



News Bulletin

Issue 14 April 2009

HPI Funding Update

In January 2009, the Government of Canada extended the Homelessness Partnership Strategy (HPS) for two years (2009 to 2011). This program is the federal government's primary program for preventing and reducing homelessness in Canada. . The level of funding remains the same at \$16 million for the Metro Vancouver area. As a result of the extension, and in order to prevent service disruption to clients, the RSCH recommended two-year extensions for the 33 funded service projects that were due to expire on March 31, 2009. The RSCH is now considering plans and processes for allocating funds that remain after the extension of the service projects. Further announcements on that are expected in the next few months.

2009 Strategic Priority: Affordable Housing

In January 2009, the RSCH concluded discussions on its strategic plan for 2009/10, and determined that "affordable housing" would be its priority for the year based on the conviction that affordable housing not only provides the solution to homelessness but encompasses prevention. The core nature of community is also that all people need affordable housing. Affordable housing encompasses transitional housing, prevention of homelessness, connecting with supportive housing and chronic homelessness. It can link into income assistance levels needed, and the need for research on what affordable housing would look like in the short-term, mid-term and long-term. This priority would allow RSCH to demonstrate a measurable impact in our community.

Street Smarts: Youth Video Launch

The RSCH hosted a video launch event for participants in our youth video project (Street Smarts) at the Vancouver Film School on March 24, 2009. The event was a huge success. The Street Smarts video was created by the Youth Working Group of the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness. This video is intended to assist professionals such as health care providers, police and security forces, and business owners on how to improve their relationships and interactions with street involved youth.

A number of young people from Metro Vancouver participated in the project through focus groups and interviews. Their perspectives, in addition to input from professionals and business owners, provide a thoughtful look at the skills needed to produce respectful interactions.

The video can be accessed through the Resources section of our website, stophomelessness.ca. The video is divided into 5 sections that can be viewed independently or consecutively. The total running time is approximately 22 minutes. A public launch is being planned by the Youth Working Group for May 2009 as part of Youth Week.

Inside this issue

- HPI Funding Report.....1
- 2009 Strategic Priority.....1
- Street Smarts: Youth Video Launch..1
- Opening of the Pennsylvania.....2
- National Conference on Homelessness.....2
- New Geographies of Homelessness: Immigrants/Refugees.....2
- Homelessness Action Week.....3
- Homeless Seniors.....3
- Creating Housing Choices Forum..4
- Homeless Count Finalized.....4
- Announcements.....4
- RSCH Member List.....4



Pennsylvania Hotel Opening

RSCH members joined the gathering at 412 Carroll Street in Vancouver on January 7th to celebrate the opening of the Pennsylvania Hotel. The Pennsylvania Hotel is a prominent heritage landmark at the corner of Carrall and Hastings Streets that was fully renovated with the replacement of the 70 SRO rooms with 44 self-contained units of approximately 250 sq. ft. each. The Portland Hotel Society will operate the building, and BC Housing will oversee the building's operation as part of the provincial portfolio of social housing.

The RSCH was involved in providing funds for the project since its inception in 2000. It finally came to fruition eight years later at a total capital cost of \$13.7 million. The project has been a long time in gestation due to funding shortfalls arising from rapidly escalating construction costs and costs associated with heritage restorations. With the proposed sale of the bonus heritage density, the shortfall has been substantially reduced, and the funding partners have finally come to an agreement in principle to split the remaining shortfall.



New Geographies of Homelessness:

Issues on Newcomers and Precarious Housing/Hidden Homelessness

Sherman Chan, MSc, RSW Director of Settlement Services, MOSAIC

There is very limited systematic knowledge about the extent of homelessness among immigrants and refugees in BC. Research suggests that the housing situation of immigrants and refugees in Metro Vancouver is heavily influenced by the social capital of existing ethno-cultural communities. As a result, the extent of hidden and absolute homelessness among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants is less than would be expected given the income levels of these groups. This is not to say that the groups are well housed. Indeed, many individuals and families are living in crowded, sub-standard conditions. However, the social networks operating among immigrants and refugees appear to mitigate the worst forms of homelessness, resulting in under-representation in the population using homeless shelters. Many of them cope by sharing rents and crowding, however, a high proportion of them are in housing stress. They are not "on the streets", in large part because of their coping strategies, and in a number of cases because of help extended from social organizations and/or other members of their ethno-cultural community.

Policy, Research and Service Considerations

Policy, Research and Service Considerations

1. Current levels of social/shelter assistance are exceedingly low, especially in light of the lack of affordable housing. When immigrants and refugees settle in unsafe housing, in inexpensive and marginal areas of the city, they tend to enter a cycle of poverty, needing help from others.
2. The positive side is the extent to which mutual aid is provided. This is a clear example of what is variously labeled "ethnic resources" or "social capital" in the academic and policy literatures.
3. Systems of reciprocity do not include everyone. Refugee claimants, given the combination of their uncertain legal status, lack of language ability, and lack of familiarity with Canadian society, are the most likely of all newcomers to "fall between the cracks" of both ethno-cultural communities and the welfare and housing provisions of the state.
4. Immigrants and refugees are particularly susceptible to hidden homelessness, so their difficulties in the housing market are essentially invisible.

