



Salt Spring
Island
Community
Plan to End
Homelessness

SALT SPRING ISLAND
HOUSING FIRST
COALITION

December, 2016



This report was written and produced by Salt Spring Island Community Services as the coordination lead of the Housing First Coalition.



Salt Spring Island Community Plan to End Homelessness

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 2 |
| Point in Time Homeless Count | 4 |
| Youth Homeless Count Update | 6 |
| SSICS and Housing First | 8 |
| Solving Homelessness on Salt Spring Island | 10 |
| PRIORITY ONE:..... | 11 |
| Support People While They Are Experiencing Homelessness | 11 |
| Food..... | 11 |
| People’s Roots \$150 000..... | 11 |
| Shelter | 12 |
| PRIORITY TWO:..... | 13 |
| Increase the supply of Safe, Decent and Affordable Permanent Housing and Supports | 13 |
| Priority THREE:..... | 14 |
| Prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and assist people who are at risk of homelessness. | 14 |
| Budget Summary | 15 |

Executive Summary

Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Community Services Society (SSICS) initiated the development of a community plan to address homelessness as a component of the Housing First initiative. SSICS has received funding from the rural and remote section of the federal Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS) to undertake this community development work. This plan is intended to be a parallel and complimentary plan, and to follow a similar process, to that being undertaken for the urban area of the Capital Regional District (CRD).

Data collection over the past decade has clearly indicated that homelessness on Salt Spring Island has reached crisis levels and shows no sign of abating. An increase of 160% between the last two homeless counts (32 to 83) indicates that the number of people experiencing homelessness is growing at an alarming rate, and that Salt Spring is a “hot spot” for homelessness within the CRD. The incidence of homelessness among the total population on Salt Spring is double that of Greater Victoria. Further, the proportion of people identified as absolutely homeless (unsheltered) is many times higher than in Greater Victoria due to the absence of shelter, transitional housing, and other facilities.

[Solving Homelessness in British Columbia’s Capital Region: A Community Plan](#) was published by the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness in April 2012. Salt Spring Island was identified as the community in the Capital Regional District as having the highest “core housing need”. The needs assessment and action steps of the plan focused on the urban HPS area (Greater Victoria) and were not extended to the Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands. Actions planned in the document have not been assessed as to their relevance to the Salt Spring homelessness situation given the differences in need, capacity and in the absence of the facilities found in the urban center.

This plan is intended to extend the overall Housing First strategy for the Capital Regional District by linking the rural and urban HPS initiatives. It identifies 3 adapted priorities embracing the Housing First principles.

Priority 1: Support people while they are experiencing homelessness.

Priority 2: Increase the supply of safe, decent, affordable, permanent housing, specifically including supported housing.

Priority 3: Prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and assist people who are at risk of homelessness.

Introduction

The seasonal emergency shelter on Salt Spring Island ended the 2015/16 winter season and closed for the season on March 6, 2016. As of that date there were 2400 person accesses to shelter services with an average of 20 people per night. This has been a consistent number over the last 3 years since SSICS began the policy of opening the shelter every night of the season.

Homelessness is a pervasive and growing issue across the country. Contrary to a popular image of Salt Spring Island as a community of wealth, the island has a lower than BC average income, an extremely limited stock of housing and low vacancy rates for the few rentals available.

Salt Spring Island has a population of 10,500, which is 2.8 % of the total Capital Regional District (CRD). The homeless population on Salt Spring makes up 5.6 % of the total for the CRD. The unsheltered homeless population of Salt Spring makes up 22.3 % of the total for the CRD.

“The municipalities with the highest per capita incidence of core housing need – where residents are forced to consistently use more than 30% of their income for rent/mortgage, or housing is in need of major repair, or is overcrowded – are our rural communities.

The municipalities or electoral area with the highest incidences of core housing need are:

Salt Spring Island (23.5%)

City of Victoria (20.1%)

Southern Gulf Islands (18.5%)

Esquimalt (17.9%)”

CRD Strategy to End Homelessness

The 2015 Salt Spring Island [Affordable Housing Needs Assessment](#) 2015 update by the Salt Spring Island Housing Council / IWAV is conclusive in its findings that demonstrate the crisis condition of the Salt Spring Island housing market.

