it is important that on evenings where more walks are anticipated, more flashlights and radios are available. Other equipment such as umbrellas may also be considered.

5. Ensure buddy system is available for walkers going home late at night

Although such a system may already be implemented by this year's SWHAT Coordinator, it is important that the schedule accommodates for a buddy system such that the walkers are also able to arrive home safely. When scheduling walkers on shift, gathering information on where they currently live (e.g. student housing) is important in creating the schedules, ensuring that everyone is able to safely walk each other home as well. Adding this in the operating policy or a particular job description may be a consideration moving forward. However, the Uber vouchers have proved to be beneficial and should also be continued — in parallel to the buddy system — to accommodate all comfort levels.

6. Investigate hiring an Assistant Director or adding weekly hours to the Coordinator role

It may be important to investigate hiring an Assistant Director for the service given the increasing usage of the SWHAT service. If the number of walkers, dispatchers, and executives increases in the future too, this could increase the burden and amount of work the SWHAT Coordinator must take on. Thus, an Assistant Director could help with the SWHAT Coordinator's efforts in leading the service and ensuring its smooth operations. Alternatively, recognizing that the SWHAT Coordinator works 6-8 hours per

week, which is below that of most Directors, increasing their weekly hours could also help the Service to function more efficiently and be a viable option.

With these steps in place, SWHAT will be able to successfully improve its service delivery and continue its role as a vital part of the McMaster Community. I would like to thank the Services Committee, the VP Administration, Administrative Services Coordinator, Director of Marketing and Communications, the SWHAT Coordinator, the volunteers and executives on the SWHAT team, and those in the student body who responded to the surveys for their help in the creation of this report.

Recommendations

1. Expand service hours, particularly during the winter
2. Increase accessibility in booking SWHAT
3. Offer safety tips or launch safety campaigns besides just through walks
4. Minimum designated amount of working flashlights/radios for every shift
5. Ensure buddy system is available for walkers going home late at night
6. Investigate hiring an Assistant Director or adding weekly hours to the Coordinator role

Best regards,

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