
PARTNERS IN ACTION



UPDATING THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY FOR THE CITY OF VERNON

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BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Social Planning Council for the North Okanagan received a federal grant to create a community strategy to address the issue of homelessness in the North Okanagan. A coordinator was hired to create an inventory of services, identify gaps and consult with various stakeholders in the community. The project concluded with a community strategy session where specific goals and actions were identified as priorities. The final document was entitled "Building Bridges: the 2007 Homelessness Strategy for the North Okanagan" and was ultimately housed with the Partners in Action Committee who agreed to monitor and implement the plan.

When the strategy was first being developed in 2007, there were very little services in place to support people who were homeless. Many agencies struggled to address these needs with limited resources. Churches and non-profits were vocal that there were people in our community who were cold, hungry and without shelter. At the same time, other sectors were disturbed by the visible impact of an increased street population on public spaces and parks. In particular, businesses in the city centre were concerned about customers avoiding downtown due to potential crime and/or harassment by panhandlers. Amongst most groups, there was an agreement that something needed to be done and that the issue of homelessness could not be ignored.

For the most part, the 2007 strategy focused on immediate problems and issues. At that time, there was a shelter in place but it was under-funded and depended on volunteers to remain open. By the Spring of 2008, this service was shut down permanently. There were no outreach workers in place and addictions counseling was only available at the Health Unit (too far to walk for most homeless people). The Upper Room Mission was feeding numerous people living on the street but was limited in the hours and services that they could offer. For many of the stakeholders involved in implementing the plan, the focus was immediate and crisis driven but there was a determination to make positive changes in the community.

Over the last five years, there have been many successes. Support from the local municipality and government agencies allowed for the expansion of services. BC Housing funded the Gateway Shelter and the Housing Outreach position, Interior Health provided substance abuse outreach counselors and established the Primary Care Centre downtown, and the Ministry of Social Development funded an income assistance outreach position. In addition, the City of Vernon created an Attainable Housing Strategy and local business people came forward to found the Vernon and District Community Land Trust Society.

There have also been challenges that have not been met. There is still a lack of detox services in the community and lack of supported housing for people with mental health issues and/or addictions. Although the community has vastly improved access to emergency services for shelter, food and health care, there is still the challenge of finding permanent homes for the people who are chronically homeless.

At this point, many of the initiatives in the original plan have been completed so there is a need to update the strategy. The goal of the Partners in Action Committee is to move forward in an informed manner so that we can improve our efforts and build on our successes.

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY FOR CITY OF VERNON: 2012-2015

Vision

- A community where every person has access to safe, affordable, and appropriate housing

Guiding Principles

- Community driven and collaborative approach
- Respect for the individual rights of people who are homeless
- Respect for the needs and concerns of the wider community at large
- Working from a harm reduction lens

Mission Statement

- To implement the Homelessness Strategy by coordinating, mobilizing and evaluating community based action teams

Geographic Scope

- City of Vernon - this is the main source of funding for the implementation of the strategy

Goals

- Ensure access to emergency based shelter, food and health services
- Provide a range of affordable housing options in the community
- Provide treatment programs and services for people with mental health/addictions
- Provide access to financial assistance/education/employment opportunities
- Encourage community coordination and collaboration
- Promote community awareness/education
- Initiate prevention strategies

Indicators

- Homeless Camp Census by COOL TEAM
- Statistics of Gateway Shelter
- Statistics for Housing Outreach Program
- Upper Room Mission and Food Bank Statistics
- Rental Vacancy Rate and Average Rents (CMHC Statistics)
- Number of New Units of Supported Housing added to the Inventory
- Street Clinic Statistics on Harm Reduction Initiatives

Work Plan

The Partners in Action Committee also hosts and implements the Harm Reduction Strategy which has a focus on individuals with mental health and addictions. There are some synergies and overlapping goals between these two strategies but as they are hosted by the same committee, there is no duplication of efforts. The shaded areas within the work plan indicate where there are action teams to address the same issues within the Harm Reduction Strategy.

