



SALT SPRING ISLAND
COMMUNITY SERVICES

Salt Spring Island

2016

Point-In-Time Count Community Report





SALT SPRING & SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS COMMUNITY SERVICES SOCIETY

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

The seasonal emergency shelter on Salt Spring Island ended the 2015/16 winter season and closed on March 6, 2016. As of that date 2400 people had accessed 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

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The 2015 Salt Spring Island ***Affordable Housing Needs Assessment*** 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 home 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.



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Point In Time Homeless Count

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.

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Where People Stayed on February 10th, 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%

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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.

Since November 2015 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.

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.

The **Housing First** Program at SSICS is funded by the federal government through the 'Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS).

Housing First has 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.

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