

Acknowledgments

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Lois Hobley
Smithers Community Services Association

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....Page 3

2. Executive Summary.....Page 4

3. Literature Review.....Page 7

4. Research Methodology.....Page 20

5. The Community of Smithers.....Page 24

6. The Economic and Social Environment.....Page 25

7. The Housing Situation in Smithers.....Page 29

8. The Interviews.....Page 31

9. Service Provider Questionnaire.....Page 47

10. Alternate Delivery Models.....Page 49

11. Recommendations.....Page 59

12. Conclusion.....Page 61

Appendices.....Page 62

Resources.....Page 76



Smithers Community Services Association
Box 3759
Smithers, BC. V0J 2N0
250-847-9515/email: homeless@scsa.ca

1. Introduction

This project was undertaken by Smithers Community Services Association (SCSA), an accredited, non-profit organization that has provided services to Smithers for over 25 years. SCSA has a keen interest in community housing issues and for that reason embarked on this research project.

Funded through Human Resources Skills Development Canada (National Homelessness Initiative) this project examines the broad spectrum of housing issues and homelessness in Smithers with an emphasis on obtaining qualitative data from those who experience it, first hand. From homeless people to service providers and 'experts' in the field, this project reached out to the community and prompted dialogue and change.

“The United Nations refers to homelessness in terms of absolute and relative. People who are absolutely homeless are living outdoors, on the street, in parks, under bridges – and are literally without shelter....also refers to people who rely on emergency shelters and hostels for temporary accommodation.

People who are relatively homeless are considered at risk of homelessness because they are paying too much of their income for rent and/or living in unsafe, inadequate or insecure housing. Often people in these households are one step away from homelessness.”¹

This report will reveal that both absolute and relative homelessness exist in Smithers. It will reveal that people for whom homelessness is a daily concern do not want to be homeless and have suggestions and recommendations to offer. It will also reveal that as a community, we have the skills and resources to work together to address this problem.

¹ Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security & the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (2000). *Local Responses to Homelessness: A Planning Guide for BC Communities*. Pp. 5.

2. Executive Summary

Through a grant from Human Resources Skills Development Canada (National Homelessness Initiative), Smithers Community Services Association undertook a research project looking at homelessness and housing issues in Smithers.

The research methodology included:

- A literature review
- The creation of an Advisory Committee and peer interviewers
- Twenty-three interviews with the at-risk population
- The gathering of impressions and recommendations from local service providers
- Research and documentation of local realities and alternate housing delivery models
- Educating the community and the results and recommendations for moving ahead

The literature review found that:

- Homelessness can be defined in terms of *absolute* and *relative*
- The attention given to the sub-groups of those who are homeless or at risk appears to be weighted in the youth category
- It is estimated that over two thirds of homeless people suffer from mental illness²
- Homelessness is not an urban only problem
- Recommendations focus on the need for integrated, coordinated services that address housing issues on a continuum from emergency shelters to independent affordable housing
- Community development and involvement is key as is an increase of affordable housing options and the reassessment of Ministry shelter rates
- The lack of quantitative data in the literature to support recommendations is problematic
- Homelessness research that is clear, accessible and provides specific information and direction for policy or program direction the most helpful

Research about the Town of Smithers revealed that:

- Smithers is a rural community of 5,414 people in northern BC, has many natural and social resources, and is home to many Wet'suwet'en and non-native people
- Smithers has seen its share of economic challenges, including the 30% reduction of Ministry staff and services
- Recent welfare reforms continue to impact Smithers in a negative way
- There is a higher than average amount of lone-parent families in Smithers
- Individuals receiving income support is 1% higher than the provincial average
- Services are being off-loaded to an already struggling community.

The research discovered that:

- The average age of the respondents was 36 years, most were single and all were Canadian born
- High rental costs, lack of space and feeling unsafe were cited as negative things about the respondent's living situation
- Thirteen respondents were on Persons with Disabilities II (Ministry of Human Resources)
- The average income was \$851.52 per month and almost half paid 30-50% of their total income for rent
- Thirteen respondents suffered from a physical illness or disability and 11 suffered from a mental illness
- Nineteen respondents said they would move, given the chance
- Twenty-one people had been absolutely homeless in the past. Thirteen of those people had been homeless in Smithers

² Queenswood Consulting (1999). *Review of Shelter Resources in Greater Vancouver: Moving Towards Resolution*. Victoria, BC: Queenswood Consulting Ltd.

- During the time that they were homeless, respondents had been without a place to live for approximately 9.2 months
- Services for singles and older women were identified as important but lacking in Smithers
- Mental health support is key
- Fatigue and disillusionment contribute to the cycle of homelessness
- Having support helped people find and keep stable housing
- Having more money/subsidies/shelter allowance were cited as important
- Knowledge of resources is key
- Low-income housing was identified as important
- Money, moving assistance, transportation and support from family were cited as things that would be needed in order to move
- The Ministry of Human Resources, Adult Mental Health, Positive Living, the Salvation Army, the New to You Store and the Passage Transition House were mentioned as valuable services
- Having a person assist with finding and securing housing was cited as something that would be helpful, as well as having an understanding landlord

Discussions with service providers revealed that:

- People accessing service is increasing
- Almost all the service providers identified a lack of suitable housing as an issue in Smithers
- It is estimated that there were as many as 250 absolutely homeless people in Smithers in 2004.
- The community does not recognize the prevalence of homelessness in Smithers
- Service providers estimate that 20-100% of their clients are at risk for homelessness
- Strategies for addressing homelessness include:
 - Provide mental health/drug and alcohol support
 - Provide low-cost housing option
 - Lifeskills and job training programs
 - Increase of rental subsidies
 - Increased community support and infrastructure

Research into Alternate Delivery Models

Conclusions and recommendations from this research include:

- Community input and 'buy-in' is key to success
- A diverse funding base is also central to success
- A scattered-site model was recommended for second stage housing
- Diverse and sometimes conflicting client needs must be addressed safely
- Support programs must accompany independent housing strategies
- Strategies must be peer driven whenever possible

Final recommendations include:

- More low-income, subsidized housing is needed
- Have a diverse funding base
- Include the community in decision-making, including those at-risk
- Increase awareness in the community about housing issues and poverty
- Consider a variety of affordable housing including a scatter-site housing model
- An emergency shelter that has street/self referral access is needed
- Create a drop-in center with centralized services
- Support programs must accompany housing strategies
- Re-assess Ministry shelter rates and earning exemptions
- Develop opportunities for higher incomes through business development and job support and training

3. The Research Methodology



This methodology is based in part on a research project conducted by the Greater Vancouver Regional District called *A Methodology to Obtain First Person Qualitative Information From People Who are Homeless and Formerly Homeless*.³

The project utilizes questionnaire development methodology provided by Frederic D'Astous, *A Guide to Questionnaires and Surveys*, (1998-2000)⁴. The project also

developed research methodology with input from the Advisory Committee that included members from:

- The Northern Society for Domestic Peace
- Positive Living Northwest
- Smithers Literacy Services and the Christmas Hamper Program
- Smithers Anti-Poverty Group
- Northwest Drug and Alcohol Services
- A Ministerial Committee member
- The Salvation Army
- The Office of the Wet'suwet'en
- Mental Health Services (Northern Health Authority)
- BC Schizophrenia Society
- St. James Soup Kitchen

Project Goals:

The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of homelessness in Smithers, to raise awareness about the issue, to identify successful strategies and provide recommendations, to give a voice to those who are homeless or at risk, and to inform appropriate stakeholders.

The goals were to:

- Obtain qualitative information (from 20-30 individuals) about the homeless population in Smithers, including both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sub-groups. (I.e. People with disabilities, men, women, youth, people with mental health/addictions/health issues, families, seniors, etc.)
- Put a face on homelessness in Smithers
- Gain a better understanding about the scope of the issue in Smithers
- Inform the appropriate policy, program and service providers about the issue of homelessness and target scarce resources as effectively as possible
- Document the life experiences of people who become homeless and the situations and processes that led them to become homeless
- Provide people who are homeless or at risk for homelessness with a voice and a tool in which to make an impact in their community if they desire
- Complete a relevant literature review
- Research the community of Smithers with an emphasis on housing options
- Identify and document housing strategies (models) to address the issue of homelessness in Smithers for use by the community and other communities
- Develop a communications strategy about the homeless issue in Smithers
- Raise awareness about the issue of homelessness through the process of information gathering and through disseminating the final report

³ Woodward and Associates Inc. (2002). Research Project on Homelessness in Greater Vancouver: A Methodology to Obtain First Person Qualitative Data from People Who are Homeless and Formerly Homeless. British Columbia: The Greater Vancouver Regional District.

⁴ D'Astous, F. (1998-2002). *Guide to Questionnaires and Surveys*. Retrieved April 2004 from http://members.tripod.com/frede_dast/conseill_a.html.

This study used first-person interviews to obtain qualitative data. A focus group of members of the Advisory Committee (including service providers and advocates) provided input regarding research and questionnaire development. Some of the topics included; how to access people who are homeless or at risk, peer interviewer candidates and questionnaire content.

The Advisory Committee met several times and fine-tuned the questionnaire. The committee warned against depicting the project as accurately representing the homeless situation in Smithers and to be transparent about its limitations. The Committee strongly suggested representing the sub-groups as fairly as possible and if this was not possible, noting that in the report and findings.

Sampling was a combination of utilizing existing relationships (between the primary researcher and peer researchers) and community service providers and people who are homeless or at risk for homeless and through 'snow-ball' sampling method. The target population was accessed through service providers, going to where people were at (soup kitchen), through word-of-mouth and by advertising in appropriate venues. Service providers were accessed through community networks and the Advisory Committee.

Interviews took place between October and December 2004 at the office of Smithers Community Services Association and at Positive Living Northwest and were conducted by the primary researcher, peer researchers and a service provider. The interviews were approximately one hour in length and participants were given a \$25 honorarium. The primary researcher worked with peer researchers in a support/recorder role during the interview and field notes were taken. A one-day training workshop was held for peer researchers and interested Advisory Committee members and focused on ethical data collection, role-plays and confidentiality and consent protocols. Peer researchers also worked with the primary researcher to develop interview skills. Workshop facilitators included Northern Health Authority staff and a professor from the University of Northern BC.

Researchers followed a protocol to obtain informed consent and assured participants that their identity was anonymous and that their interview was confidential. Where appropriate, a choice was given to the interviewee whom she/he would like to interview with. Participants were also able to sign the consent with a pseudonym. Before the interview, respondents were informed of the motives of the study, who made the study, and how the information would be used. Respondents were made aware of confidentiality and consent processes and that the interviews would be transcribed and/or recorded.

Interview questions were developed with input from the advisory committee, peer and primary researchers, research consultants and advocates (approx. 20 people). The questions were developed to reflect the goals of the project. A focus group tested the questionnaire prior to its activation for clarity, appropriateness, and usefulness.

Interviewers were selected for their ability to access participants and their ability to make the interviewee feel at ease and to illicit the best information possible. However, the primary researcher noted that in some interviews the peer researcher seemed a bit ill-at-ease and did not probe fully. It was also difficult to coordinate times between the peer researchers and the respondents. Family, health and general daily living commitments made it difficult to coordinate interview appointments. This coupled with the transient and sometimes spontaneous nature of the respondents resulted in fewer interviews completed by the peer researchers as planned. Peer researchers completed 6 interviews and the primary interviewer completed 17. However, one of the most important elements of having peer researchers was their insight and ability to access potential respondents who would have otherwise been inaccessible.

Respondents were thanked for their time and paid an honorarium on completion of the interview. They were also informed where they could obtain a copy of the report upon completion of the project.

4. Literature Review



The literature review was undertaken with several parameters in mind. Documents were reviewed for relevancy to the project and to gather the most recent information about homelessness research in Canada, B.C. and United States with an emphasis on rural research. Some reports were included for their contribution to project methodology and model development. The documents were summarized and conclusions were developed from the review. (See Appendix I for document review.)

By no means exhaustive, the literature review does provide some clues regarding trends in homelessness and its associated research.

Perhaps the most significant theme is that homelessness defies description both as a term and as a state of being. As noted by Quantz and Frankish (2002), those who are considered homeless are often “fluid and mobile”. For purposes of clarity defining homelessness in terms of *absolute* and *relative* seems to be a good place to begin our discussion:

“The United Nations refers to homelessness in terms of *absolute* and *relative*. People who are absolutely homeless are living outdoors, on the street, in parks, under bridges – and are literally without shelter....also refers to people who rely on emergency shelters and hostels for temporary accommodation.

People who are relatively homeless are considered at risk of homelessness because they are paying too much of their income for rent and/or living in unsafe, inadequate or insecure housing. Often people in these households are one step away from homelessness.”⁵

It is important to begin a dialogue with participants, researchers advisors, and people who are or at risk for homelessness with an agreement about the definition of homelessness. Not only will this help to frame the research project, it will provide it with a foundation of *common language* between participants and researchers that is not to be underestimated. In *The View from the Sidewalk, Toward a New Definition of People Who are Homeless*, the authors made defining homelessness the intent of their project. Through the process of participating in and guiding the research processes, participants gained a unique and powerful perspective. However, a comment must also be made that although the participants seemed to be transformed by the project, the recommendations for moving forward do not appear to be adequate or specific enough.

The attention given to the sub-groups of those who are homeless or at risk appears to be weighted in the youth category. Certainly of major concern and diverse needs, youth as a research group have received considerable attention. It is also of concern that people with mental illness issues have not received as much research attention although it was estimated in *A Review of Shelter Resources In Greater Vancouver: Moving Towards Resolution*⁶ that over two thirds of homeless people suffer from mental illness⁷.

⁵ Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security & the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (2000). *Local Responses to Homelessness: A Planning Guide for BC Communities*. Pp. 5.

⁶ Queenswood Consulting (1999). *Review of Shelter Resources in Greater Vancouver: Moving Towards Resolution*. Victoria, BC: Queenswood Consulting Ltd.

⁷ Frankish, J. & Quantz, D. (June 2002). *Homelessness Research in the Great Vancouver Regional District: An Agenda for Moving Forward*. British Columbia: Institute of Health Promotion Research, University of British Columbia

The BC Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security examined the cost of homelessness in BC and found that the costs to the social service, health care and criminal justice systems are far more than the implementation of specialized, supportive housing. Initiatives that assist people to maintain their current housing situation is important as is research into the antecedents of homelessness including family break-down and involvement with the foster care system.