OBJECTIVES	LEADERS	ACTION	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS	MEASURABLE RESULTS AS OF DECEMBER 2012
Goal: Ensure access to emergency based shelter, food and health services				
Continue to conduct a census of homeless camps and provide outreach to homeless campers	COOL Team (frontline workers of non-profit and government agencies; by-law officers)	Continue to conduct the census in June and October of each year. Campers should be provided with "Tips for Staying Safe" and the Vernon Survival Guide.	Tracking number of homeless camps in Greater Vernon.	Significant reduction in number of homeless camps since 2009: Jun 2009 – 30 Nov 2009 – 12 Apr 2010 – 13 Oct 2010 – 16 Jun 2011 – 7 Sep 2011 – 4 May 2012 – 0 Sep 2012 – 2
Better coordination and efficiency to meet emergency food needs Adding more upstream food programs to the community (hand up rather than hand out)	Trinity United Church, Social Planning, Upper Room Mission, IH Nutritionist, Food Action Society	Host a community meeting for churches, non-profits and schools to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ provide a current list of food resources ○ Give examples of upstream programs ○ build on opportunities and create partnerships ○ set up a networking system for stakeholders 	New partnerships/ programs are developed as a result. New programs that provide people opportunities to feed themselves (community gardens, canning groups etc).	In 2011, the Emergency Food Action Network was created and agreed to meet twice a year. Social Planning Council and Trinity United co-hosted two network meetings in 2012. Patchwork Community Farms programs will be launched at the OC site in Spring 2013. Partners in Action have agreed to host an action team to research the creation of a "food centre".

Goal: Provide treatment programs and services for people with mental health/addictions

More local access to a range of detoxification services	Interior Health Authority Partners in Action	Research home detox program	Decrease in emergency room visits for detox. Decrease in number of critical incidents in shelters.	An action team was created in December 2012 to research a home detox or "daytox" approach to services in Vernon.
Increased access to long term recovery programs	Interior Health Partners in Action	Create an action team to clarify what these services would look like in Vernon Gather stakeholders to create a plan	Vernon residents have access to long term recovery services in their own community.	John Howard Society is in the process of opening Bill's Place which is 12 step recovery program for men.

Goal: Provide access to financial assistance/education/employment opportunities

Build employability skills and provide employment for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Community Futures John Howard Society Canadian Mental Health Association Kindale	Create social enterprises (catering service, waste removal, yard maintenance) that hire people at risk of homelessness.	Participants receive part or fulltime employment. Participants successfully pass certificate courses (Foodsafe, First Aid). Participants secure other part or full time employment.	Community Futures provides these services in the community and has partnerships with John Howard Society and Kindale Development Association to work with more marginalized populations. Kindale, CMHA and JHS offer skill building/social enterprises as part of their programming. Patchwork Community Farms has a long term vision of including social enterprises into the programming.
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Goal: Provide a range of affordable housing options in the community

Affordable Housing Strategy	Affordable Housing Committee – City of Vernon Social Planning Council	Continue to implement	Increase in housing stock. Rental vacancy rate (above 4 % vacancy)	Rental vacancy rate is approximately 6.3% as of Fall 2012 Since 2008, 66 new units of non-profit affordable housing have been added to the housing stock. There are plans for up to 30 new units in 2013. There is also a home ownership model being developed for 88 units of “attainable” housing (15% below market for income households below \$65,000 per year)
Housing Forums	Social Planning Council, City of Vernon Affordable Housing Committee Members	Continue to host housing forums on an annual basis	Tracking number of participants and their evaluation responses.	A Housing Forum was held in Spring of 2012 with over 100 participants. Another forum is planned for Spring 2013.
Range of Supported Housing for people with Mental Health and Addictions	Agencies with a Mandate for Housing BC Housing and IH	Support non-profit agencies in their efforts to provide more housing.	New Units of Supported Housing Decrease in number of people sleeping outside in Vernon.	John Howard Society has opened Bill’s Place which is a sober living house. The facility offers four apartments and a 10 bed housing unit.
Create supported housing (up to two years) for women with substance abuse issues.	Partners in Action	A business plan has been developed.	Creation of 10 bed facility. Participants secure and maintain permanent housing after completing the program.	In 2011, a business plan for a 10 bed facility was pitched to both BC Housing and Interior Health however funding was not available.

