

Vision for Our Future

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VISION FOR OUR FUTURE

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS FACED BY VICTORIA'S ABORIGINAL STREET COMMUNITY

This report documents a three-phased project that sought to develop an overall report and action plan to combat Aboriginal homelessness in Victoria. The Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness (ACEH) brought together participants from the Aboriginal Street Community to share their experiences with homelessness to learn about the barriers they face, and hear their ideas for action and change.

In **Phase I**, a group of participants were brought together to discuss where they want to be within three years, what barriers they might face, and what would help them on their journey forward.

For **Phase II**, the group gathered again to discuss their ideas in more detail and to outline the key barriers they experience and what supports would help eliminate those barriers.

In **Phase III**, participants were asked where the ACEH should go from here. They were asked what they would like to see the ACEH do to better support them moving forward.



PHASE I: SHARING CIRCLE

APRIL 5, 2016 | Held at OUR PLACE SOCIETY

At a Sharing Circle on April 5, 2016, ACEH Executive Director, Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi, facilitated a discussion with 30 Aboriginal people from the Victoria street community. They were invited to attend to learn the results of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy Survey and to give input into a **Vision for Our Future**.

The participants were asked where they want to be within three years, what barriers they might face, and what would help them on their journey forward.

JOURNEY FORWARD

In Three Years, I Want To:

- Have a better life
- Be housed
- Be employed
- Have ID and my status card
- Not have to feel like I'm going to be kicked out at any time
- Have opportunities to get emotionally reunited with my family
- Have native people to work with me, First Nations advocates and frontline workers in all places
- Have self-help programs that are easy to access



Barriers I Face:

- The inflexibility of some of the current housing and shelters, such as the Salvation Army. If you miss a curfew you are kicked out. When you have addictions that's a problem.
- The police. We need Aboriginal police or an Aboriginal liaison to get to know us
- Handicap people have extra challenges
- Transportation and money for transit
- The Victoria Native Friendship Centre is too far out of down town and it's hard to connect
- Not having places to go. I am an artist but there's no place to do my art
- The rules around one person per one bedroom; as a single person, I will never have enough money to rent if I can't have a roommate
- The racism and discrimination by the rental property managers; it starts off good on the phone but doesn't end up well; they need cultural training
- A big barrier is being given the royal run-around; go here and then to be told, "I can't help you, go there..."

- Hygiene; having a place to get cleaned up
- The shelter diets, especially for those with allergies
- Hotels and shelters with bed bugs

SUPPORTS THAT WILL ASSIST ME ON MY JOURNEY

- More subsidized housing
- Having someone to give us a kick in the ass sometimes around healthcare - just giving us that reminder, especially those with diabetes; having Aboriginal nursing students working with us
- Care packages with things like a backpack and sleeping bag



- Reverend Al has a food van that he helps people with. It would be so good to have an Indian food van with bannock and fish
- To have our own one-on-one advocate; someone who will get to know us, to help create a “life plan” and help us to achieve it
- Advocates for children-in-care and families. The philosophy is to bring families together but that’s not happening
- We need shelters on reserves so that we can go home and wait there until there is housing for us
- Help with addiction
- A mini-storage place for all our stuff
- An advocate to help us with jobs or to help us if we lose our job
- Bus tickets to get to appointments
- A place to go during the day that’s appropriate. I’m on the street and my teens are on the street, and they have to stay at a youth shelter and I stay at another shelter, so when we see each other during the day the only place we have to go is to sit in the park and it’s just too hard
- A hotline and a place to make phone calls
- A shared Facebook page so that we can communicate with our families back home or to each other, and sometimes just to let people know we are okay
- Share this information (survey results)
- It would help if you present at the NTCAGM
- A monthly calendar with events and with contact names and numbers of our advocates

NOTE: The ACEH created a digital story based on the three questions above on YouTube

PHASE II: DIGGING DEEPER

NOVEMBER 1, 2016 | FIRST METROPOLITAN CHURCH

For Phase II, the group gathered again to discuss their ideas in more detail and to outline the key barriers they experience and what supports would help eliminate those barriers. Coreen Child and Bernice Kamano assisted as note takers.

EXPERIENCES WITH CITY POLICE

Thirteen out of the eighteen participants indicated they have had negative experiences with the city police. These negative experiences can be classified within two categories: racism and police brutality.