Homelessness is not an urban only problem, although the availability of literature regarding rural homelessness is not extensive in the big picture. Certainly Williams Lake and Nelson, BC are considered rural by provincial and urban standards, but for a centre like Smithers with a population of only 5,000 people these areas are down right metropolitan. However, the research methodologies and rural perspectives are very relevant to the study undertaken by Smithers Community Services Association. Of particular interest is the perception that homelessness *is* an urban only problem and that it does not occur in rural communities. This perception may in fact increase the farther north one travels. Not only are homeless people invisible to the community, this silence affects the community's ability to deal with homeless issues in an effective way. Other characteristics unique to rural homelessness are the lack of available services, the tendency of homeless people to move (or be moved) to larger centers, a general lack of employment opportunities and transportation issues.

Across the country, homeless research reveals three common threads that are consistent and contribute to the cycle of homelessness. There is:

- An inadequate supply of affordable and appropriate housing
- Insufficient income (employment or income support)
- A Lack of appropriate support services for those who need them

Our research reveals that Smithers is no exception. There is an inadequate supply of appropriate housing in our community, people are at risk for homelessness because of insufficient income and housing support services are lacking.

Recommendations abound in all the reviewed literature and by far ***the most common recommendation is the need for integrated, coordinated services that address housing issues on a continuum from emergency shelters to independent affordable housing.*** Community development and involvement is key as is an increase of affordable housing options and the reassessment of shelter rates. Each report recommends strategies that are unique to the community, and according to the Williams Lake Social Housing Society, "there is no clear recommendation for the most effective service delivery model"⁸. Rather, a compilation of components from other models combined with strategies provided by the community appears to be the most effective way to create a community-specific model.

As previously mentioned the transient and elusive nature of the target group makes conducting research into actual numbers extremely difficult and the lack of quantitative data to support recommendations is problematic. In fact, the tendency toward collecting anecdotal information and the lack of a baseline is presented as a barrier for the planning of appropriate interventions⁹. Indicators of homelessness tend to be easier to measure and include things like food bank and shelter service usage, motel and SRO rates, evictions, soup kitchen use and emergency food voucher distribution.

⁸ Peters, H., Scheach, D. (2002). *Youth Homelessness and Housing Needs in William's Lake and Area*. Retrieved May 2004 from <http://www.hvl.ihpr.ubc.ca/pdf/WilliamsLake2002.pdf>.

⁹ Frankish, J. & Quantz, D. (June 2002). *Homelessness Research in the Great Vancouver Regional District: An Agenda for Moving Forward*. British Columbia: Institute of Health Promotion Research, University of British Columbia

Lastly, Quantz and Frankish provide recommendations regarding the use of research data and its dissemination. Homelessness research that is clear, accessible and provides specific information and direction for policy or program direction is the most helpful.

To sum up:

- Understanding homelessness in terms of *absolute* and *relative* is important.
- Although it is estimated that 2/3 of the people who are homeless have a mental illness, they have received little housing research attention.
- Homelessness is not an urban only problem.
- The most common recommendation is the need for integrated, coordinated services that address housing issues on a continuum from emergency shelters to independent affordable housing.
- The tendency toward collecting anecdotal information and the lack of a baseline is a barrier for the planning of appropriate interventions.
- Specialized, effective housing programs are more cost effective than crisis care.
- Homelessness research that is clear, accessible and provides specific information and direction for policy or program direction is the most helpful.

5. The Community of Smithers



A Brief History

Smithers, located about halfway between Prince George and Prince Rupert in northern BC, developed as a result of explorations conducted by the Collins Overland Telegraph line in 1866. Although construction of the line failed, the trail served as an access point to the north for people looking for gold, resources and land.

Beautifully situated in the Bulkley Valley (originally known as the Wastsonquah Valley) and in the shadows of Hudson Bay Mountain, Smithers has a population of 5,414 people and was incorporated as a town in 1921. It is the service centre for the Bulkley Valley including Telkwa (pop. 1, 426)¹⁰ and the Wet'suwe'ten village of Moricetown (pop 815).¹¹ It has a total land area of 15.54 square km and is in the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District.¹²

In 1972, town council decided that Smithers adopt a theme to "give Smithers a unique and memorable appearance"¹³. An Alpine theme was chosen and Alpine Al became its official mascot. (Alpine Al originally came from Rock Creek and now resides on Main Street. See inset.)

Traditionally, Smithers is part of the Wet'suwet'en Nation that also includes Hagwilget (Hazelton), Moricetown (Kyah Wiget), Broman Lake, Burns Lake, Skin Tye and Nee Tahi Buhn, Telkwa and Houston. A matrilineal society, there are five sub-groups of the nation called clans that identify families and territories. They are:

- **Gilseyhu** (Big Frog)
- **Laksilyu** (Small Frog)
- **Gitdumden** (Wolf/Bear)
- **Laksamashu** (Fireweed)
- **Tsayu** (Beaver clan)



It is estimated that there are 5,000 Wet'suwet'en people living in the territories and beyond.¹⁴

¹⁰ Child and Family Community Planning Committee (March 2003). *Smithers and Area Community Profile*

¹¹ Community Profile (n.d.) *Moricetown Village Page*. Retrieved Sept 2004 from <http://www.tricorp.ca/pages/villpgs/morice.html>.

¹² Community Facts, Smithers (2001). *BC Stats*. Retrieved April, 2004 from www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca.

¹³ Smithers Visitor Information Centre (n.d.) *The Complete Story of Alpine Al*.

¹⁴ Office of the Wet'suwet'en (August 2000). *The Wet'suwet'en*. Retrieved August 2004 from www.wetsuweten.com.

6. The Economic and Social Environment



Like many small towns in rural Canada, Smithers' economic foundation is reliant largely on its natural resources. Forestry, mining, fishing, and tourism provide economic opportunities for residents and as the service area for the Bulkley Valley, Smithers also offers a variety of retail, hospitality and government services.

In recent years the Bulkley Valley has seen its share of economic difficulties. It is estimated that BC experienced a 30% decrease in Ministry personnel as a result of government downsizing and restructuring¹⁵. These cuts were (and continue to be) acutely felt in the area as many government offices were located in Smithers and in the Bulkley Valley. In addition, the closure of Carnaby (Skeena Cellulose Incorporated) affected an estimated 400 employees although this figure is considered conservative. "The Skeena mills at Carnaby, near Hazelton and Smithers face indefinite closure. When you count in the logging contractors, log haulers, suppliers and merchants in the area's forestry dependent communities, the true impact is greatly magnified"¹⁶. Like many small towns, Smithers struggles with issues that continue to define rural living including higher than average unemployment rates, higher than average usage of the social safety net and reduced access to medical and specialized services. (See chart below).

Dependency on Social Safety Net ¹⁷						
Percentage of Population by Age Receiving Benefits- September 2003						
Age Group	BC Basic* Income Assistance Recipients (%)		Employment Insurance Beneficiaries (%)		Total of BC Basic Income Assistance and EI Beneficiaries (%)	
	Smithers	BC	Smithers	BC	Smithers	BC
Under 19	5.4	4.0				
19-24	4.5	2.5	3.2	2.7	7.7	5.1
25-54	3.0	2.1	3.1	3.6	6.0	5.6
55-64	1.2	1.0	1.5	1.6	2.7	2.6
19-64	3.0	2.0	2.9	3.1	5.8	5.1

As noted in this chart prepared by BC Stats, the percentage of individuals receiving BC Basic Income Assistance is 1.0% higher than the provincial average and Smithers has a higher rate of those collecting unemployment benefits.

The median income for Smithers residents is \$25,695.00, which is \$3,600.00 higher than the provincial average. We have a higher than average amount of lone-parent families and a relatively high incidence (10.7%) of low-income families.¹⁸ This disparity demonstrates the financial gap that exists in Smithers. This gap may also explain why

¹⁵McLeod, A. (2004, July). Where Did All the Welfare Cases Go? *The Tye. Part 1*. Retrieved August 2004 from www.thetye.ca.

¹⁶ Stirling, J. (2004). Employees, Contractors Reeling in Wake of Repap BC Collapse. *Logging and Sawmilling Journal*. Retrieved August 2004 from www.forestnet.com

¹⁷ Reprinted from *Community Facts, BC Stats*. (Sept. 2003). Retrieved August 2004 from www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca.

¹⁸ Community Facts, Smithers (2001). *BC Stats*. Retrieved April 2004 from www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca.

many Smithers residents don't recognize that a homelessness problem exists in the community.

It is impossible to have a discussion about the social and economic climate in BC without looking at the recent BC Liberal welfare reforms. Most significant was the announcement that 'employable' people would be limited to only two years of welfare payments out of five¹⁹ as of April 2003. Largely due to public pressure, exemptions to this policy were subsequently developed but the policy still exists.²⁰

As of April 2003 other welfare reforms include:

- Anyone who is on income assistance must be actively looking for work.
- A parent with children over three years of age is expected to work. (As compared to seven years of age, previously.)
- Rates have decreased from \$557 to \$510 a month for a single employable person between the ages of 55-59.
- An employable person between the ages of 60-64 faces a hefty cut from \$608 to \$510 per month.
- The \$200 monthly allowable income has been eliminated for everyone except those on disability.
- People under the age of 19 have to declare their independence from parents for two years in order to qualify for assistance.²¹

As a result of the recent reforms, the 2003 social safety net statistics show significantly reduced figures from the 2002 statistics. (See chart below.) For example, 7.9% of youth in Smithers between the ages of 19-25 showed dependency on the social safety net (income assistance) as compared to 4.5% in 2003. On average there was a 2.2% decrease in the amount of people utilizing income assistance and employment insurance combined. Although it would be satisfying to think that the issues of unemployment and poverty were better addressed in 2003, the explanation is clearly not that simple.

Increased pressure for and on welfare-to-work programs, an exodus of those (previously) receiving benefits to other provinces, a movement of Aboriginal people to relocate from off reserve to on-reserve, and federal programs taking the place of income assistance may explain the decrease noted from 2002 to 2003²².

Demonstrating a decrease in dependency on the social safety net is a political boon for the party in power, however it may in fact be doing a disservice to many low-income British Columbians. Although, there are nearly 90,000 fewer British Columbians dependent on income assistance²³, these figures have been touted to mean that as a province and community, we are effectively dealing with our poverty issue.

¹⁹ A.McLeod. (2004, July). Welfare's New Era: Survival of the Fittest. *The Tyee*. Part 2. Retrieved from www.thetyee.ca.

²⁰ Reitsma-Street, M., Wallace, BC (2004). *Resisting Two Year Limits on Welfare in British Columbia*. *Canadian Review of Social Policy*. (53, pp.169-176.

²¹ A.McLeod. (2004, July). Welfare's New Era: Survival of the Fittest. *The Tyee*. Part 2. Retrieved from www.thetyee.ca

²² Employment Counselor (personal communication, Aug. 2004)

²³ McLeod, A. (2004, July). Where Did All the Welfare Cases Go? *The Tyee*. Part 1. Retrieved August 2004 from www.thetyee.ca

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	Smithers	BC	Smithers	BC	Smithers	BC
Under 19	5.1	5.6				
19-24	7.9	3.7	4.2	2.5	12.0	6.2
25-54	3.6	3.2	4.6	3.4	8.0	6.6
55-64	1.6	2.2	2.2	1.5	3.8	3.7
19-64	3.9	3.1	4.2	3.0	8.0	6.1

As a result of BC's spending cuts, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has identified the following social and economic areas of impact that are felt acutely in the Bulkley Valley:

- *Loss of direct employment income due to layoffs and office/facility closures*
- *The induced, or multiplier effects of employment losses as people losing their jobs spend less money for other goods and services in the community;*
- *Offloading of services, which either disappear altogether or must be replaced at the municipal level;*
- *User fees and other out-of-pocket cost increases for tuition, drugs, tolls and other fees.*
- *Lost individual time and increased financial costs to access services, including courthouses, located further away from the community; and,*
- *Social and environmental costs to communities as a consequence of cuts to programs²⁵.*

Increased usage of the local food bank and the soup kitchen supports the idea that services are being off-loaded to the town and that an already taxed and struggling community now bears the cost of feeding its citizens. According to the Salvation Army Food Bank, there are between 250 and 300 men, women and children who receive assistance from the Smithers food bank on a monthly basis and of the 117 people who rely on the food bank in Moricetown, 70 percent are school-age children.²⁶

²⁴ Government of BC (2002). *Community Facts, BC Stats*. Retrieved July 2004 from www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca.

²⁵ Lee, M. (Jan. 2003). *Bleeding the Hinterland; A Regional Analysis of BC's Tax and Spending Cuts*. Retrieved August 2004 from <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/bc/regionalimpacts/regionalrelease.htm>.

²⁶ Subryan, M. (August 18, 2004). *Local Food Banks Need Help*. The Interior News, pg. A-10.

7. The Housing Situation in Smithers



Most people in Smithers live in residential, single-detached homes (67%), Second in popularity are multiple and single attached units (27%). The remaining 6% are mobile home units.

As of July 2004 the average cost for a single-family home was \$156,000.00. Mobile homes averaged \$20,000.00. A rural residence on a two-hectare lot would sell for \$165,000.00. Apartments rent for \$450.00 to \$650.00 per month.²⁷

After a brief, but significant building surge in the 1970's, new housing construction in Smithers has steadily decreased since 1981. Thirty-four percent of the households in Smithers spend more than 30% of their income on rent alone while 32% of the occupied dwellings in Smithers need either minor or major repairs.²⁸ The respondents in this research indicate that they are living in older, unaffordable, and unsuitable housing in Smithers.

An informal poll of eight apartment complexes in Smithers revealed an average vacancy rate of 11.2%, with a low of 0% and a high of 43.4%. The average price for a 2-bedroom apartment was \$512.50. Interestingly, the apartment with the highest rental rate had 0% vacancy and the apartment complex with one of the lowest rates had the highest vacancy rate. The King St. apartment is the most affordable at \$275.00 for a bachelor suite with a shared bathroom. These suites are limited.

In recent times, several low-cost housing options have disappeared in Smithers. The closing down of the Fisherman's and Sportsman's Hotels and the fire-destruction of the Bulkley Hotel has left a void in low-cost housing options. Although far from adequate, tenancy at these venues provided some sense of affordability and tenure. The lack of these options means that more people are cycling in and out of absolute homelessness in Smithers.