“2011 Census showed 56.3% of renters on Salt Spring are paying more than 30% of their income on shelter costs, including a very high number of households (295 or 36.4%) paying more than 50%. It is generally accepted that households paying more than 50% of their income on housing are at risk of homelessness.” p. 31

“There is virtually no supply affordable to the lowest income residents, some of whom are presumed to be living in social housing, but many are likely in insecure or inadequate housing or homeless.” p. 32

“Service providers that serve the more vulnerable and lowest income clients did report very high numbers were forced to leave SSI due to lack of affordable and appropriate housing.” Appendix 2, p. 5

“There is an estimated 475 households earning little to no income (Table 22), which suggests a gap of potentially up to 200 units for the lowest of income households.” p. 42

The findings are supported with the data from other indicator services of the levels of need on the island. Salt Spring Island Community Services operates the Food Bank and the Emergency Cold Weather Shelter along with an Outreach program.

Salt Spring Island Food Bank use has grown from 1,352 food bags distributed in 1999 to 8,389 in 2015.

The ‘In From the Cold’ Extreme Weather Response Shelter at SSICS has been at capacity occupancy of 20 virtually every night for the last 3 winter seasons. Many nights the shelter is over capacity.

Point in Time Homeless Count

On the night of February 10, 2016 there were at least 83 people experiencing homelessness on Salt Spring Island.

In February 2016 the federal government coordinated a national ‘Point-In-Time’ homeless count by funding a number of designated communities to carry out counts and surveys. Salt Spring Island was not among the communities designated or funded for the count, but carried out the count (without the survey/interview component) using other organizational resources.

The count on Salt Spring Island faced several challenges. With no permanent shelter and a limited capacity seasonal shelter, many homeless are spread among bush camps, vehicles, boats, or couch surfing arrangements (the hidden homeless). It is generally accepted that homeless counts tend to under report the true numbers and that counts in rural communities, for reasons such as those experienced on Salt Spring, are prone to even greater under reporting than in urban areas.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the results of the count document a minimum of 83 homeless people on Salt Spring Island with an unknown number of uncounted. This is a significantly higher per capita incidence of homelessness on Salt Spring (1 in 127 people) than what was found in the Greater Victoria area (1 in 250 people) and indicates a growing problem of alarming proportions.

The last homeless count performed in 2008 documented 32 homeless on Salt Spring. The 2016 count also found that the availability of shelter of any kind for the homeless on Salt Spring was limited. There is a significantly higher incidence of “unsheltered homeless” (66% of all homeless) than what was found in the Greater Victoria area (18% of all homeless), with many of the sheltered being in a temporary extreme weather facility.

The count does not include the significant number of known and unknown individuals that are at risk of homelessness, but not currently homeless. This includes known individuals in transition housing with limits on length of residency.

| Where People Stayed on February 10 th , 2016 | | | | |
|--|--|-----------|-------------------|-------------|
| | | Frequency | Total of Category | % of Total |
| Unsheltered absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation | Boats, Vehicles, Shacks, Tents etc. | 55 | 55 | 66% |
| Emergency Sheltered Those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless as well as Violence Against Women shelters | Seasonal Shelter Women's Transition House | 15 8 | 23 | 28% |
| Provisionally Accommodated Those whose accommodation is temporary and who do not have their own home or security of tenure | Transitional Housing | 5 | 5 | 6% |
| Total | | | 83 | 100% |

Youth Homeless Count Update November 2016

On November 20, 2016, SSICS Housing First Workers and the SSICS Child and Youth Services Team identified 29 individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 that did not have a permanent stable living situation.

The current housing situation of each individual was identified as either “Unsheltered” or “Provisionally Accommodated” based on the criteria of the recent national Point-In-Time Count.

| Homeless Youth on November 20, 2016 | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| | Age 15 to 19 | Age 20 to 24 | Total |
| Unsheltered absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation | 5 | 12 | 17 |
| Provisionally Accommodated Those whose accommodation is temporary and who do not have their own home or security of tenure | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| Total | 11 | 18 | 29 |

The total number of homeless youth counted was 29. In keeping with the generally accepted concept that homeless counts are under-reported, especially so in rural settings, the best estimate of workers was that there could be as many as 20 more homeless youth that are not connected with SSICS services.

There are an increasing number of youth arriving at the seasonal emergency shelter for shelter and other basic support (food, shower etc.) SSICS operates a BC Housing funded emergency shelter in the winter months. These shelters are typically not permitted or equipped to provide shelter to anyone under the age of 19. It was this situation that prompted the youth homeless count. It is apparent that the shelter is not an appropriate place for youth, and that an alternate response to the shelter needs of this group is needed.

There a significant numbers of youth finding shelter on derelict and unsafe boats. Housing First Workers, in consultation with the local Harbourmaster estimate then number to be 10 or more.

A note about boats: Salt Spring has a sizeable population of homeless finding shelter on derelict boats and living offshore in several protected bays (approximately one third of total unsheltered).