RACISM

Numerous stories were shared about racist behaviours/comments, including those summarized below:

- A female participant shared a story of when she was in Oak Bay with her boyfriend (who is on the streets and 'is white;' and whose family is from Oak Bay). They were stopped by the police and the police officer said, "Your kind doesn't belong around here; go back to where you came from." Although her boyfriend clearly was also from the street community, he was not targeted.
- A female participant was working on getting her life together and was in temporary housing. She saved money to buy a bike to get around. Many times, she was stopped by the city police and each time they ran the bike's serial number and asked her how she was able to afford the bike.
- Similar stories were shared about comments by the city police, such as, "We are tired of you native people drinking on the streets." Participants also mentioned that when they are stopped the police dump their alcohol and fine them, and the perception is that this is done to a much lesser degree with non-native homeless individuals.
- Stories were shared about being called, "Drunken Indian," and, "F*ckin Indian," by the city police.
- Another pattern reported is that "Indians in the cells are always the last ones to be released from the drunk cells."

BRUTALITY

A very high percentage of the eighteen participants reported experiencing violence at the hands of city police.

- A story that stands out the most is a young woman who was arrested and was latched onto by the police dog. Once the dog latched on to her, the trainer told the dog to stop, which it did. However, for no reason, according to her, other than her swearing, he then signaled the dog again and the dog dragged her for six feet and she sustained injuries and was bitten.
- One young man said he has been "black and blue from head to toe" as a result of being man handled by city police.

- A male participant shared a story where he was being asked to leave a building and was thrown down the stairs. He became unconscious. The next thing he knew he was in an ambulance on his way to the hospital.

The story about going to the hospital prompted considerable discussion about the hospitals and the treatment or lack of treatment the participants received in emergency and/or at the hospitals. A woman spoke of her recent experience (in the past week) at the hospital, where she was dragged by the hospital security in front of the nursing staff. The participants shared similar sentiments that, “the hospital staff don’t help us and they don’t like us.”

- One participant said just being close to the police triggers fears and brings him back to his time in residential school.
- A female participant shared a story where she was told to turn down her music and she said no and the police officer dragged her down the stairs and she ended up with a broken arm.

RELATED STORIES/COMMENTS

- Issues about being on medication – being arrested but not accommodated to get medication before being jailed.
- Not being told their rights.



RACISM

The following comments reflect the direct experiences of the participants when attempting to find rental accommodation in the City of Victoria.

- Dealing with shared accommodation – tenants are racist towards me.
- When I go to rent an apartment:
 - They ask me if I am native;
 - They discriminate - specify what race they will rent to;
 - They say I don't have proper references;
 - I am asked when I last had an apartment;
 - I am asked why I can't go back to the reserve, that the 'reserve' should help me;
 - When family members visit, there are strict restrictions on the length of time people can stay over; and
 - It seems like men face more barriers trying to rent.
- Property management told her they had a place – when she got there they told her there was nothing.
- One young man said, "I have never been homeless for so long. If I lived in Vancouver I would not be homeless this long."
- Support Worker called about a room, the worker told the owner that the client was First Nations – the owner said they had nothing available.
- When I apply for places I want to tell the landlords that I am French.
- Even when I get a place – I am not allowed visitors. There are cameras. It is like jail all over again.
- Credit check – is it legal?
- Cost of rent is too high when you are single.
- Pets are barriers. That keeps me homeless too.
- Ministry told me I had to declare the money I made picking bottles.
- Process to get application through takes too long; feels like you must exaggerate to get into an apartment.



SUPPORTS THAT WOULD HELP

SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND ADVOCATES

- We need our own **Aboriginal workers** to help us fight addiction and alcohol abuse in all areas.
- We need advocates in the health system, **legal support workers** to understand us, police that are our own so we can feel like we are heard, and dental and doctor advocates or nurses to help us take care of ourselves without feeling like a burden or being judged.
- Sometimes we just need **someone to witness** what we go through or help us understand what we are going through.
- We would like to have more **connection to our Elders**.
- We need **mental health support**. Someone who understands us and knows how to talk to us. I live on my own and I'm lonely.
- It be cool to have an **employment office support worker** for Aboriginal people.

SERVICES AND RESOURCES

- More access to food and warm clothing.
- It's getting cold out this time year and having **warm blankets** would be a support.
- **Streamline services**. Don't leave us out in the cold.
- I would like to have **proper ID and status cards**. It would be great to hop on a bus as a big group and go over to Vancouver and get it done in one shot or maybe we request INAC to come visit Victoria to do cards with us.
- I need help **fighting my own demons** from residential school.
- As a single man, I (we) need help on communication to landlords and rental units, to **understand forms**, because we want to live with people but we can't apply together, and it doesn't make sense. Why can't we help each other when we can't make it on our own?
- I would like to have a **Native Sobriety Group**, just for us, and not all looped together with others, because we have our own way of trying to seek help or finding things that can help us.
- I have had a degree and have had jobs. I would like **help getting back to work**.
- I would like to see all levels of education for us to let us know **what programs and funding are available** for us.