There are several housing resources available in Smithers. They include:

- Passage Transition House and Second Stage Housing (Northern Society for Domestic Peace)
- BC Native Housing Corporation
- Bulkley Drive Housing Project (Smithers Community Services Association)
- Emergency Shelter Services (Smithers Community Services Association)
- Pioneer Place Senior's Housing
- BC Housing
- Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission

Local resources provide emergency shelter for women and men (on a limited basis). The Transition House also provides food for residents as well as support to find permanent housing. Second Stage Housing provides accommodation (up to two years) for women fleeing abusive relationships and the Bulkley Drive Housing Project provides affordable, subsidized housing for families. In addition, the BC Native Housing Corporation also provides subsidized housing for families. BC Housing and the CMHC provide support to communities and organizations that wish to provide housing.

²⁷ Smithers District Chamber of Commerce (2003). Retrieved January 2005 from <http://www.tourismsmithers.com/chamber/community/profile.html>.

²⁸ BC Stats (2001), *1996 Census Profile of BC Consensus Subdivisions-Smithers*. Retrieved January 2005 from <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/cen96/profiles/CSD51043.pdf>.

Although there appears to be several housing resources available, the current services are to a certain degree exclusionary to men, single people, and people with active addictions or mental health issues.

Drop In Services Available in Smithers (both “official” and “unofficial”):

Positive Living Northwest-Open 1-10pm on Tuesday to Thursday. People can drop in and rest and have something to warm to drink. Needle exchange, services and outreach offered

Smithers Community Services-Open Monday – Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm. People can drop in, get warm and have a coffee

Dze L K’ant Friendship Centre- Open Monday-Friday, 9-4:30. Coffee, friendship, services

Mental Health Club House-Open daily, for coffee, friendship, support, services, food, etc.

The Smithers Court House- Open Monday-Friday 8:30 to 4:30pm. Provides a surprising service for people who are transient or temporarily displaced. Discussion with courthouse staff reveal that between 5-8 people frequent the courthouse, generally in the morning before staff arrives. This core group, (also referred to as ‘the jury’ by some Smithers residents) are welcome to stay, get warm and quietly observe court sessions.

Tim Horton’s- Open 21 hours a day and provides another unofficial service for people who are homeless or transient. More than one respondent spoke of seeking warmth and refuge at this popular coffee shop.

The Smithers Public Library- Mondays/Wed/Friday/Saturdays- noon-5, Tuesdays and Thursdays –noon to 9pm. Provides a warm, quiet environment.

Current housing gaps in Smithers include:

- More people need affordable housing than is available
- Little housing is available for singles at a good rate
- No housing options for people with FASD, mental health or active addictions issues
- No centralized housing resources for people looking for housing
- No safe, affordable housing for people trying to maintain sobriety
- Current emergency shelter services for men are not adequate or accessible
- No support services available for emergency shelter

(See Appendix ii for more housing resources.)

8. The Interview Results



Twenty-three people agreed to be interviewed. The primary interviewer conducted seventeen interviews and peer interviewers conducted 6 interviews. Interviews took place at the office of Smithers Community Services Association and at Positive Living Northwest, both located in Smithers. The quantitative results are compiled here for several questions, quotes from the respondents are provided in boxes and the complete text for some responses can be found in the appendix. Some of the questions were yes/no, some were multiple choices, some were short answer and some were long answer where respondents were given an opportunity to tell their story.

Question 1

Gender

Female: 13
Male: 10

Question 2

Age

Average age of participant: 36 years
Youngest: 17
Oldest: 63

Question 3

Are you Canadian Born? Yes/No

All but one participant was Canadian born.

Caucasian: 12
First Nations: 10

Question 4

Marital Status?

Single: 12
Separated: 5
Divorced: 3
Common Law: 2
Married: 1

Question 5

What is your First Language?

English: 20
Other: 3

Question 6

Where did you spend most of your time growing up? *

Small Town: 11
City: 9
In a village or reserve: 2
Other: 3

*Multiple Answers

Question 7

Where do you live now?

Smithers: 23

Two of the participants were absolutely homeless and one other was absolutely homeless until two days prior to the interview.

Question 8

What was the last grade level you completed?

Grade 3: 1
Grade 8: 2
Grade 10: 8
Grade 11: 1
Grade 12: 7
Upgrading: 2
College/University: 2*

*Any amount of course work at this level is included in this response.

Part A: Current Living Situation

Question A1

Where do you live?

Apartment: 12
Rental Home: 3
Boarding: 2
Sharing with others: 2
Single Room Occupancy: 2
Townhouse: 1
Transition house: 1

Question A2

How long have you lived there?

Less than 6 months: 14
6 months to 1 year: 3
More than 1 year: 6

Question A3

Where did you live before that?

Other Community: 5
Trailer Court: 4
Apartment: 4
Suite: 2
"Party house": 2
Street: 1
With relatives: 1
Shelter: 1
House: 1
With friends: 1
Duplex: 1

Question A4
Are you sharing?

No: 14
With others: 6
With children: 2
With other parent and children? 1

"I'm worried about my personal safety. The people in the next building drink and do drugs."

-Participant

"My landlady is pretty fair-she looks into concerns."

-Participant

Question A5
What are some good things about your current living situation?

Although many of the living situations presented by the participants are reportedly less than perfect, most had something positive to say about their environment. For example, several of the participants mentioned that having an understanding landlord made living in their homes a more positive experience. In addition, living in or near town, reasonable rent, having a washer and dryer, having a place that was relatively safe and free from bugs and mold were also cited as some good things about their current living situations. On the other hand some people were just happy to have a roof over their heads and a warm place to sleep.

"After rent, it doesn't leave a lot. It's very tight."

-Participant

Question A6
What are some not so good things about it?

Many participants spoke of a variety of issues and problems in their current living conditions. Lack of space, noise, the inability to have pets, rents that ate up living costs, and having to move into a dirty environment were cited as current problems. More disturbing however, is that many of the participants felt unsafe and neglected. The lack of security and ill-fitting locks, broken windows, and the presence of drug and/or alcohol in the home or neighborhood all added to feelings of insecurity. Many participants spoke of broken water fixtures, animal fouled carpets and general disrepair that remained unattended to. Some of the participants ended up feeling that they were not worth the effort. For those who were absolutely homeless at the time of the interview, feelings of alienation from community were profound.

Question A7
What is home to you?

"I was raised in a group home, so I never had that kind of stability."

-Participant

This question was asked for two reasons. First, it was asked in order to explore the participant's idea of what home was to him or her. Secondly it was asked in order to prompt critical thought on the part of the participant to further explore the notion that if they were not living in their idea of home, what were some of the contributing factors.

Many of the participants described home as a safe place. One participant called his home a 'safe house', perhaps reflecting his need to feel safe and his mental health issues. Several participants identified home in the context of family and belonging. A few identified warmth, privacy, physical and emotional well-being, ownership and autonomy as important factors.

Some participants felt they had no basis for comparison in order to answer this question. Living in group or foster homes or profoundly unsafe/unstable childhood environments made answering this question extremely difficult for some. A few of the respondents talked about their foster care experiences and felt that these experiences directly affected their mental health and addictions issues, their inability to cope and their lack of stability in community.

"I've moved around a lot in my life. I've had a room and been on the street. It can take away from childhood memories. The security that should be there is insecure. I've seen a lot of death."

-Participant

Question A8

What is your main source of income?

Persons with Disabilities/Multiple Barriers (I/A):	13
Income Assistance:	4
Disability Pension:	3
Child Support and Child Tax Credit:	2
Employment Insurance and Child Tax Credit:	1

Most of the respondents were on income assistance (Persons with Disabilities II)

Question A9

What is your monthly total from all sources?

Average:	\$851.52
High:	\$1150.00
Low:	\$510.00

Question A10

Have you ever paid rent in a form other than money at a place where you lived or are living?

Yes:	12
No:	11

Fixing place:	4
Selling drugs:	2*
Cut wood/	
Farm work:	2
Worked for landlord:	2
Yard work:	1
Child Care:	1
Sexual/Illegal Activities:	0

Most participants had paid for rent in a form other than money at a place where they rented.

*It is not clear whether the two participants paid for rent with drugs or whether they paid for rent with the money they made from selling drugs.

Question A11

How much of your total income goes toward your portion of the rent?

0-9%:	0%*
10-29 %:	13%
30-49%:	43%**
Over 50%:	35%**

*Two respondents were homeless and not counted in this data.

**CMHC reports that people paying over 30% of their income on rent, who also live in substandard or inadequate housing and who can't afford to move to a better place are also considered to be 'at risk' and to be 'inadequately housed'.

Question A12

What if any of the following situations do you have in your current living situation?*

Place Needs lots of repairs:	6
Don't feel safe:	6
Other persons stealing from you:	6
No difficulties:	6
Fights/Conflicts with other people:	5
Other people who eat food and do not help pay for it:	4
Other people who do not pay their share of the rent:	3
Other people who verbally abuse you:	3
Other people who physically abuse you:	2
Pressure to engage in illegal activities:	2
Discrimination:	1
Other person who moves out with no notice:	1
Other person who forces you to engage in Sexual activities:	0

*Multiple Responses.

"When I'm feeling depressed, I find the place unsuitable, I can't keep up with it. It feels unsafe when I'm sick."

-Participant

Most of the respondents experienced problems in their current living situation. Not feeling safe, other people stealing from the respondent and fight/conflicts with other people were cited.

Question A13

Are you currently dealing with any of the following issues?*

Physical Illness/Disability	13
Mental Illness:	11
Alcohol/Drug Abuse:	6**
Learning Disability:	4
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome:	2
Other:	2
None:	2

Forty-eight percent of the respondents had a mental illness. These figures echo other recent homelessness research. In addition, most of the respondents had a physical illness or disability as well and were dealing with these issues together. Alcohol and drug use compounded the problem.

*Multiple responses.

**Does not include those (8) participants with a nicotine addiction.

Question A14

Do you have children?

Yes:	14
No:	8
Not sure:	1

Question A15

If yes, what are their ages?

Under 17: 10
 None: 8
 Over 17: 4

Question A16
Where do they live?

With parent: 4
 With others: 6*

*Results for parents who have children under the age 17.

Question A17
If applicable, how does your housing situation affect your children, or how does having your children affect your housing situation?

Those participants who responded to this question were primarily focused on the safety of their children. One person talked about how there was no safe place to play and another talked about poor wiring and worrisome neighbors. She was thankful however, that the place was bug-free and because of many previous moves was willing to put up with less than perfect surroundings because she was sick of moving herself and her family.

"They are happy and not happy. They have a roof over their heads, but can't have animals."
 -Participant

Another theme was the lack of appropriate housing that made having a relationship with their children difficult. One respondent spoke of not having a place big enough for his children to stay if they decided to come and visit. Another spoke of not being able to see his children often because of a lack of affordable housing where they lived.

"It's hard to let him go out and play, there's no place to watch him."
 -Participant

Question A18
Given the opportunity would you move to a place more suited to your needs?

Yes: 19
 No: 4

Many of the respondents wanted to move from their current housing situation due to lack of security, disrepair and general feelings of discontentment.

The four respondents who answered "no" to this question did not want to move because they felt they had been on such unstable ground that they would prefer to put up with unsatisfactory conditions instead of moving on. Unfortunately, one can gather from the stories provided by the participants that inevitably something would happen or the situation would go from bad to worse and people would have to move anyway.

Question A19
If you wanted to move what would that look like?*

Have washer and dryer: 7
 Have a yard: 5
 Safer: 4
 Bigger: 4
 Out of town: 4

"If I found a house with a fenced yard and everything in good repair, I'd paint it nice, not stark white. I'd like a light blue kitchen. When you are dreaming you can have your own choices."
 -Participant

Just something “nice”:	3	
Better access (no stairs)	2	
Able to have pets:		2
In good repair:	1	
With home support		1

*Multiple responses.

The desire for a washer and dryer was a common response to this question. Many of the respondents spoke of difficulty in maintaining their hygiene because of the lack of access to laundry facilities. This coupled with the fact that many had no access to a vehicle made the basic task of keep their clothes clean an activity that required a large amount of effort and planning.

“I’m always trying to find a better place, they’ve been cold, dirty. If I had more money, I’d move to a house.”

-Participant

Question A20

If answered “no” to above question, is there anything you’d like to change in your current situation?

Most often, respondents cited the lack of space as the primary thing they’d like to change. Also, one respondent just wanted things to match, so it wouldn’t look like everything came from a thrift store. Another respondent said it would be better to buy a home.

Question A21

What would you need to make that happen?*

Money:	18	
Moving Assistance:		16
Transportation:	14	
Support from Family/ Friends:		12
Furniture/housewares:	10	
Counseling:		16
<i>Mental Health</i>		8
<i>Drug/Alcohol</i>		5
<i>Financial</i>		3
Assistance with daily Living:		7
Medical Assistance:		3
Legal Assistance:		1
Other:		Help to pack and clean More self esteem to reach out and get jobs Be closer to family

“I would like things to match, it’s a bit depressing at times. I have a bunch of ‘crap’ that doesn’t match!”

-Participant

“I slept in a dumpster. I became homeless after I was fired from my job, I didn’t have an iron to iron my shirt (for work.)”

-Participant

*Multiple responses.

Part B: Past Experiences:

Question B1

Have you ever been without a place to live?

Yes: 21
No: 2

Most of the respondents had been absolutely homeless at some point in their lives. At times it was difficult to pinpoint a specific time, since many experiences appear to happen on a continuum that reflected many unstable living situations.

"When I was in Ministry care, I had a nervous breakdown. I woke up in Prince George. My bed was given to someone else. I never knew abuse until I went into your white homes. The people drank there every night."

-Participant

Question B2

If yes, where did you stay?*

Motel/Hotel:	10
Staying at other people's	
Emergency Shelter:	9
House whenever possible:	9
With family/friends:	9
Barn/shed/tent:	8
Transition House:	7
Jail:	5
With girlfriend/boyfriend:	5
Out of doors:	5
Hospital:	3
Other:	Dumpster
	Car
	Abandoned apartment
	Street
	Hotel laundry room
	Foster Care

"Too many times I carried my clothes in a backpack. It was a 'home in a bag'!"

-Participant

"I left an abusive relationship and my family home to move into a one room shack with no plumbing and no water."

-Participant

Many respondents had stayed in a hotel/motel. Although very expensive, it was a short-term solution, since a damage deposit was not required. However, this option soon became too expensive and the respondents had to move on. In addition, respondents also stayed with other people and used emergency shelter services where available.

*Multiple responses.