This manner of shelter is extremely high risk and is of great concern to service providers and first responders.

Health and safety risks that Salt Spring has experienced include: fire, weather exposure, unsanitary living, complicated access for police and first responders and the stress related to drowning risk by being ill-equipped to reside in a water environment.

This casts the challenges faced by the Housing First Program on Salt Spring into sharp relief.

Between November 2015 and March, 2016 the Housing First Program of Salt Spring Island Community Services has housed 19 individuals in transitional or permanent housing in scattered sites throughout the community.

This has significantly reduced the number of homeless- by as much as 20% if the 2016 count is used as an average over the winter months.

It is also worth noting that the success of the Housing First Program has been in its early stage when there were numerous untapped housing options. With these options now utilized the program is faced with very few remaining housing units.

SSICS and Housing First



The *Housing First* Program provides the philosophy, principles and processes to tackle and end homelessness. **Housing First** has demonstrated and well documented successes. It is a core philosophy and approach to address homelessness across North American and European cities including Victoria and Vancouver.

Page | 8

The *Housing First* Program at SSICS is funded by the federal government through the Rural and

Remote section of the 'Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS). The HPS activity, including the development of a Housing First plan, for the rest of the Capital Regional District is funded through the Greater Victoria section of HPS.

In a 2010 review of hundreds of Community Plans to end homelessness, the US National Alliance to End Homelessness identified four factors that lead to successful plan implementation:

1. **identifying an organization responsible for leading implementation**
2. **identifying a funding source**
3. **setting measurable outcomes and**
4. **setting a clear implementation timeline**

In keeping with these best practices, the SSICS *Housing First* program will lead and support implementation of a Community Plan, involving a variety of community partners.

Community Partners are throughout the community and includes, but not limited to:

- IWAV
- United Church
- Copper Kettle
- Islands Trust
- Capital Regional District
- RCMP
- Salt Spring Island Service Clubs
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Salt Spring Island Foundation
- Salt Spring Island Housing Council
- Land Trust Society

The Plan is a framework for organizations to work together to achieve common goals, and to assist the community to make the best possible use of scarce resources through collaboration and integration.

The major sources of funding to create and maintain transitional, supported and permanent affordable housing in the Capital Region include:

- Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy
 - (funds Housing First program currently)
- Government of British Columbia
 - (BC Housing – potential capital and operating, some shelter funding)
- United Way of Greater Victoria
- CRD Regional Housing Trust
- CRD Hospital District
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
 - Supports, supplements
- Foundation funding, private donations
- Social Enterprise

Solving Homelessness on Salt Spring Island

While the CRD Community Plan embraces Housing First and many of the same activities and resources required on Salt Spring Island, adapting the plan to the semi-rural environment of Salt Spring and recognizing the differences in service levels is necessary.

The Salt Spring Island Plan includes 3 priorities.

Priority 1: Support people while they are experiencing homelessness.

Priority 2: Increase the supply of safe, decent, affordable, permanent housing, specifically including supported housing.

Priority 3: Prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and assist people who are at risk of homelessness.

PRIORITY ONE:

Support People While They Are Experiencing Homelessness

Homelessness is being without the essentials of physical and mental health and wellness. This plan advocates introducing new long-term solutions with current essential supports for people who are homeless.

People who are in the situation of homelessness need support in the provisions of basic food, shelter and physical and mental health maintenance.

Food

People experiencing homelessness rely on the invaluable supports provided through meal and food bank programs.

The Food Bank at SSICS has provided food to an average of approximately 170 individuals weekly over the last 4 years.

In From the Cold program at SSICS feeds an approximate average of 25 individuals per night, not all of whom stay at the shelter for the night.

The ***People's Roots*** program at SSICS encompasses over an acre of gardens that produce food directly benefitting the local food bank and other meal programs. It also incorporates vocational rehabilitation for the mental health support services at SSICS. People's Roots also administers the Farmers Market Nutritional Coupon Program, providing coupons for seniors and families in need redeemed for nutritious produce at the local Tuesday Farmer's Market, benefitting local farmers as well as the families and individuals.

Action: Continue to provide emergency food and shelter to those experiencing homelessness.

Cost:

| | |
|----------------|---------------|
| Food bank: | \$65 000/year |
| People's Roots | \$150 000 |

Shelter

A strategy to address homelessness will anticipate a system of progression for people experiencing homelessness to move from using emergency shelter capacity or living without shelter to transitional housing and to permanent housing solutions. There must remain a capacity for emergency shelter as a first step.