Goal: Community Coordination and Collaboration

<p>Continue to support community based coordination and integrated team approach</p>	<p>Partners in Action NOPOT CMHA Community Services Committee Integrated Outreach Team</p>	<p>Partners in Action continue to take a lead role in fostering collaborative approach and assisting in community coordination Encourage a "culture of collaboration"</p>	<p>Active participation by stakeholders in committees Stakeholder "buy in" to the coordinated approach to services</p>	<p>Vernon has a reputation amongst funders and other municipalities as a community that works well together. Partners in Action Final Reports provide details of the number of collaborative projects taking place in the community.</p>
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Goal: Community Awareness/Education

<p>More Public Awareness on Issue of Homeless-ness</p>	<p>Partners in Action NOPOT</p>	<p>Homelessness Awareness Week each year</p>	<p>Supportive letters to editor. Wider community engagement in solutions. DVA and local businesses take part in action teams that address the issue of homelessness.</p>	<p>Partners in Action approached the NOPOT Committee to see if they would be interested in promoting the Homelessness Awareness Week. There was interest but not enough capacity to organize events in 2012.</p>
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More education for service providers/enforcement agencies who come in contact with people with MH & A	JHS, Street Clinic, CMHA, NOPOT	Organize workshops and presentations to service providers and enforcement agencies.	Track number of participants Better understanding amongst service providers of MH&A	JHS and the Street Clinic organize lunch time "info sessions" for service providers on an ongoing basis. A workshop on methadone was organized in October 2012 with over 75 participants. CMHA has worked with the local RCMP to provide training on MH. In 2012, the Street Clinic presented to two of the watches at the RCMP.
Goal: Prevention Strategies				
Ensure youth and families know what activities/supports are available to them	Community Futures, Social Planning Council, North Okanagan Child Youth and Family Committee	Resource guide for youth Promote recreation discount pass to families on income assistance	Increase of youth participation in community activities	In 2011, Community Futures and Social Planning Council partnered to update the Little Black Book and create an on-line version. Community Futures continues to update the resource.
Expand prevention strategies in the schools to include information about supports for coping with mental health issues	School Districts IH Aboriginal Services	Programming that focuses on coping/supports for children/youth at risk	Students are more educated on mental health issues and where/how to access supports and services.	Kal School organized Mental Health Days in Spring of 2012 which was a huge success. Harm Reduction Action team will follow up with the teacher who organized Mental Health Days; explore whether mental health days can be expanded to more schools than just Kal.

APPENDIX 1:

Homelessness Strategy for the North Okanagan: Results for 2007-2011

The following are the results of efforts by the community to implement the original strategy developed in 2007. The actions that were added to the strategy *after* 2007 are shaded to indicate that these were not part of the initial plan. As with most plans, there needs to be some flexibility to respond to emerging issues and opportunities.

OBJECTIVES	LEADERS	ACTIONS TAKEN	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS	MEASURABLE RESULTS
EMERGENCY SUPPORT SERVICES				
Establish a women's shelter Stabilize/expand existing shelter services	John Howard Society, Vernon Women's Centre, Social Planning Council, First Nations Friendship Centre, Vernon Transition House, CMHA, Salvation Army	By September 2008, the Gateway Shelter was established with 28 beds for men and women (13 for men and 15 for women). By Fall of 2008, BC Housing had established the Emergency Weather Response Program in Vernon. This allows for up to 20 additional emergency shelter beds in winter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⬇ Tracking of successful placement of people in permanent housing and/or support programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⬇ Seventy people have been placed in permanent housing from the Gateway Shelter since it opened; 29 were confirmed to still be housed after six months (not all participants responded to the follow up). ⬇ Seventy-eight women and 250 men have been housed under the Housing Outreach Program; 130 were confirmed to still be housed after six months (not all participants responded to the follow up).
Create a Safe Drop In Program	Upper Room Mission Partners in Action Neighbourhood Council	By Fall 2007 the Upper Room Mission had expanded their hours and mandate to include literacy and lifeskills programs. In Spring of 2008,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⬇ Tracking successful referrals by staff to programs. ⬇ Outside of facility is free of drug 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⬇ Numerous guests of the Upper Room Mission have accessed their programs. Stats to be collected. ⬇ As a result of increased RCMP presence and inter agency