Question B3

How long were you without your own fixed address?

Average: 9.2 months
High: 25 years
Low: 1 day

Many of the participants had different interpretations for this question. Some considered living out of doors as having 'no fixed address', while some considered spending the night at a friend's house as having a fixed address. Therefore the amount of time may be underrepresented. Some others felt they had never really had their own home and one man said he had been without his own address for 25 years.

Question B4

During the time that you were without a place, how many times had you moved around in that year?

Some respondents framed their responses according to community, while others answered this question on a night-by-night basis. However, one thing is clear and that is that almost every respondent had moved many times and frequently for most of their lives. (Respondents answered this question with difficulty, perhaps due to ambiguity in the phrasing of the question. Thus data is not available.)

"I've moved around every few months since I was born. My body and mind are used to (it). Why do I feel like I have to move all the time? Well, because I've been couch-surfing my whole life."

-Participant

Question B5

Where were you without a place to stay?

Smithers:	13
Other:	10

Question B6

Where were you living before you lost your home?

Apartment:	7
Own home (renting):	5
Sharing with others:	4
Other:	2
Suite:	1
Room in house:	1
Own home (own):	1
N/A:	2

Question B7

Did you live there alone or with others?

With others:	15
Alone:	5
No answer:	2
Said "both":	1

Question B8

How did you lose your housing-what were the circumstances that led to your moving out?

Several of the respondents said that a separation from their spouse or partner preceded their housing issues. In some cases, domestic violence and alcohol abuse was mentioned. The second most common circumstance that led to participants moving out was issues with the landlord (eviction), including discrimination. Drug and alcohol use, unsatisfactory living environments and lack of affordability were also cited. Flood, illness and mental health issues were also contributing factors. Discussion with service providers revealed that many people become homeless as a result of an eviction, a term that may be used to describe a variety of situations.

"I told (my boyfriend) that I couldn't afford to feed me and him and this baby. He needed to start helping out or get out – he got out."

-Participant

Question B9

What caused your housing problems at the time?*

Lack of money:	8
Issues with landlord:	8
Mental health issues:	4
Domestic violence:	4
Discrimination:	3
Drug and alcohol issues:	3
Lack of affordable housing:	2
Health concerns:	2
Divorce:	1
Flood:	1

"I couldn't think properly (because of mental illness). I couldn't hold down a job."

-Participant

*Multiple responses.

Question B10

Were there any factors related to your health or lifestyle that you were dealing with at the time?*

Mental health issues:	14
Alcohol and drug issues:	9
Physical illness or disability:	5
Learning disability:	4
Other:	2
No answer:	2

"A lack of security throughout moving has caused (my) depression."

-Participant

*Mental health issues and
one or more of the above: 8*

*Multiple responses.

Several of the respondents cited mental illness as an issue they were dealing with at the time. Of those 14 people, 8 were also dealing with other physical, mental health or addictions issues.

Question B11

What was your main source of income at that time?*

Income Assistance:	9
Persons with Disabilities:	6
Full time employment:	4
Occasional employment:	3
Part time employment:	2
Employment insurance:	2
Disability Pension:	2
Child Tax Credit:	2
Money from parents:	1

"I spent two months in the hospital. When I got back the landlord said welfare did not pay the rent and he threw my stuff away but kept a silverware set my daughter gave me. I saw it in his house on the floor. I still remember that."

-Participant

Borrowing money:	1
School loan:	1
Other:	Collecting bottles Dealing drugs Chopping wood Theft

*Multiple responses.

Question B12

Was there a change in your main source of income at that time?

Many of the respondents detailed moving back and forth between income sources. From work to employment insurance, from no income to social assistance, most of the respondents had a lack of stability in their income levels.

On a more positive note, several respondents with a mental illness were able to secure more income through social assistance following diagnosis. (A change from regular Income Assistance to *Persons with Disabilities*.) However, the monthly allowance is still very low at only \$607.92, including shelter.

Question B13

Did you go for help or advice before you lost your housing? If yes, who was it and what did they do?*

"Mental health workers-they usually go to bat for us."
-Participant

Social Services (Ministry of Human Resources):	5
Did not go to anyone:	5
Friends/Family	5
Mental Health Services:	2
Northern Society for Domestic Peace (Transition House):	2
Newspaper:	2
Smithers Community Services Assn.	1
Salvation Army:	1
Other:	1

"I got to go to the New to You and pick out stuff. It was like a gift from heaven!"
-Participant

"The Ministry suggested moving to a more affordable place."
-Participant

Many of the respondents identified the Ministry of Human Resources as a financial emergency resource. They also relied on friends and family to assist them to move or provide a temporary place to stay. Many respondents did not know where to turn and in a few cases, were overwhelmed with environmental, physical and mental health issues and felt unable to deal with the situation without support.

*Multiple responses.

Question B14

Is there anything that could have been done to help you get another place to live at that (this) time? Where would you go today?

"Where would I go today? I haven't any idea."
-Participant

Understandably, many of the respondents said that having access to more low income housing options would have been helpful -- in particular access to housing for singles.

The respondents also said that having someone to assist with locating and assessing the suitability of rentals would have been extremely helpful, since many felt they were not fully accessing services and available rentals in Smithers. Knowledge, transportation and support (physical and mental health) were also key.

Many of the respondents would access the same resources they had previously, like mental health services and the Ministry of Human Resources. A few women said they would go to the Transition House today, whereas previously they thought it wasn't appropriate for them. One man even said that he would contact the RCMP since it was better than sleeping in the street.

Question B15*

During the time when you didn't have our own place or needed a more adequate place to live, did anyone help or try to help you:

"It would be good to have a support worker that actually cared about people."

-Participant

A) Get a more suitable place to live? If yes, who and what happened?

The Salvation Army, the Ministry for Human Resources, Mental Health Outreach Workers and the Passage Transition House were identified as organizations that helped respondents find a more suitable place. Assistance with the mechanics of finding a place, like providing a phone, help to look in the paper and actively seeking rentals were cited as helpful activities.

B) With Income Assistance?

Many respondents identified the Ministry of Human Resources as a resource. Especially in the case of obtaining a damage deposit, the respondents found it most helpful when the Ministry paid the damage deposit and then deducted a small amount from subsequent assistance checks. It was also very helpful to have an outreach worker assist respondents with subsidy applications.

Although most of the respondents had some measure of success with the financial services available, two of the respondents could define *falling through the cracks*. One woman spoke of being too young to get financial support although she was pregnant and a man spoke of not being able to access services because he was without a fixed address.

C) Other kind of Assistance?

The Smithers Food Bank (Salvation Army), the Passage Transition House, the Ministry for Human Resources, Positive Living Northwest and the Mental Health Club House were most often mentioned as support resources. They provided assistance in the form of food, counseling, clothing, child-care and moving assistance.

"They (Passage Transition House) told us to go there and eat, after we stayed there. That helped us to save money."

-Participant

Question B16*

What kind of services do you think would have helped you at that (this) time?

Certainly, the most common response was the need for support in order to find and maintain affordable housing. Not surprising the need for affordable single units was identified as well as strategies to assist people during medical crisis.

"Welfare could have paid the rent (while I was sick). Instead the landlord threw me out on the street. That's what it felt like."

-Participant

Question B17*

What would you say were some of the barriers/hassles that prevented you from getting these services?

Although there were many barriers identified, one of the most pervasive issues was fatigue and disillusionment. Respondents spoke of numerous moves, the seemingly endless search for adequate accommodations, the repeated loss of personal effects and the frustration of never having enough money. All this added up to create overwhelming feelings of resentment and loss. Respondents also spoke of discrimination, costs associated with moving, illness, a lack of affordable housing, physical and mental illness and the waiting period stipulated by the Ministry of Human Resources as barriers to getting services.

Question B18*

What were the factors that helped you find suitable housing?

Most of the respondents identified support as the primary thing that helped them obtain suitable housing. Whether through mental health services, a good landlord or the Street Corner Ministry, people's successes depended on accessing (or accepting) help from others.

"It's harder to work towards a better existence when you are easily discouraged. If a person was always living 'under the thumb', it would be hard to rise above that."

-Participant

Question B19*

Looking back, was there anything that could have made it possible for you to get your own place sooner?

Several of the respondents said that having more money would have made it possible for them to get their own place sooner. In addition, assistance with the damage deposit would have helped. A few of the women spoke of staying at the Transition House until they could afford a deposit. One person spoke of a housing service that in addition to assisting people find a place to live would also assist in providing a way to guarantee a damage deposit.

Several people also spoke of needing more knowledge, both of the rentals available and the most efficient way to find a suitable place. Other respondents spoke of having a shelter, a steady job and the drive and motivation when things are so discouraging as factors that would have helped get their own place sooner.

"Some people understood mental health issues and that we are not just 'trouble makers'".

-Participant

Question B20

What was (is) the hardest thing about finding suitable housing?*

Money/Affordability:	15
Process of finding a place:	4
Affording the damage deposit:	2

"If you have money, you don't have any problems, if you don't have money, people don't want you."

-Participant

Good location:	2
Being underage:	2
Lack of a good reference:	1

Other responses included: lack of transportation, lack of a good credit rating, having children with health issues, being sick, winter, and discouragement.

*Multiple responses.

Question B21

What would you say are the most important things that you need to be able to get and maintain adequate housing? What suggestions do you have for an organization wanting to provide housing options?*

Have a hostel or low-income housing:	11
Money/more income:	10
Provide support to help find a place:	5
Health considerations:	3

*"You don't want to turn homeless, sometimes you have to."
-Participant*

By far the most important suggestion provided was that there be a shelter and/or low income housing available for families, singles and persons with disabilities or multiple barriers. Several of the respondents said that they were sick of living in "crap" and would like low-income rentals to be clean and attractive. Second to that was that there be enough income in order to afford a suitable place to live.

Another suggestion was that there be support services provided for people who need assistance to find a place. This support could include: assistance in locating rentals, moving assistance, telephoning, general emotional support and assistance in obtaining cleaning supplies.

Regarding what was needed to maintain suitable residency, the respondents said they would need health and medical support, continued mental health support, assistance with budgeting and lifeskills training.

*Multiple responses.

Question B22*

How would you describe your life now that you have suitable housing?

Although several respondents said they did not feel like their housing situation was 'adequate', many said they felt happy to have a roof over their head. Some talked about feeling like they had a home, even if they did not own it. Others talked about feeling better if only because they did not have the stress of moving.

"I told my dad I was feeling pretty good and he asked why. 'Because I have a home! It's not much of one but it's mine.'"

-Participant

Question B22

How would you describe homelessness?

“Not having any choice, feeling worthless, suicidal, depressed.”
 “Walking the streets asking people for money, nowhere to sleep.”
 “People looking down at you and saying mean things.”
 “It’s like a disease, it attacks you and gnaws away at you.”
 “Denies sense of self.”
 “It’s shitty, you feel like you have nothing and nobody cares.”
 “Worthless.”
 “Unstable/unsafe.”
 “Depression/boring, makes you angry and upset.”
 “It’s scary when people are my age.”
 “Having no phone is homeless-need to be connected and have basic necessities like a phone, fridge and bed.”
 “If you have don’t have the things with you that you love.”
 “I’m one of them homeless because our band doesn’t care. Government keeps money instead of using it for people.”
 “A place where someone shouldn’t be. It’s horrible not knowing where you are going next or be the next day – worry about food, being depressed cold.”
 “Living out on the streets, being stuck at the Transition House, that’s not home that’s just shelter.”
 “Not having anywhere to go.”
 “Not having a place to have belongings, a place to come and go.”
 “It’s a narrow road, poverty. Got a place to sleep but no place to eat.”
 “Physically, emotionally, mentally frustrating. Nobody should be better than another.”
 “A place you can’t call home.”
 “Feeling hated, hopeless.”
 “It’s scary-it makes me want to cry.”
 “Not safe, no where to go.”
 “There’s no excuse for homelessness.”

<p><i>Homelessness is:</i></p> <p><i>“Feeling hated and hopeless.”</i></p> <p><i>-Participant</i></p>

Most respondents recognized the complex and demoralizing issue of homelessness and with clarity of thought were able to articulate their thoughts in the context of their own lives. Contrary to the myth, no one said they wanted to be homeless. Rather, most of the respondents showed tenacity toward living in their community and an unwillingness to be categorized as *homeless*.

(See Appendix III for more detailed responses.)

9. Service Provider Questionnaire



The response from the service providers in Smithers was exceptionally good. With the help from a few follow-up phone calls, eighteen questionnaires were returned from the twenty that were distributed. One of the unfortunate omissions is potentially important information from the Ministry of Human Resources. (See Appendix IV for complete list.)

Local service providers were asked the following questions:

- What kind of service do you provide? (Name of service)
- What age group do you serve?
- Do you provide service to people who are homeless or at risk?
- If you provide shelter services, how many bed days per month do you provide?
- At approximately what capacity do you operate?
- How many people do you serve each year?
- To the best of your knowledge, how many people do you serve each year that are absolutely homeless?
- How many people do you serve each year that are at risk for homelessness?
- What do you see as the primary barrier for people who wish to have suitable housing?
- What challenges do you face in serving people who are homeless or at risk?
- What in your opinion could the community do to assist people who are homeless or at risk?
- Have you noticed any trends regarding the people you serve?

There is an increase in the amount of people accessing services. From the soup kitchen to the Friendship Centre, people appear to be in circumstances where basic needs (like food for example) are not being met. To compound the issue, it was reported that some people access services because their monthly resources are being funneled into alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, lottery tickets, etc. instead of 'the basics'. Naturally, this dilemma causes frustration for service providers and the community at large.

Almost all the service providers identified a lack of affordable housing and living costs as a barrier for people who wish to have suitable housing. It was also identified that being homeless prevents people from accessing services, generally when they need it the most. (Alcohol and drug and mental health counseling for example.)

Although it is difficult to quantify exactly how many people are homeless in Smithers, the services provider responses provide some clues. The Salvation Army reported that 200 people were homeless in Smithers in 2004. Oftentimes the Salvation Army is the first organization accessed when people are without a home. Combined with the Salvation Army's integrated community network of supports, the problem is addressed or minimized even before the community sees there is a problem.

The Northern Society for Domestic Peace reported providing services to 250 homeless women and children over the course of a year. Generally, these women were fleeing domestic violence and sought refuge at the Passage Transition House. The Passage House is securely and discreetly located near the hospital and provides a stable environment while women get back on their feet. This transition is oftentimes quite seamless as far as the community is concerned and adds to the perception that homelessness does not exist in Smithers.