- We get \$375 for rent. On occasion, the Victoria Native Friendship Center will do a top-up, but not for everyone. If we could get the information out, we can understand how and when to ask for these top-ups.

A PLACE FOR US

- A **place to gather** to make friends.
- We would like to find a **Native-friendly building** for us to live. After we make a phone call and go see the landlord they usually turn us away because of the way we look.
- We would like a place that is strictly for us for gatherings and dinners, **a place to receive our teachings**, a place to visit with our family.
- I am now a grandfather and have eight grandchildren and **I have no place to bring my grandchildren** or to meet them of my own.
- Three out of five of us will be without a bed tonight. Some of the services don't work for us. To get into one place you must be drunk. **One time I had to go buy a bottle to get drunk, just to have a place to stay.** I would like to have the support of not having to hurt myself to have a place to sleep.
- I have gone from residential school, foster care, and to jail, and then to M'akola Housing Services. **It's not a good feeling to be watched by cameras, to have to sign in, and to not be able to invite my family into my living space. It feels like jail.** I choose the streets with my street family – I need support not to feel like this.

PHASE III: FINAL THOUGHTS

DECEMBER 20, 2016 | FIRST METROPOLITAN CHURCH

Fourty-two participants from the Aboriginal Street Community attended a lunch at the First Metropolitan Church on December 20, 2016. Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi provided a recap of the focus group process to date. She outlined the meetings and participant input that has led to the creation of a digital story and the development of an overall report and action plan.

Participants were asked “**Where the ACEH should go from here?**” They were asked what they would like to see the ACEH do to support them moving forward, taking into consideration the input that has already been provided regarding where they want to be in three years, the barriers that might come up, and the supports that would help them.

FEEDBACK

The following summarizes the key points that were shared:

- Information **needs to be posted** at the shelters and organizations for ACEH events and information on other First Nations events; NTC were here for a dinner in December but we didn't know about it.
- The bottom line is **we- single people need housing**; housing never reaches us because it is for low income and families; and why is it that all the white people and tent city got housed? We have been struggling and waiting for a long time.
- We need **workshops for trauma**.
- It would be good if the Victoria Native Friendship Centre did the same as the churches and other organizations and open their gym to be a shelter.
- We need our own **downtown space** where we can have **First Nations AA and NA meetings**; We need help with addictions; we need a safe place to go; VNFC has meetings but too far away.
- Who is the new worker at Our Place? I have never seen her; **it would be helpful if the ACEH invited Indigenous support workers to our meetings as a way for us to get to know who is out there** to help and learn what they are supposed to do.
- We need to **stop the favouritism**; all these places have favourites and help only certain ones.
- We need **storage**; I have lost my backpack again; we need a place to get mail and an address to use for us.
- The people **from BC and Vancouver Island need to be helped**; the white people and natives from all over the place seem get help before we do; I have been waiting for a long time.
- You need to help us to get our **status cards**.

- Some of us need to be able to get into ***clean sober houses***, away from the alcohol and addictions; we are left in buildings where there are drugs and alcohol constantly around us; this does not help to stay clean and do well.
- We really need an **Aboriginal Transition House**.
- The ACEH should **start a support system for us adult men who are trying to work**, to help us to keep our jobs. If I go to work for the day for cash, there is no food available and when I get back after the end of the day all the services are closed so I can't access food and showers. This doesn't help me in trying to work. Also, if there is a way that someone could hold some of our money that we need to go towards rent and other things that would also be helpful.
- There is no **support for young people**, for youth; when I was in Alberta, there was a program called the Back Door for Youth; there is nothing for Aboriginal youth in Victoria.
- The ACEH needs to find **space in the downtown area**; there are no Aboriginal programs or services to help us. We just wait and stand in line all day – for what?
- Can the ACEH write **letters of support**? For example, I have been clean for nearly seven months and I am at Holly House in a second stage sober house and I could use your help to try to get housing. The ACEH can advocate.
- It's simple: start with housing for us singles that can't get in the door, help us get jobs and keep jobs; help us with addictions and managing our money. **You need to work from the inside out.**