		Upper Room Mission joins a Neighbourhood Council to work with neighbouring businesses to address security issues.	activity.	communication, there has been a decrease in crime related activity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Neighbouring businesses and agencies have indicated they see an improvement in addressing issues of drug activity and loitering.
Establish a Downtown Health Centre	Interior Health Authority Partners in Action	By Spring of 2008 a Downtown Primary Care Center is opened at the First Nations Friendship Centre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Decrease in emergency room visits by homeless population. ✚ Tracking successful referrals by staff to programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Evaluation of the Primary Care Center shows a decrease in emergency room usage amongst users of the centre.
Conduct a census of homeless camps and provide outreach to homeless campers	COOL Team (frontline workers of non-profit and government agencies; by-law officers)	By Spring of 2010, the COOL Team had conducted a census on four occasions. Campers were provided with "Tips for Staying Safe" and the Vernon Survival Guide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Tracking number of homeless camps in Greater Vernon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Census shows a decrease in number of identified homeless camps in Greater Vernon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Spring of 2009 - 28 ○ Fall of 2009 - 11 ○ Spring of 2010 - 8 ○ Fall of 2010 - 7
Create a protocol regarding the discharge from VJH of someone who is homeless	IH – VJH Staff Agencies that provide services to homeless population	BY January 2010, a protocol and resource list was created and distributed to VJH staff and service providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Tracking number of patients who are connected to community services before being discharged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Process still has to be formally evaluated. Gateway Shelter reports that the protocol has improved communication between VJH and frontline workers.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS				
More local access to a range of detoxification services	Interior Health Authority Partners in Action	No action was taken on this initiative due to lack of funding opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⬇️ Decrease in emergency room visits for detox. ⬇️ Decrease in number of critical incidents in shelters. 	⬇️ This still remains an identified priority in the community but no action has taken place on the issue.
Create a Harm Reduction Strategy	North Okanagan Youth and Family Services, RCMP Safe Communities Unit , Social Planning Council, Interior Health, Upper Room Mission, Restorative Justice Program	By Fall 2009, the community consultation process was completed and the harm reduction strategy created.	⬆️ Tracking the implementation and evaluation of the strategy.	⬆️ A community driven harm reduction strategy has been created and adopted by the Partners in Action Committee.
INCOME/EMPLOYMENT				
Same day Income assistance/	Action Network on Poverty and Homelessness Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance	By May 2007, a Ministry outreach worker position was created.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⬆️ Increase in number of clients receiving same day service. ⬆️ Monitor success rate after one year of people remaining housed. 	⬆️ Frontline workers report that the income assistance outreach position is working incredibly well to connect their clients to the system quickly and efficiently; this is a requirement for securing permanent housing. Stats to be collected.
Develop flexible childcare space with immediate access	North Okanagan Childcare Society	By April 2007, a program with 20 spaces had been developed targeting low income parents.	⬆️ Increase in at risk parents accessing programs and services.	⬆️ 20 new spaces created for high risk parents. Accessed on a case by case basis.

HOUSING

<p>Affordable Housing Strategy</p>	<p>Affordable Housing Committee – City of Vernon Social Planning Council</p>	<p>By January 2008, City Council unanimously supported the Attainable Housing Strategy. Strategy includes: targets for housing stock; policy recommendations for City of Vernon; community initiatives.</p>	<p>⬇️ Increase in housing stock. ⬇️ Increase in rental vacancy rate (to between 2 – 4 % vacancy).</p>	<p>⬇️ Sixty-six new units are added to the affordable housing stock (does not include housing targeting seniors or people with developmental disabilities). ⬇️ Vacancy rate in Spring of 2010 is 5.6%.</p>
<p>Community Land Trust and or/ Housing Authority</p>	<p>Partner in Action</p>	<p>By Fall 2007, the Land Trust Society was established. By Spring 2010, Under One Roof was completed and individuals and families living in the units.</p>	<p>⬇️ Increase in affordable housing stock. ⬇️ Increase in number of subsidized housing projects with non-profit partners.</p>	<p>⬇️ Six additional units to the affordable housing stock. ⬇️ Provincial and national model for partnerships between private sector and non-profit partners.</p>
<p>Range of Supported Housing for people with Mental Health and Addictions</p>	<p>Agencies with a Mandate for Housing</p>	<p>CMHA provided 16 new units of supported housing for people with mental health issues. John Howard Society received funding for 9 additional beds for men with addictions. The society also provided 8 new beds of off site permanent housing.</p>	<p>⬇️ Decrease in number of homeless in Vernon.</p>	<p>⬇️ Number of reported homeless camps has decreased over the last two years from 28 camps in Spring of 2009 to 7 camps in Fall of 2010. ⬇️ Thirty three new units/beds for people with mental health/addictions.</p>