Most of the service providers reported that many of their clients are at risk for homelessness (20-100%). As homelessness exists on a continuum and is influenced by many factors, service providers understood and suggested multi-tiered strategies for both

people who are homeless and those at-risk. Examples include mental health/medical/drug and alcohol and support programs, lifeskills and job training, increase of subsidies, affordable housing options for singles and families, increased community support and stabilization.

To sum up:

- ▶ **The response was good, 18 questionnaires returned out of 20.**
- ▶ **There is an increase in people accessing services.**
- ▶ **No access to low-cost housing was identified as a barrier as was insufficient funds for daily living.**
- ▶ **There are more people who are absolutely homeless in Smithers than the community realizes, up to 250 per year.**
- ▶ **The hidden nature of the problem adds to the community's inability to deal with the issue effectively.**
- ▶ **Up to 100% of the service provider's clients are at risk for homelessness.**
- ▶ **Service providers suggested multiple approaches for people who are homeless or at risk in Smithers.**

10. Alternate Housing Program Delivery Models



This chapter examines service delivery models from the literature review and from personal interviews with program/project directors. Services were chosen for their relation to the goals of the project and the needs of the Smithers community. There is an emphasis on rural housing delivery models. Service providers were asked to provide a description of their services, complementary services they provided or accessed, how people accessed them, funding sources, what works well, current challenges and 'words of wisdom'.

An Association Advocating for Women and Children in Prince George (AWAC)

This organization provides a variety of services for women and children in Prince George, BC.

Location:

144 George St. V2L 1P9
Prince George, BC.
250-562-6262

Services:

- For women and female youth
- 24-hour emergency shelter with 16 'regular' beds and 10 minimum barrier beds
- Early steps program
- Drop-in center
- Supported housing-8 units
- Outreach Support Worker
- Case model approach

Complementary Services:

- Medical Services
- Native Health Clinic
- Mental Health
- Detox Centre
- Needle exchange

Access:

- Word of mouth
- Referrals from RCMP, hospital, etc.
- Self-refer

Funding Sources:

- Ministry of Human Resources
- Human Resources Development Canada
 - SCPI (Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative)
- Northern Health Authority
 - Mental Health
- City of Prince George
- Service Organizations
- Bingo
- Gaming Funds

What works well:

- Shelter Services
- Purchased new building through SCPI and refurbished it through CMHC
- Flexible in approach to address needs as they change
- Continuity of service

Biggest Challenges:

- Trying to balance needs of individual can be difficult when the lifestyle impacts of one client interfere with another. For example, harm reduction vs. sobriety efforts.
- Trying to work within provincial policies (ie. Length of stay)
- Some women find process difficult and time consuming
- Diversity and complexity of funding and reporting/documentation/bureaucracy

Words of Wisdom:

- Communicate with neighbors and open lines of communication
- Give opportunity to voice concerns and follow up
- Community consultation is big!
- There's quiet support and assistance available from community partners

1. Ocean Crest Shelter, Salvation Army

The Ocean Crest Shelter is operated by the Salvation Army and offers emergency shelter services. It has a very open-door policy and “does not try and change people”.

Location:

690 Evergreen Rd, V9W 3R8
Campbell River, BC
250-287-3791

Services:

- Emergency Shelter, 7pm to 8am daily
- Provides supper, hot lunch program and breakfast
- Provides clothing/hygiene supplies/laundry
- Provides services to people who are relatively ‘clean and sober’. No alcohol allowed on premises, but can lock up

Complementary Services:

- Ministry of Human Resources
- Alcohol and drug services
- Treatment centers

Access:

- From the street
- RCMP

Funding Sources:

- Ministry of Human Resources provides funding for 7 beds
- BC Housing owns building

What works well:

- Don't try and "fix" people
- Don't ask too many questions

Biggest Challenges:

- People that continue to revolve-when nothing changes

Words of Wisdom:

- Visit site

2. Northern Society for Domestic Peace (NSDP)

NSDP offers a variety of services for women and families in Smithers, BC. The emphasis is on providing safe, stable environments that assist women and families transition away from domestic violence.

Location: 3772 1st Ave. Box 3836
Smithers, BC V0J 2N0
250-847-9000

Services:

- Passage Transition House
 - 10-bed 24-hour emergency shelter
- Second Stage Housing
 - 4 units

Complementary Services

- Counseling services for men and women (NSDP)
- Pregnancy Outreach Program (NSDP)
- Support for Children and Youth
- Victim's Assistance (NSDP)
- Stopping the Violence Program (NSDP)
- Smithers Community Services Association

Access:

- Self referrals
- Friends
- Police
- Doctors
- Service Providers-HRDC, Friendship Centre, Office of the Wet'suwet'en, Family support services, legal services
- Ministry for Children and Family Development
- Word of mouth

Funding Sources:

- CMHC-Forgivable mortgage, Second Stage Housing
- The Ministry of Community and Aboriginal Affairs - Passage House

What works well:

Passage House

- Beautiful facility
- Well trained staff
- Balance between technology and guidelines for safety
- Organizational experience
- Works as a team
- Constant standard of service
- Peaceful surroundings for women having to make difficult decisions

Second Stage Housing

- Comfortable facility, people feel good about being there
- It's not sub-standard accommodation!

Biggest Challenges:

Passage House

- Funding
- Legal system's approach to domestic violence
- Community support--not marginalizing or stigmatizing people

Second Stage Housing:

- Balance between safety and being able to address individual needs, ie. Mental health, drug and alcohol issues while making it a safe place for staff, residents and children who stay at the house
- Educating people in small, rural communities

Words of Wisdom:

- Set people up to succeed
- Provide support as well as an affordable environment
- Address issues separately
- Homeless shelter must be clean and have access to referrals and information
- Independent living program must have programs attached to it, ie lifeskills, tenancy rights, budgeting, nutrition, etc.
- Need to balance between different issues and safety
- Be sensitive to individual situation and vulnerability
- Have people who have experience with homelessness direct/manage/coordinate/create program
- Be realistic about resources available and if a program cannot be provided safely, then reconsider
- Children are an important but challenging piece
- Women with mental health issues and young women are the most vulnerable
- Co-habitation beds-do they really work?

3. K'san House

K'san House offers a variety of housing services with a First Nations focus in Terrace, BC.

Location:

4724 Lazelle St.
Terrace, BC V8G 1T2
250-635-2373

Services:

- 10 bed Transition House for women
- 7 bed emergency shelter
- Scattered-site subsidized housing
- 50 Unit social housing unit
- Two outreach workers
- Drop-in Centre

Complementary Services:

- Anti-Poverty group
- Family Place
- Social Services

Funding Sources:

- The Ministry of Community and Aboriginal Affairs
- Ministry of Human Resources (Emergency Shelter)
- Subsidized Housing –BC Housing/Gaming Funds/Project Funds/Income-rent dependent

What works well:

- Transition House services--safe shelter for women
- Emergency shelter--people are not sleeping in the streets.

Biggest Challenges:

- Transition House is not wheelchair accessible
- We are still needed in the community
- Subsidized Housing--mental health clients provide a challenge
 - Criteria needs to be broader to include single people and youth

Words of Wisdom:

- Scattered Site Model works well in smaller communities for 2nd stage housing
- Diverse funding is key
- Having a multi-use building eases burden on any one program
 - Also does not stereo-type people
- When you have different funding sources you can do different things; “hands are not tied” necessarily
- Look into BC Housing with an Aboriginal perspective--may provide more flexibility

4. Cariboo Friendship Centre

The Cariboo Friendship Centre is one of the largest housing organizations in central BC. It offers a variety of housing options for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Williams Lake, BC.

Location:

99 S. 3rd. Ave.
Williams Lake BC V2G 1J1
 240-398-6831

Services:

- 72 unit, scattered site model

- 29 bed emergency shelter
- Transition House-16 beds

Complementary Services:

- Youth advocate worker, also works with families
- Transition house/mental health and emergency shelter outreach workers
- Meals
- Have mental health and A&D counseling
- Restoring Aboriginal Roots Treatment Program
- After school daycare
- Choices for Youth
- Residential School Legacy Program
- Head Start Program for kids
- Case Aid and Community Services Program
- Children Who Witness Violence Program
- Two economic development programs
- Other services accessed in community:
- Boys and Girls club
- Mental Health
- Stopping the Violence Counselor
- Legal Aid
- Ministry of Human Resources

Access:

- Self-referrals
- From service providers
- From using other family programs

Funding sources:

- Ministry for Community and Aboriginal Affairs-Transition house
- Ministry of Human Resources-Shelter
- Interior Aboriginal Mental Health
- CMHC-Forgivable mortgage

What works well:

- Diverse funding base
- Can do inter-referrals
- Very accessible to everyone
- Good relationship with CMHC

Challenges:

- Funding
- Would like more space for Second Stage Housing
- Need administration in place for difficult tenants
- Even in a flexible program you need a bottom line, especially when children are involved

Words of Wisdom:

- Diverse funding base is key--can be more flexible in programming
- Multi-use building reduces burden on any one program or funder and does not stereotype people
- Look into funding possibilities with an Aboriginal focus

6. Carnegie Centre

The Carnegie Centre offers a safe-haven for residents of the lower east side in Vancouver, one of the most high-risk areas in Canada.

Location:

401 Main Street
Vancouver BC V6A 2T7
604-665-2220

Services:

- Drop-in center for residents of "lower east side"
- Arts and music program
- Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner program
- Outreach program
- Needle exchange
- Park Program
- Learning Centre
- Library/Literacy program
- Social activities

Complementary Services:

- Food/clothing/shelter resources
- Friends/relatives
- Employment services

Funding Sources

- 100% from City of Vancouver
- Project/Program fundraising
- Some self-generated funds through food services (cafeteria)

What works well:

- The Centre's neutrality
- The arts program
- The opportunity to showcase people as contributors to the community
- Relationships with others, ie. Artists

Biggest Challenges:

- Client base generally have 'no veneer', can be very intense
- Mental health issues
- Aggression and anger issues, staff safety

Words of Wisdom:

- Important to be a neutral place/peer driven as much as people are able
- If possible have food component
- Partnerships with larger community, ie. Business person, trades union, someone with a voice to advocate
- Place where people can contribute and be seen as contributing
- Community-based arts development could be a funding/support source
- Have both unassigned and activity space

Conclusions from Alternate Model Delivery Research

Community input and ‘buy-in’ from the very first stages of any housing strategy is key. Particularly in the case where a facility or building is to be built or designated, giving neighbors and others an opportunity to voice their concerns or provide suggestions is absolutely necessary. Quiet support can be an important element in the successful development and longevity of a housing model.

Having a diverse funding base is also central to success. Not only will this diffuse the stress on any one program, program or organization, it is necessary in order to provide flexible services. In addition, a multi-use building or site should also be considered.

A scattered-site model was recommended as an appropriate option for a northern BC housing model. A scattered-site model can be defined as:

- Having single or attached units (like individual homes or duplexes), centrally managed by one organization
- Several sites spread over a designated geographical area

Some of the benefits of this type of housing model include:

- Less likely to need a large capital investment and there are more individual houses available that can be purchased or rented than there are apartment buildings
- Having more flexibility when it comes to addressing individual housing needs
- Less chance of stigmatizing or ‘ghettoizing’ sector of the community

Some of the drawbacks include:

- No opportunity to create a community/neighborhood of people with similar issues/interests.
- Increased difficulty in delivering/centralizing services

Consideration must be made when attempting to provide service to a variety of people with (in some cases) conflicting needs, ie. safe housing for older singles vs. harm-reduction strategies. It was recommended that if a strategy or housing option cannot be implemented safely, it not be implemented at all.

Finally, independent housing programs must have support programs attached to them like counseling, and food programs. Programs and projects must include peer input.

To sum up:

- ▶ **Community must be given opportunity to provide input and voice concerns**
- ▶ **Have a diverse funding base**
- ▶ **Consider a scattered-site model**
- ▶ **Safety is key, set clear boundaries**
- ▶ **Drop in center must be a neutral place and have both assigned and unassigned spaces**

- ▶ **Any housing initiatives (both emergency and second-stage) must include support programs**
- ▶ **Strategies must be peer driven whenever possible**

11. Recommendations

The following recommendations were compiled through discussions with service providers and respondents, a literature review, and consultation with the Advisory Committee. They are listed in no specific order:

1. More low-income, subsidized housing is needed

It is evident that more low-income housing is needed in addition to subsidized housing. Most of the people interviewed were living in sub-standard housing and many felt they were being taken advantage of by less than concerned landlords and were made to put up with unsafe, unhealthy, and unsuitable accommodations. Forcing people to stay in such circumstances further marginalizes and oppresses a significant sector in our community. Low-income housing must be included in community planning.

2. Have a diverse funding base

For housing strategies and their accompanying programs, it is important to have a diverse funding base. This could mean accessing funds through BC Housing or CMHC for capital costs and contracting beds with the Ministry of Human Resources or the Northern Health Authority. In addition, gaining support from the community through partnerships with landlords or property owners is another way to create a funding base that will stand the test of time and be able to endure the financial fluctuations that non-profit community organizations continue to endure. Possible funding sources include:

- Ministry of Human Resources
- BC Housing
- Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation
- The Ministry of Community and Aboriginal Affairs
- Rental income
- Community partnerships with businesses, property owners, other non-profits, church groups
- Northern Health Authority
- BC Gaming Funds
- Local government
- Nadina Community Futures Corporation

3. Include the community in decision-making, including those who are at risk

From the early planning stages it is key that the community be consulted regarding housing responses and approaches. Especially in the case of constructing or designating properties, having the support from the community is a necessary element. Community members must be given the opportunity to voice concerns and ask questions. Quiet support from the community can 'make or break' the success of housing programs.

Listening to the voices of those at risk in addition to following up on concerns and recommendations is another vital element to success. Those who have experienced housing issues first hand have a unique perspective on the problem. Given the opportunity to participate, people at risk are more likely to 'buy in' to the issue and will be in a better position to be a valued resource, rather than a perceived liability.

4. Identify and address individual needs

A strategy that is flexible and specific to the needs of the individual is paramount. Some examples include housing for people with mental health issues and active drug and alcohol addictions, FASD, and housing for older single women, men and families. Safety concerns must be examined.