The current capacity of the Emergency Cold Weather shelter at SSICS is 20 mats. The long term goal of this is to reduce the demand for a cold weather shelter by implementing priorities two and three, as well as to provide different kinds of shelter alternatives potentially.

Currently the cold weather shelter is funded by BC Housing only on nights that meet the extreme weather criteria (below 0 degrees, rain for continuous 14 hours, snow etc.). In recognition that shelter is required every night however, SSICS has for the last three years maintained an open shelter every night of the cold weather season. This extends only for the length of the cold weather season.

The emergency shelter must expand beyond the current limits of funding only in extreme weather conditions. Alternative Emergency Shelter services need to be developed that are available every night and year round.

Action: **Maintain and develop emergency shelter capacity for immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness.**

Cost: **Emergency Shelter \$100 000/year**

PRIORITY TWO:

Increase the supply of Safe, Decent and Affordable Permanent Housing and Supports

Lack of affordable housing is one reason the rate of homelessness continues to grow.

Subsidized low-barrier housing can be an essential transitional step from living on the streets or staying at the emergency shelter to having one's own place. Alternatively it can be a longer term solution for individuals experiencing chronic mental or physical health problems making it hard to enter market housing.

Support services can be very minimal or intensive, depending on the situation and can include supports such as: vocational development, mental health supports, eviction prevention and landlord negotiation support and advocacy, material supports such as subsidies or rent supplements.

Supports necessarily imply outreach workers. By design, supports should taper off over time as people move towards independence.

- Action:**
- Build or Acquire 40 new units of housing by 2018 towards the 2020 goal of 85 units including both transitional housing and safe, decent affordable permanent housing**
 - Bolster existing Inter-agency Housing Committee, which currently reviews supplements, to include intake and referral services.**
 - Enable access to housing with 20 new rent supplements of \$300/month towards the 2020 goal of 40 new rent supplements.**
 - Provide supports with 1 new FTE permanent support worker.**

| Cost: | New Funding Requirements | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| | Subsidized Housing Capital | \$4 000 000 |
| | Supports & Supplements | \$72 000/year |
| | 2 FTE permanent support worker | \$160 000/year |
| | Housing Committee Intake / Referral | \$20 000/year |

Priority THREE:

Prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and assist people who are at risk of homelessness.

Prevention is a key factor in ending homelessness. Intervention with supports before people become homeless is an essential element of a strategy as it is considerably less resource intensive than what is required after a person becomes homeless.

Prevention is an added dimension to the actions taken for priorities one and two. Fundamental to prevention is added activities and accessibility of services with increased outreach workers working with those most vulnerable to homelessness.

Intersection of Housing First and other important services to vulnerable individuals is critical to the prevention of homelessness activities. People frequenting the food bank, Mental Health vocational rehabilitation and other social services can be exposed to support services for homelessness prevention.

Prevention activities are aimed at providing people in identified at-risk groups and people at transition points that put them at great risk of homelessness. Support can include rent supplements and help in securing housing - potentially rental housing in the private market.

Support services are provided to ensure enhanced access to housing and community-based services.

Action: **Secure access to housing with 10 new rent supplements of \$300/month towards the 2020 goal of 20 new rent supplements.**
Implement 'Ready to Rent' program that prepares individuals for rental situations with education on rights and responsibilities as well as providing aid in securing rental housing.

| | | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Cost: | New Funding Requirements | |
| | Supports & Supplements | \$36 000/year |
| | Outreach worker | \$40, 000/year |

Budget Summary

A concerted plan to end homelessness on Salt Spring Island will draw upon resources from many directions and requires cooperation and collaboration between many island partners. The overall estimates for annual costs and total capital are based on the known quantity of homeless people on Salt Spring Island. It is, however, also known that the number is increasing rapidly so it becomes imperative that resources are put into the 3rd priority of prevention in order for the issue to not continue escalating and for the plan activities to have the desired outcomes.

Some of the costs of the plan are not new costs and have context that supports having them resourced without new activities geared to fundraising. Food bank costs have been funded with private donations solely for several years. The emergency shelter is funded through a combination of BC Housing and private donations. The remaining costs require new funding methods.

| | Costs / Annum | Capital |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Food Bank | \$65,000.00 | |
| People's Roots | \$150,000.00 | |
| Emergency Shelter | \$100,000.00 | |
| Supplements | \$108,000.00 | |
| Outreach workers | \$200,000.00 | |
| Inter-Agency Housing Committee | \$20,000.00 | |
| Capital (2018) | | \$4,000,000.00 |
| Capital (2025) | | \$4,500,000.00 |
| Total | \$643,000.00 | \$8,500,000.00 |