Housing Outreach Worker	John Howard Society BC Housing	By April 2008 a Housing Outreach position was created.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful permanent housing for up to 50 homeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since the program began, the Housing Outreach Worker has placed 328 people. After a six month follow up it was confirmed that 130 still remained housed (not all participants responded to the follow up).
Create a Memo of Understanding (MOU) between BC Housing and City of Vernon	Social Planning Council, City of Vernon, BC Housing	<p>By January 2009, the City of Vernon had drafted an MOU to partner with BC Housing to build supported housing.</p> <p>BC Housing informs the City that funding is no longer available for MOU's.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC funds projects for supported housing in Vernon Three projects of at least 30 units each. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A draft MOU has been created by the City of Vernon. Once provincial funding becomes available the City of Vernon will pursue the MOU.
Non Profit Housing Business Plans	Social Planning Council, Non-profit agencies with a housing mandate	By June of 2009, a consultant had met with the housing non-profits and created three business plans for supported housing for women, youth and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business plans are in place and the community prepared for when funding opportunities present themselves with BC Housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networking between the agencies resulted in the development of the <i>Under One Roof</i> partnership.
Under One Roof Partnership	City of Vernon, BC Housing, Vernon and District Community Land Trust, Habitat for Humanity, Kindale Developmental Association	By March of 2010, 4 families and 2 people with disabilities move into the Under One Roof complex.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six affordable housing units added to the affordable housing stock. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The <i>Under One Roof</i> model was presented at The BC Non-Profit Housing Society as a best practices project.

Affordable Housing Newspaper Insert	Social Planning Council, Community Futures, Vancouver Foundation, Members of Affordable Housing Committee, Morning Star Newspaper	By November 2008, a four page insert on affordable housing was printed in the Morning Star newspaper.	✚ Number of households who receive information.	✚ Over 30,000 homes received the newspaper insert with information on affordable housing.
Housing Forum	Social Planning Council, City of Vernon Affordable Housing Committee Members	Social Planning Council secured funding to host a housing forum with information booths and speakers in conjunction with the Affordable Housing Committee. The Housing forum was held on April 15 th at the Schubert Centre.	✚ Tracking number of participants and their evaluation responses.	✚ Over 150 people took part in the forum; positive feedback in evaluation.
COMMUNITY AWARENESS				
More Public Awareness on Issue of Homeless-ness	Partners in Action Action Network on Poverty and Homelessness	During 2007 – 2010 there were numerous newspaper articles and radio coverage engaging the community in issues and solutions.	✚ Supportive letters to editor. ✚ Wider community engagement in solutions.	✚ Numerous editorials and letters to the Editor in Vernon Morning Star regarding homelessness ✚ DVA and local businesses take part in action teams that address the issue of homelessness.

Overview of Community and Municipal Housing Strategies – 2007-2011

Community Based PARTNERS IN ACTION		City of Vernon's AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMITTEE	
Homelessness Strategy - March 2007		Attainable Housing Strategy - January 2008	
RECOMMENDATIONS	PROGRESS	RECOMMENDATIONS	PROGRESS
Permanent Shelter	✓	Lower The Development Cost Charges (DCC's) And Other Permit Fees, On Secondary Suites	✓
Drop In Program	✓	Strengthen the Strata Conversion Policy to Protect Existing Rental Housing	✓
Downtown Health Centre	✓	Restructure DCC's	✓
Housing Outreach Worker	✓	Waive DCC's for Non-profits	✓
Income Assistance Outreach Worker	✓	Assist Land Trust to Acquire Land	✓
Childcare Program for Parents at Risk	✓	Support Other Non Profits To Develop Non Market Units	✓
Employment Services	✓	Appoint Committee to Monitor Progress	✓
Creation of Land Trust Society	✓	Review Parking Requirements	In Progress
Increased Community Awareness	Ongoing	Increase/Expand Permitted Types of Housing	In Progress
More Supported Housing and Treatment For People with Addictions/Mental Health (including detox)	Longer Term	Examine Mixed Use Developments and Revitalization Tax	Longer Term
More Affordable Housing for Individuals and Families	Longer Term	Consider Inclusionary Zoning	Longer Term