5. Consider a variety of affordable housing models including a scatter-site housing model for second-stage housing

A scattered-site housing model may be a reasonable alternative in a rural setting for several reasons. First, the initial capital investment for single-family or dual-family unit dwellings is considerably less than for multi-unit buildings and financing may be easier to obtain. Secondly, there are many more single units available in the north. Lastly, the scatter-site model may be a more flexible option when considering the individual needs (and safety) of people seeking service.

6. Provide assistance and resources for people to obtain adequate housing

Provide support in the form of a resource center or outreach person. Assistance could be helping people set up appointments, looking through the newspaper, going with people to check out places and talking with landlords. In addition, a pay-back or guarantee system for damage deposits should also be developed.

7. An emergency shelter that has street/self referral access

An emergency shelter with an open, self-referral policy and 24-hour trained support staff is needed. Current emergency shelter services need to be more responsive and provide for basic hygiene needs. (The Passage Transition House already provides these services for women fleeing domestic violence.)

8. A Drop-in Centre with centralized services

A drop-in center where people can meet, eat, access services and be encouraged to contribute to their community is needed. Could include counseling, needle exchange, a spiritual component, referrals, tenant rights information, access to telephone, laundry, showers and access to clean, dry storage. The best models are coordinated efforts between many service providers. Basic supplies like laundry detergent, cereals and other dry goods be purchased in bulk and divided into smaller, single-friendly packages for purchase.

9. Support programs must accompany housing strategies

Support programs like mental health and drug and alcohol counseling, life skills and job training programs and medical assistance will ensure that people are able to maintain their housing situation. This can be accomplished through an integrated community support approach, an outreach worker and/or support staff. Housing programs that provide caring and understanding property managers and/or landlords is also important.

10. Increase awareness in the community about housing issues and poverty in Smithers

As housing problems and homelessness are considered invisible in Smithers, much work needs to be done to educate the community. Although this project will help to raise awareness, there is much more that can be done. Keep housing issues and homelessness on the agenda at community meetings, utilize the local media and appoint a task force to advocate for these issues on a community, provincial and federal level.

11. Reassessment of BC Income Assistance Program Shelter Rates and Earning Exemptions

The current Ministry shelter rates and the elimination of earning exemptions play some part in the increase of poverty in our community. One of the respondents said that the Ministry was "going back on their mandate to eliminate poverty". The current shelter rates only assure that people continue to live in

substandard accommodations that cost more than 50% of their income. All the training and support in the world will not help if income is not sufficient enough to afford adequate accommodation. In addition, the removal of earning exemptions for all people on social assistance (except for PWDII) has made it almost impossible for people to augment their incomes. In many cases, part-time/sporadic/minimum wage jobs are all that is available and having an extra hundred dollars a month can make the difference between having enough food and going hungry. Whenever possible, reassessment of shelter and earning exemption rates must be lobbied for. In addition, reassessment of support services in rural settings must also be undertaken.

12. Develop opportunities for higher incomes through business development and job support and training

Training and job opportunities can make all the difference for people struggling with housing issues, but the two must go hand in hand. It does a disservice to people to train them for jobs that don't exist. People continue to fall through the cracks if they are older, without recent work experience, have multi-barriers, or are without a permanent residence. It may also be necessary to continue to provide support during training and while on-the-job. More economic investment on the part of provincial/federal governments in rural communities is necessary. (Nadina Community Futures Corporation for example.)

13. Develop opportunities for people who are at risk for homeless to contribute to their community.

Volunteer work at a storefront service could provide opportunities for increased self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and perks that can't be taken away – like free meals or honorariums. A feeling of belonging and contribution is extremely valuable to mental health and to making healthy lifestyle choices. Contributions can come in the form of art, volunteerism, peer advisory committees and peer outreach.

12. Conclusion

Absolute and relative homelessness exist in Smithers. Both of these areas deserve close scrutiny because homelessness exists on a continuum. People cycle in and out of homelessness because of instability in their economic and social systems, because of physical and/or mental health issues and because of addictions. People also become homeless because of a lack of suitable, flexible services on the part of the community and the social safety net.

Part of the problem of homelessness in Smithers is the perception of who it applies to and whether or not it exists. Up to 250 men, women, youth, children, families, seniors, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, people with and without disabilities have been absolutely homeless in Smithers in 2004. Contrary to the myth, none of these people wished to be homeless. Even more (up to 2200, according to the Salvation Army) are at risk for homelessness.

Current effective services include the Mental Health Club House, the Passage Transition House and the Salvation Army. These organizations assist people find shelter and provide services to help find stable housing. Gaps include the lack of street access emergency services for men and families, the lack of affordable housing for singles, people with FASD, active addictions issues and mental health issues, and the lack of a centralized resource for people looking for housing.

More low-income, subsidized housing is needed, but this alone is not the answer. When faced with the threat of homelessness, many people in the study did not know where to turn and were overwhelmed with environmental, physical and health issues. Therefore, any housing project or program need support services to ensure its success and the success of the people who access it. No one model will suffice. A variety of housing models that considers the needs of the individual and is supported by the community must be considered. People who are at risk have valuable insight into this issue and must be given the opportunity to contribute to the solutions.

Appendices

APPENDIX I- Literature Review

1. The View from the Sidewalk, Towards a New Definition of People Who are Homeless, Organic Intellectuals, 2001.²⁹

By participating in, guiding and producing the report the participants changed and grew as a result - thus the term *organic*. This report that included several BC communities, examines their process and provides recommendations for change.

Some of the key findings of this project include:

- It was important that the participants be consulted regarding project development and direction.
- The term *homeless* does not adequately describe the condition of many people living without shelter. In order to begin to discuss this issue, participants must develop a working definition of the term *homelessness*.
- The organic intellectuals defined homelessness as a “relationship between a person and their society; physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually. The components are:
 - The subjective and objective aspects of having and not having a home;
 - The need for consensual recognition;
 - Absolute and relative homelessness;
 - Livability standards;
 - The need for emotional, spiritual, and mental –as well as physical-comfort”.
- Included are several testimonials from people who are homeless or at risk for homelessness.
- The creation of the “Web of Homeless Causes and Effects”.

Recommendations include:

- That service providers treat people and families uniquely.
- Utilize a “SafeHouse Model” as per Kamloops, BC.
- Have a discharge plan for people leaving jail.
- Make provisions for adequate food and food preparation.
- More social housing opportunities, ie. a percentage of new developments should be designated for low-income people.
- That low-income parents receive the same money as foster parents.
- Increased accountability on part of government use of funds.
- Funds should be allocated to peer-based groups.
- Welfare rates need to accurately reflect the cost of living.
- Recognition of First Nation’s issues regarding colonization.

2. Faces of Homelessness in a Rural Area: Housing Issues and Homelessness in the West Kootenay Boundary Region, VisionLink Consulting, 2002.³⁰

²⁹ Organic Intellectuals (2001). *The View from the Sidewalk – Towards a New Definition of People Who Are Homeless*. Retrieved from <http://www.hvl.ihpr.ubc.ca/pdf/OrganicIntellectuals2001.pdf> May 2004.

This report details housing and homelessness in the West Kootenay Boundary Region.

The goals of the project were to:

- Probe and understand the housing and homeless issue in a rural setting.
- Build a profile and estimate the numbers of people who are homeless or at risk for homelessness.
- Provide recommendations that may help to reduce homelessness in the future.

Some of the key findings include:

- Homelessness is not an urban-only problem.
- Homelessness is defined as being either *absolute* or *relative*.
- Rural communities are resourceful and have the tools for change.
- 84% of the respondents were single and the gender split was almost equal.
- *Reasonable* education was found in most respondents, including 12 participants with university degrees.
- Over 70% of the respondents were receiving either Income Assistance or Disability Benefits. The average yearly income was reported to be less than \$9,000 for singles, just over \$14,000 for parent(s) with 1-2 children.
- The wealth gap in this area was notable.
- Housing challenges included:
 - Having to spend more than 50% of income on rent.
 - Unsafe/unsuitable accommodations.
 - 13% had no shelter or were staying in Transition Houses or SRO's (Single Room Occupancy).
- Issues cited as being particular to a rural setting include:
 - Lack of transportation, especially for the elderly.
 - Lack of employment opportunities.
 - In the context of a family breakdown, labor issues directly related to rural living like the gathering and processing of firewood, garden tending, feeding animals, etc.
 - In order to access services, some people had to leave their home communities.
 - Social networks abound in rural communities.
- Compared to Vancouver, Kelowna and Victoria, Nelson has a disproportionately higher rate of people paying more than 50% of their income on rent.
- 10-15% of the population of the West Kootenay Boundary region is experiencing at least one serious housing issue.

Recommendations include:

- More affordable housing and/or subsidized housing options.
- Higher individual incomes through greater economic development opportunities.
- Reassessment of Ministry shelter rates and earning exemptions.
- Reinvestment in support services in rural communities.
- Increased community and individual awareness of housing issues, regulations and opportunities.

³⁰ VisionLink Consulting (2002). *Faces of Homelessness in Rural Area: Housing Issues and Homelessness in the West Kootenay Boundary Region*. Retrieved May 2004 from <http://www.hvl.ihpr.ubc.ca/pdf/Kootnays2002.pdf>.

- Emergency and Short Term Accommodation.

3. Homelessness – Causes and Effects (Volume 3), BC Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 2001.³¹

This report examines the cost of homelessness in BC and the implications to the social service, health care and criminal justice systems. An argument is presented that the costs will come either now (in the form of specialized, supportive housing options) or later (in the form of increased health care, criminal justice system costs).

The objectives were to:

- Present a cost analysis of homelessness in terms of BC's health care, social service and criminal justice systems.
- Analyze whether the provision of adequate and affordable housing is prohibitive.

Information was gathered through case histories and service provider use records. Cost reports were gathered through estimates for per service costs, and estimates based on published research.

Key findings include:

- Cost related to BC's health care, social service and criminal justice systems was on average 33% more for homeless individuals, as opposed to those who were housed. The major cost category was criminal justice.
- Service and shelter costs for homeless people ranged between \$30,000 -\$40,000. The combined costs for services and supportive housing for housed individuals was between \$22,000 -\$28,000 per year.
- Providing adequate supportive housing to homeless people saved the provincial government money.
- A prevention approach to homelessness is more cost-effective than a reactive approach.

The report recommends that the provincial government undertake:

- Initiatives that assist people to maintain their current housing. (Rent control, eviction prevention, etc.) Prevention activities must be a part of any initiative.
- Initiatives that assist people who are homeless to obtain adequate housing.
- Research regarding:
 - Provincial costs of homelessness using a larger sample.
 - The barriers for homeless people to access drug and alcohol services.
 - The link between family breakdown, childhood foster care and homelessness.

4. Nowhere to Live, Lower Income Urban Singles Task Group, 1995.³²

This project is called a call to action. It is a series of vignettes about the plight of lower income singles living in British Columbia's cities. The report identifies the problem as a lack of decent and affordable housing for lower income singles and limited government funding programs.

³¹ Eberel, M., Kraus, D., Pomeroy, S., & Hulchanski, D. (February 2001). *Homelessness – Causes and Effects*. British Columbia: British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, and BC Housing Management Commission.

³² Lower Income Urban Singles Task Group (1995). *Nowhere to Live*. British Columbia: Ministry of Housing, Recreation and Consumer Services.

Suggested solutions include:

- Increase the supply of affordable housing for lower income urban singles through provincial, federal and local government initiatives.
- Create a range of housing options through community development plans, alternatives to SRO's, housing pilot projects, and long-term solutions.
- Protect and improve existing housing including SRO's through government grants, building rehabilitation grants and rent control.
- Acquire public SRO's in partnership with non-profit management.
- Educate the community and government about the housing issues surrounding urban lower-income singles and the Residential Tenancy Act.

5. Aboriginal Homelessness, Prince Rupert and Port Edward, S. Helin, 2002.³³

This report examines the gaps and services for Aboriginal homeless people in Prince Rupert and Port Edward. The information was gathered by conducting surveys with service providers and homeless people.

Key findings include:

- The (homeless) target group was primarily of Tsimshian decent.
- Most were on income assistance and had an income of less than \$10,000 per year.
- The most acute need was for food, adequate and affordable housing, employment assistance and access to services.
- The health care system is not able to adequately service people with mental health and addictions issues.
- The target group did not routinely access the wide array of services available in Prince Rupert.
- Increased access to services was identified as a preventative measure. (For the at-risk homeless.)
- Culturally appropriate service delivery is needed. Aboriginal service providers are best suited to serve Aboriginal clients.

6. Youth Homelessness and Housing Needs in Williams Lake and Area, Williams Lake Social Housing Society, 2002.³⁴

³³ Helin, S., (2002). *An assets and gap review of existing services for the homeless: Prince Rupert and Port Edward*. Retrieved May 2004 from <http://www.hvl.ihpr.ubc.ca/pdf/Helin2002.pdf>.

³⁴ Williams Lake Social Housing Society (2002). *Youth Homelessness and Housing Needs in William's Lake and Area*. Retrieved May 2004 from <http://www.hvl.ihpr.ubc.ca/pdf/WilliamsLake2002.pdf>.

This report purposed to understand youth homelessness and housing issues in the Williams Lake area through surveys, focus groups and the collection of anecdotal information.

The primary goals were to determine if:

- There is a problem with youth homelessness;
- The extent of the problem; and
- What youth and the community suggest as ways to address the issues.

In summary of the literature review, the project reported that there is no clear recommendation for the most effective service delivery model for Williams Lake. However, there are components that can be derived from several ideals combined with local solutions to create an effective model.

From its research the report discovered that:

- The Williams Lake area has a population of 25,122 and a higher than average number accessing both Employment Insurance and Income Assistance for all age groups.
- Youth in the Cariboo region have the highest reported unemployment rate in the province at 23.3%

The surveys revealed that:

- The average respondent age was 20 years old.
- 40% were of Aboriginal decent.
- 24% reported having some kind of physical, mental or learning disability.
- At least 29% of the respondents are considered to be at risk for homelessness.
- 14% of the respondents were without permanent housing and of those 75% had been without a place to live for between one month and one year.
- 39% had been homeless at some point in the past.
- Two people interviewed had been homeless for more than one year.
- 42% had multiple moves in the past year.
- 18% of the youth had paid for rent through illegal or sexual activities.

The following concerns were identified by youth and service providers:

- There is a lack of affordable, safe housing as well as a lack of adequate financial support.
- There are homeless youth living on the streets in Williams Lake.
- There is no one to talk to about housing issues.
- Youth sometimes *fall through the cracks* in the system.
- Youth instability as a result of not having a permanent place to live perpetuates homelessness, ie. difficulty in maintaining work/school.
- Youth have diverse needs.

As a result of the above research, the following recommendations were reported:

- Provide an emergency shelter/temporary stay facility for youth.
- Provide long term affordable housing for youth in Williams Lake.
- Develop supported living programs to assist youth to successfully transition to independence.
- Address high unemployment and low-income levels among youth.

- Subsidize housing for low-income, employed youth.
- Increase attention to health and safety regulations for apartments and suites rented to youth.

7. Local Responses to Homelessness. Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 2000.³⁵

This report is a how-to guide for communities who wish to address the issue of homelessness. It includes case studies and examples that detail how communities can work together to address the needs of those who are homeless or at risk. Case studies include examples from Muskoka, Ontario, Port Alberni, BC, Portland, Oregon, Toronto, Ontario, Nelson, BC, Vancouver, BC, Kamloops, BC and Victoria, BC.

It was reported that:

- The best strategies are community based and are taken on by those who have a long-term interest. (I.e. Community, local government and provincial government.) Some examples of federal and provincial government initiatives include programs offered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Agency (CMHC), the Homelessness Initiative, BC Housing, The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, The Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors (2000), The Ministry of Women's Equality and the Ministry for Children and Families. (Please note that this report was written in 2000 and that the names of several ministries have since changed.)
- Each person and community have diverse characteristics, and solutions to homelessness need to acknowledge these diversities. However, this report is clear that:

“Three specific problems produce a population at risk of homelessness:

 - An inadequate supply of affordable and appropriate housing
 - Insufficient income (employment or income support)
 - Lack of appropriate support services for those who need them

The lack of one or any combination of these three creates the necessary pre-conditions for homelessness.”³⁶
- Factors contributing to homelessness are different for every person and community. Assessment of these factors can contribute to a community strategy. The guide lists several methods to access and record the numbers of people who are homeless (or at risk).
- Having realistic goals and a flexible approach is important to building, developing or maintaining housing for individuals and families at risk.
- Emergency shelters can be an important part of a community strategy. However, overemphasis should not be on short-term solutions at the expense of long-term needs. Options for a housing continuum (from emergency shelter to supportive/independent housing) is identified as a more balanced solution.
- Successful strategies are often the result of partners coming together in new ways. Community development is also seen as a key activity.

³⁵ Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security & the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (2000). *Local Responses to Homelessness: A Planning Guide for BC Communities*. British Columbia: Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security & the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

³⁶ Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security & the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (2000). *Local Responses to Homelessness: A Planning Guide for BC Communities*. p.6.

- Housing that is offered with support can be a successful way for individuals to maintain housing and stabilize their lives.
- Initiatives that assist individuals and families to keep their current housing are important preventative measures.
- Affordable housing is not a solution for some people experiencing homelessness. Underlying issues include the need for appropriate housing, support services and employment issues.

8. Nelson's Community Plan to Prevent and Reduce Homelessness, Nelson's Committee on Homelessness, Feb. 2002.³⁷

This report examined the housing and homeless issue in Nelson, BC and recommended a community plan to address the problem.

According to the report:

- Homelessness is not restricted to large, urban centers.
- Nelson is having a homelessness crisis although measurement of exact numbers is not feasible.
- Homelessness is caused by several factors including poverty, lack of affordable and adequate housing, lack of supports for people in transition, closing of institutions, the breakdown of family and social supports, and the changes in government assistance policies.
- The costs to health, justice and educational systems are high.
- Homelessness in Nelson can be prevented by a *continuum of housing and supports* model.
- Nelson has high rental rates and low vacancies.
- Nelson has a higher than average number of young people and seniors but a lower than average income overall.
- There is a growing need for food banks, significant substance misuse and other social problems and an increase in the victims of assault.
- The need for assisting those facing homelessness is on the increase.
- The plan to address homelessness includes recommendations for an emergency shelter program, short-term accommodation with support services, food distribution system, a drop-in centre, public transit between communities, outreach and life-skills training services, emergency dental care, 24-hour victim's assistance, improved communication

³⁷ Nelson's Committee on Homelessness (2002). *Nelson's community plan to prevent and reduce homelessness*. Retrieved May 2004 from <http://www.hvl.ihpr.ubc.ca/pdf/Nelson2002.pdf>.

between community groups, long-term affordable housing, supported housing, repair of existing housing stock, and the costs associated with each of these recommendations.

- The Nelson Committee on Homelessness will continue to look for partnerships to implement the plan.

9. You Have Heard This Before, M. Chand/L. Thompson, 1997.³⁸

This report, funded through the Social Planning Department of the City of Vancouver, identifies some of the service gaps for street involved youth in Vancouver.

Some of the key points include:

- Street involved youth (ages 12-19) is defined as "...teenagers who have lost their family ties and social support systems, lack dependable sources of food and shelter, and have gravitated to the urban downtown as a last resort for survival and freedom..." Also included are youth who have grown up in the downtown sector and have become involved in street life.
- Service providers were asked to speak about trends involving youth. Trends included: a high number of street youth for the last two years, youth are often turned away from shelters due to lack of room, the age of intravenous drug users is decreasing to 12-15 year olds, more youth (14-15) are involved in the sex trade, wait lists for mental health and alcohol and drug treatment programs can be 6 months to a year.
- There is a large influx of youth coming from other centers including rural and non-rural areas.
- There is a gap in housing for youth and a lack of alcohol and drug treatment centers for youth.
- There is an absence of 24-hour access to services and poor coordination of services.
- There needs to be an integrated case-management approach and reformation of laws and policies that could protect street youth.

Recommendations from the report include:

- Housing options including a transition house and more safe housing options for youth with a variety of needs.
- The establishment of youth-oriented treatment programs and associated ear-marked funds.
- 24-hour access to food, shelter, counseling and medical services.
- Integrated case management, increased coordination of services and decreased bureaucracy.
- Services for street youth provided in other areas as well, as announced by the Provincial government in March 1996.

³⁸ Chand, M.K. & Thompson, L. (1997). *You Have Heard This Before: Street involved youth and the service gaps*. Retrieved May 2004 from <http://www.hvl.ihpr.ubc.ca/pdf/Chand&Thompson1997.pdf>.

10. Homelessness Research in the Greater Vancouver Regional District: An Agenda for Moving Forward. D. Quantz, J. Frankish, 2002.³⁹

The development of this *agenda* is a two-tiered project. It includes an extensive literature review of the GVRD homelessness research and interviews with key stakeholders to determine the usage of and priorities around research information.

The goals of the project were to:

- Compile research undertaken by the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) between 1987 and 2002.
- To organize and synthesize the research literature.
- To identify the strengths, limitations and gaps in the literature.
- To develop a research agenda and future research recommendations for the GVRD regarding homelessness.
- To distribute the research literature to stakeholders to increase awareness about homelessness.
- To create a reference database as a resource for those interested in doing homelessness research.

Findings include:

- The most common type of research was environment scans, most commonly undertaken by agencies, academic institutions and government.
- Although Aboriginal persons are over-represented in the homeless population, the amount of homeless research in this area is limited.
- It is estimated that over two-thirds of homeless people suffer from mental illness, but there are relatively few research documents that deal with this issue.
- Youth as a group receive considerable attention.
- There are many research projects that investigate the use of shelters, housing, and single room occupancies.
- There are several research projects that examine justice, policy, and use of services.
- Women, seniors and immigrants have not received much research attention.
- Gaps in research include the lack of a solid baseline for homelessness and the abundance of anecdotal information. This was seen as a barrier for the planning of interventions.
- The measurement of the costs of homelessness is a necessary tool in the management and allocation of funds.
- The development and use of a clear definition of homelessness was identified as a gap.
- Barriers to research include the fluid and mobile nature of the target group, the lack of access to or unavailable data, issues around informed consent, lack of time and financial constraints, a lack of expertise within community groups, funding, the perception that some areas are over-researched, and issues with dissemination.

³⁹ Frankish, J. & Quantz, D. (June 2002). *Homelessness Research in the Great Vancouver Regional District: An Agenda for Moving Forward*. British Columbia: Institute of Health Promotion Research, University of British Columbia.

- Homeless research that is clear, accessible and provides specific information and direction for policy or program direction is the most helpful.
- Barriers to homeless research use include lack of skill in utilizing the information, lack of time, perception that research is inaccessible and ambiguous, the incongruence of program cycles and research cycles, and poor connections between policy makers and researchers.

Key recommendations include:

- Increase the involvement and capacity of communities in all phases of research.
- Support more effective funding structures.
- Foster partnerships between universities, government and communities.
- Effectively disseminate and apply research knowledge.

Appendix II

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR INDIVIDUALS IN SMITHERS

Passage Transition House
Northern Society for Domestic Peace
 3772-1st Ave. Smithers, BC 250-847-9000

The Passage Transition House is a 10 bed, 24-hour emergency shelter facility that is available for women and children in crisis. It provides a safe, non-judgmental shelter for women who may be fleeing violence or abuse.

Second Stage Housing
Northern Society for Domestic Peace
 3772-1st Ave. Smithers, BC 250-847-9000

Second Stage Housing provides safe, independent, affordable housing for women and their children leaving abusive relationships. This project has four units and usually operates with a wait-list.

Emergency Shelter Services
Smithers Community Services Association
 3815-B Railway Ave. Smithers, BC 250-847-9515

Smithers Community Services Association has 4 emergency shelter beds available for adults and families in need of emergency shelter. The beds are located at the Twin Valley Hotel on Hwy 16. These beds are available on a temporary basis only.

Bulkley Drive Housing Project
Smithers Community Services Association
 1211 Bulkley Dr. Smithers, BC 250-847-9515

Smithers Community Services Association currently manages a 24-unit housing complex in Smithers. The unit was originally funded through a grant from BC Housing at an initial cost of 3.2 million dollars and was built in 1999.

Of the 24 units, ten must be available at market value from \$550.00 for a 2-bedroom unit to \$630.00 for a 4-bedroom unit. The remaining units can be subsidized through BC

Housing. In May 2004, there was a wait list of 5 people for subsidized units and 12 people waiting for market value units.

BC Native Housing Corporation

Contact: 250-562-9106

The BC Native Housing Corporation is a rural initiative that assists low-income families (both native and non-native) find and maintain affordable housing. This program is accessed through an application process and acceptance is contingent on income level. There are 22 units available in Smithers and Telkwa. Units are either single-family homes or attached dwellings. Currently there is a waitlist and priority is given to need.

Pioneer Place 1&2

3965 Pioneer Place, Smithers, BC 250-847-2455

Pioneer Place is a senior's housing complex and is managed through the Bulkley Senior Citizen's Housing Society. It contains 29 bachelor units and two one-bedroom units. Currently it is full and there is a waitlist.

Gorbahn Professional Resources Incorporated 3911 Alfred Ave. Box 3957, Smithers, BC. 250-847-2285

This program operates a 4-bed group home for developmentally delayed adults. Beds are funded through the Ministry for Children and Families.

Emergency Social Services Contact Victim's Services 250-847-9374

ESS provides essential services for people affected by emergencies such as fires, floods, and earthquakes. Short-term assistance may be provided (usually up to 72 hours). In exceptional circumstances, authorization may be given to extend assistance beyond 72 hours.

Other Housing Options

Capri Motor Inn,

Hwy 16, Smithers, BC 250-847-4226

The Capri Motor Inn is a low-rise motel on Highway 16 in Smithers. In May 2004 several units were rented on either a weekly or monthly basis. For a one-person unit with a kitchen, the rate was \$322.00 per week. The Inn reported that on average there is at least one unit per month that is rented on a long-term.

Florence Motel, Hwy 16

Hwy 16, Smithers, BC 50-847-2678

The Florence Motel is a two-story motel located on Highway 16 in Smithers. A full-kitchen unit is available for \$375.00 per week. In May 2004, the motel reported that 2 units were rented on a long-term basis.

Smithers Hostel

1766 Main St. Smithers, BC 50-847-4862

The Smithers Hostel is a new facility as of June 1, 2004. This beautifully furnished 14-bed hostel has wheel-chair accessible beds and is located close to downtown Smithers. Shared units are available for \$23.50 per night.

Housing Programs Available in Smithers

BC Housing

1539 –11 Avenue, Prince George, BC V2L 3S6 `250-562-9251

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, BC Housing is an agency that develops, manages and administers a wide range of subsidized housing options across the province. Currently it manages approximately 8,000 units and there are more people waiting for housing than there are units available. Its programs include:

SAFER

1-800-257-7756 or www.bchousing.org

The SAFER Program (Shelter Allowance for Elderly Renters), available through BC Housing is a program designed to give rental assistance to people over the age of 60. Eligibility is dependent on an array of variables from age and citizenship to monthly income. Only those people not receiving other financial assistance (like BC Benefits or subsidized housing) are eligible to receive assistance from SAFER. For example, based on an income of \$1000.00 per month, SAFER will provide a rental subsidy of \$174.00.⁴⁰

Social Housing

1-800-257-7756 or www.bchousing.org

BC Housing currently manages 8,000 units in the province. Families, seniors, people with disabilities and some singles can apply. According to the BC Housing website, there are thousands of people waiting for subsidized housing⁴¹

Supported Independent Living Program (SILP) Northern Health Authority, Mental Health Centre, 3712 Kalem St. Terrace, BC. V8G 4T6

Although a program of BC Housing, SILP is accessed through the Northern Health Authority. In order to be eligible, individuals must be a current client of the NHA (Adult Mental Health) and submit an application for assistance. There could be a wait list for this subsidy.

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission (Federal Government) Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

200 - 1111 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6E 4S4 (604) 731-5733

The CMHC "participates in assisted housing initiatives as directed by the federal government with ongoing responsibility for federal social housing funding. In particular,

⁴⁰ BC Housing (2004). *Rent Supplements*. Retrieved August 2004 from http://www.bchousing.org/applicants/rent_supplements.asp.

⁴¹ BC Housing (2004). *How to Apply and Become a Tenant*. Retrieved August 2004 from http://www.bchousing.org/Applicants/How_To_Apply/.

CMHC supports Aboriginal communities in their efforts to become self-sufficient in developing and maintaining their housing”⁴². It offers a variety of housing programs including:

Loan Insurance Program On Reserve with Ministerial Loan Guarantee

Band Councils or Aboriginal persons may access CMHC insured financing for the construction, purchase or renovation of single-family homes or multiple residential rental properties.

Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) On-reserve

Financial assistance for Band Councils and Band members to repair substandard homes to a minimum level of health and safety and to improve accessibility to housing for disabled persons.

Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program

Assistance for homeowners and landlords to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Funding Opportunities for Non-profits and Housing Organization

The following describes potential funding opportunities for non-profit groups and organizations interested in housing initiatives.

BC Housing (Provincial Government)

Suite 601 - 4555 Kingsway, Burnaby, BC
V5H 4V8 604-433-1711

Independent Living BC Program

Provincially, this program will create 3,500 affordable independent living units by 2006 that will include support services like meals, personal care, housekeeping, recreation and a 24-hour response system. Low-income seniors and people with disabilities are able to rent the ILBC units for 70 per cent of their after-tax income. This program is implemented in partnership with the regional health authorities, the federal government, and the private and non-profit sectors.⁴³

⁴² Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission. (2004). *Programs and Financial Assistance*. Retrieved August 23, 2004 from <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/prfias/>.

⁴³ BC Housing. (2004). *About BC Housing*. Retrieved August 23, 2004 from http://www.bchousing.org/About_BC_Housing/.

Provincial Housing Program (formerly HOMES BC)

Assists with the development of new non-profit and co-operative subsidized housing for frail seniors, people at risk of homelessness, people with disabilities and low-income families including women and their children fleeing abuse.⁴⁴

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission (Federal Government) Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
200 - 1111 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6E 4S4 (604) 731-5733

On Reserve Non-Profit Housing Program

Financial assistance to build or rehabilitate affordable rental housing on-reserve.

Additional Financial Contribution

Temporary financial assistance available to pre-1997 CMHC on-reserve housing projects that are experiencing financial difficulties solely as a result of the loan renewal.

Proposal Development Funding (PDF)

PDF loans encourage the development of projects that offer housing for seniors, the disabled and low-income Canadian households including First Nations, through innovative partnership arrangements.

Youth Internship for First Nations and Inuit Youth

An initiative providing on-the-job training for First Nations and Inuit youth to assist them in pursuing employment in the housing industry.

Aboriginal Capacity Development (ACD)

ACD helps First Nations work towards self-sufficiency in housing through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, training and other resources.

The CMHC also provides funding opportunities to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups:

Shelter Enhancement Program (SEP)

Assistance to build, repair, rehabilitate and improve shelters and second stage housing for women and their children, youth and men who are victims of family violence.

Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program RRAP for Conversions

Assistance in converting non-residential buildings into affordable housing.

Direct Lending

⁴⁴ BC Housing . (2004). *About BC Housing*. Retrieved August 23, 2004 from http://www.bchousing.org/About_BC_Housing/.

CMHC's Direct Lending Program provides financing and renewals for eligible social housing projects, offering the lowest average financing rate available.

External Research Program (ERP)

Funding assistance to help Canadian researchers investigate housing topics in priority areas identified by CMHC.

Capital Replacement Planning: A Manual for Co-operative and Non-Profit Housing Providers

Assists non-profit and co-operative housing providers plan for future major repairs and replacements as their buildings age.

APPENDIX III

Question B15

During the time when you didn't have your own place or needed a more adequate place to live, did anyone help or try to help you:

a) Get a more suitable place to live? If yes, who and what happened?

- *Salvation Army*
- *Ministry of Human Resources*-Helped find better place to live
- *Newspaper*-Locate rentals
- *Community Living Skills (SCSA)*-Helped phone around
- *Friends/Family*-Place to stay
- *Transition House (NSDP)*-Provided suggestions
- *New To You Store*-Helped get started by providing house wares
- *Mental Health*-Outreach worker helped find place

b) With Income Assistance?

- *Ministry of Human Resources*-Paid damage deposit and took \$20 off each check until caught up, will divide up check for people who are impulsive or have addictions issues, income, crisis grant, help to find roommate
- *Mental Health Services*- Helped with rental subsidy
- *Community Living Skills*- Helped with rental subsidy
- *Transition House/NSDP*- Gave place to stay for 3 months and let me eat there in order to save some money
- *Family*-Helped find a place, helped with food
- *Nadina Community Futures*- Income
- *Employment Insurance*- Income

C) Other kind of Assistance?

- *Food bank*- Food
- *Smithers Community Services*- Shelter
- *Church*-Referred to mental health services

- Transition House*- Clothes, food, support, child-care when house hunting, place to stay while looking
- Positive Living Northwest*-Phone, help to move
- Mental Health Services*- Access to resources, moving assistance
- Family*- Moving assistance, things for baby
- Home Care Nurse*- Wound care
- Street Corner Ministry*- Helped with damage deposit, moving assistance
- Northern Society for Domestic Peace*- Counseling
- Newspaper*-Locating rental units
- Friends*- Support

Question B16

What kind of services do you think would have helped you at that (this) time?

- Services for older women
- Family support
- Transition House
- Hostel
- BC Housing
- Someone to go with and look at rentals
- Drug and Alcohol meetings
- Mental Health support
- More affordable rents
- Information about different housing options; what to look for and what to avoid.
- More affordable damage deposit
- Ministry of Human Resources to pay rent while participant is sick/infirm
- Money toward subsidized housing
- Transportation
- Buddy/Support Worker
- Low cost housing for singles
- Higher income
- Lifeskills training and budgeting

Question B17

What would you say were some of the barriers/hassles that prevented you from getting these services?

- No services for older women who are not abused or elderly
- Physical disabilities-hearing/sight/ambulation/chronic illness
- Lack of respect by government organizations, bureaucracy
- Transition House is too full, limited criteria
- Discrimination- mental health, kids, drug and alcohol issues
- Lack of money
- Lack of work, could not work
- Stayed with people who drank
- Mental health issues
- Rents too high
- Didn't feel like the Transition House was for her
- Didn't know where to go, not sure where to start
- People who did not call back

- Damage deposit
- Government cut backs
- Being too young to qualify for assistance
- Being pregnant
- Cost of moving
- No furniture
- Illness on part of family
- Lack of trust by others (regarding mental health issues)
- Lack of affordable housing in town
- Lack of affordable housing for singles
- “Just being scared”
- Embarrassment
- Wouldn't know what would do with possessions if went to Transition House
- Being diagnosed with schizophrenia
- Cost of hydro/gas, etc.
- Being on Disability
- Waiting time with Ministry of Human Resources
- No furniture

Question B18

What were the factors that helped you find suitable housing?

- More income
- Understanding people about mental health issues
- Outreach worker
- Friends
- Transition House, helped so I could save money
- The newspaper
- The Dze L’Kant Friendship Centre
- Help from the hospital and the Salvation Army
- Assistance with Lifeskills and Emergency Shelter Services-referred
- Feeling better-medical treatment for mental health issues
- Counseling at NSDP
- Friend-helped speak for me
- Word of mouth, newspaper and Calderwood Realty-helped find a place
- Community Living Skills (SCSA) helped look through the paper
- Street Corner Ministry-helped when I thought I was doomed
- Doctor told me not to go back and live on reserve
- A good landlord
- Good timing, good time of year
- Organization was open to giving me direction
- Trial and error
- Help from Mental Health worker
- Luck
- We were well dressed and my girlfriend had a nice car

Question B22:

How would you describe your life now that you have suitable housing?

- Adequate but still not safe

- I'm blessed, I'm not on street-I don't have to worry about my next meal or being rolled on the street
- Still up and down
- I don't have adequate housing!
- It's pretty good
- I feel really happy-don't have the stress of having to pay \$500 a month--Every day was either a victory or a very bad day
- It's warm, I can have cats, company
- I don't have that
- Once I'm caught up with rent, I can afford to eat and get proper shoes
- It's a roof over our heads but I'm not happy
- I'm happy with it, it's comfy and clean
- A lot better, can sleep in own bed at night, I'm not couch-surfing any more
- Comfortable and secure to have roof but the issues still need to be dealt with- I could still be homeless!
- I'm happy but I know I have nothing
- Feels better, don't have to move anymore
- I don't want to move and start that again
- Life is excellent, I have everything I need. We live in a great country

Question				
1. What kind of service do you provide? (Name of Agency/Program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCFD • Community Living Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. James Community Soup Kitchen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAFER Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Society for Domestic Peace
2. What age group(s) do you serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All
3. Do you provide service to people who are homeless or at risk for homelessness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We may 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes
4a. If you provide shelter services, how many bed days per month do you provide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 305 bed days
4b. Approx. at what capacity do you run? (Filled bed days.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70% annually
5a. How many people do you serve each year?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,000 • 150-200 each Saturday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 937
5b. To the best of your knowledge, how many people do you serve each year that are absolutely homeless?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 250
6. To the best of your knowledge, how many people do you serve that are at risk for homelessness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 or 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50
7. What do you see as a primary barrier for people who wish to have suitable housing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to budget money • Clients are vulnerable to being financially exploited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of income often as a result of lifestyle choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances • Lack of transportation • Mental health issues • Child Custody issues • At risk youth • Spousal interference
8. What challenges do you face in serving people who are homeless or homeless at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support services to help people stay stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of affordable safe, housing • At risk women with no references • Damaged historical occupancy
9. What in your opinion could the community do to assist people who are homeless or at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gov't need to provide adequate income and supports to stabilize at risk population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency hostel and support programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing policies that include priority placement for abused women. • Provide workshops on tenancy • Mental health housing • Co-op
10. Have you noticed any trends regarding the people you serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As program dollars decrease, there are fewer services available that provide stabilization. They drift up and down the hwy. looking for help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people coming who are hungry. • Cut backs-most people who come are 'unemployable' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidy is available, but not eligible if on social assistance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in justice practice make safety issues more challenging

Question				
1. What kind of service do you provide? (Name of Agency/Program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulkley Valley Anti-Poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smithers Baptist Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Wet'suwet'en 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Living Northwest
2. What age group(s) do you serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All
3. Do you provide service to people who are homeless or at risk for homelessness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes
4a. If you provide shelter services, how many bed days per month do you provide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
4b. Approx. at what capacity do you run? (Filled bed days.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
5a. How many people do you serve each year?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 150 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80-100 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-24
5b. To the best of your knowledge, how many people do you serve each year that are absolutely homeless?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None directly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not aware of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2
6. To the best of your knowledge, how many people do you serve that are at risk for homelessness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 150 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All
7. What do you see as a primary barrier for people who wish to have suitable housing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of affordable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of affordable housing • Individual's level of expectation and lack of steady income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordability • Some feel they need to stay on reserve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually very active drug addiction
8. What challenges do you face in serving people who are homeless or homeless at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When basic needs are not met, people cannot focus on getting a job or filling out forms, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to help people to give, look beyond themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining consistency and remaining in contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental inability of community to respond in a realistic way to people who struggle with addiction
9. What in your opinion could the community do to assist people who are homeless or at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give people more money so that their basic needs such as shelter, safety, food, etc are met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop giving hand-outs that create dependency. • Share cost • More accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing there is an issue of homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in community development process that is encompassing and includes those at risk
10. Have you noticed any trends regarding the people you serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older single women are falling through cracks-too young for OAS but too old for jobs. These women have raised families/worked their whole lives and now have hard time fitting in anywhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of expectation ("I deserve") has increased. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having more youth involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are beginning to get sick

Question	Smithers Literacy Services (SCSA)	Christmas Hampers- (SCSA)	Emergency Shelter Services (SCSA)	Dze L'Kant Friendship Centre
1. What kind of service do you provide? (Name of Agency/Program)	• Smithers Literacy Services (SCSA)	• Christmas Hampers- (SCSA)	• Emergency Shelter Services (SCSA)	• Dze L'Kant Friendship Centre
2. What age group(s) do you serve?	• All	• All	• All	• All
3. Do you provide service to people who are homeless or at risk for homelessness?	• Yes	• Yes	• Yes	• Yes
4a. If you provide shelter services, how many bed days per month do you provide?	• N/A	• N/A	• 120-124	• N/A
4b. Approx. at what capacity do you run? (Filled bed days.)	• N/A	• N/A	• Between 20-60% (difficult to answer, just started program)	• N/A
5a. How many people do you serve each year?	• 150	• 1100	• Count not in	• 6000
5b. To the best of your knowledge, how many people do you serve each year that are absolutely homeless?	• 2	• 5	• All clients are at risk	• unknown
6. How many people do you serve that are at risk for homelessness?	• 10	• 100	• No answer	• About 40%
7. What do you see as a primary barrier for people who wish to have suitable housing?	• Cost • Lack of suitable, affordable housing	• Money	• Poverty, joblessness, drugs/alcohol issues, eviction	• Income • No references • People not willing to rent to single persons • When children are apprehended, parents may not be eligible to live in their home
8. What challenges do you face in serving people who are homeless or homeless at risk?	• Being homeless in their #1 issue-stop seeking my services	• Can't deliver to 'no address'	• No answer • Criteria is 'very personal', some people don't like the rules • Getting word out about service • Having to turn women away	• Finding suitable accommodations for clients and limited income • MHR policies surrounding damage deposit.
9. What in your opinion could the community do to assist people who are homeless or at risk?	• More suitable affordable housing for singles and FASD folks	• Better community supports, re: cheaper accessible food and housing	• Provide a multi-service activity with D/A counseling, food bank, soup kitchen	• MHR can be a bit more caring for clients that have no place to go or call home
10. Have you noticed any trends regarding the people you serve?	• Less funding	• More working poor needing help. Higher heating, gas and food costs mean less \$ and less ability to have food all month.	• No answer	• Increase in clients from last year-doubled

Question	
1. What kind of service do you provide? (Name of Agency/Program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salvation Army Family Services and Food Bank
2. What age group(s) do you serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All
3. Do you provide service to people who are homeless or at risk for homelessness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes
4a. If you provide shelter services, how many bed days per month do you provide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
4b. Approx. at what capacity do you run? (Filled bed days.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
5a. How many people do you serve each year?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2945
5b. To the best of your knowledge, how many people do you serve each year that are absolutely homeless?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200
6. To the best of your knowledge, how many people do you serve that are at risk for homelessness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2200
7. What do you see as a primary barrier for people who wish to have suitable housing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job stability • Lack of experience/training for employment • Mental health!
8. What challenges do you face in serving people who are homeless or homeless at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • none
9. What in your opinion could the community do to assist people who are homeless or at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support, access to resources to gain skills need for work, life, health
10. Have you noticed any trends regarding the people you serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in # of people serviced. • Economic factors/mental health issues/increase in drug/alcohol addiction

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