(This is an outline of Sherman's presentation at the National Metropolis Conference in Calgary March 20, 2009. Full paper will be available by email at: schan@mosaicbc.com.)

National Conference on Homelessness

Representatives from the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness and staff from the Homelessness Secretariat attended Growing Home - the National Conference on Homelessness sponsored by the University of Calgary. The conference was from February 18 - 20, 2009, and brought together more than 750 participants from across Canada. The conference provided a place for sharing innovative and effective best practices across the country. The RSCH representatives included the two co-chairs and IP staff, who presented three workshops, including the Metro Vancouver Youth Video Project, the Greater Vancouver Homelessness Count 2008, and Homelessness Action Week 2008. All of the presentations were well received.



Exhibit of art by homeless people

Homelessness Action Week

Building on the success of the 2008 campaign

During Homelessness Action Week 2008, many communities held “homeless connect” events. At least 13 such events were held throughout Metro Vancouver and around the province; 6 in the Metro Vancouver and 7 in other communities. There were also 50 or more other types of events in Metro Vancouver and 50 around the Province. These events ranged from discussion forums and film showings to Thanksgiving dinners and clothing drives. Many communities have continued to host periodic connect events, and these will be an important part of Homelessness Action Week 2009.

The public awareness campaign changed direction from the past two years. While 2006 and 2007 focused on myth busting about people who are homeless, the 2008 campaign dealt more directly with the issue of affordable housing by illustrating four different types of shelter / sleeping arrangements that people who are homeless are forced to use. The change of focus also allowed the poster campaign to work better for the whole province. A separate public engagement campaign entitled “A dozen days, a dozen ways,” developed the 2008 theme of “focus on communities.” The campaign invited people from across the province to share the projects and activities taking place in their communities that are contributing to solving homelessness. Twelve of these projects were selected and featured on each of the 12 days in October leading up to Homelessness Action Week. CITY TV provided significant sponsorship support by developing a public service announcement related to the “A dozen days, a dozen ways” campaign. The PSA began running in early August.

New materials continue to be added to the website. A webpage was created for each participating BC and Yukon community featuring a Homelessness action week event. New resources added to the website include Project Homeless Connect - A Manual for BC Communities, Homelessness Election Kit and Homelessness Action Week Toolkit. The planning for HAW 2009 is underway and will support the RSCH priority of affordable housing. Check out the stophomelessness.ca frequently for updates and useful resources.



A Dozen Days
A Dozen Ways



Homeless Seniors: Out of Sight, Out of Mind?

Lindsay Milburn, Coordinator of Temporary Housing Units, Seniors Services Society (seniorsservicessociety.ca)

Though we don't often see or think about them, homeless seniors are a rapidly growing segment of our society. According to the 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count, the number of street entrenched homeless seniors has increased 316% since 2002. But there are innumerable more who go uncounted - those sleeping in their cars, at hotels, on their friends' couches, or have recently been discharged from hospital (the 'invisible homeless'). Emergency shelter is sorely needed to support these vulnerable older adults, yet traditional shelters are not appropriate for their special needs.

Seniors Services Society (SSS) has been addressing this gap in service with its Temporary Housing Program (THP). Homeless or at risk clients referred to SSS who meet selection criteria are provided with a private apartment, furnished by donation, as temporary accommodation for up to three months. Rent is on a sliding scale set at 30% of income, if any.

Each program participant is fully supported by an outreach worker who, under the auspices of SSS, assists in accessing benefits, managing personal finances, and ultimately securing permanent affordable housing.

For more information, email info@seniorsservicessociety.ca or call 604-520-6621.



Creating Housing Choice Forum

The third in the series of day-long discussions on the future of the emergency shelter sector in the housing continuum was held on October 23, 2008, at the Firefighters Club Banquet and Conference Center in Burnaby.

Co-hosted by the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (GVSS), the forum followed up on the results of the May 2008 two-day discussion held in New Westminster. It may be recalled that the May discussion identified five themes for further discussion — keeping the conversation going; investment in transitional, supportive, and affordable housing; building capabilities on the front line; connecting the continuum of shelter, housing and support services; and preventing evictions.



Over 100 forum participants formed five breakout groups to discuss the five themes. With the benefit of prepared background papers on each theme, the participants identified 21 areas of action for governments and the community to consider. GVSS and RSCH staff are currently working on a process to bring the recommendations to the attention of all stakeholders. Stay tuned.

2008 Homeless Count Finalized

Following the release of the final count report, the RSCH received comments from across the region on ways to strengthen and enhance the report. The report has now been revised to reflect the feedback received. The revisions add clarity largely with additional definition of terms and discussion of the regional distribution of the homeless population. A copy of the revised report is at metrovancover.org/planning/homelessness.

Announcements

- The RSCH welcomed the Canadian Red Cross as a new member in October 2008. Their new Community Outreach program provides refugees with 24/7 multilingual information and referral services upon arrival. The program officially started on Oct 2, 2008 with the support and partnership of over 50 agencies. The CRC, of course, also works with the homeless in outreach, advocacy, and extreme weather sheltering. For more information visit their website: redcross.ca
- Kingsley Okyere joined the Metro Vancouver Homelessness Secretariat in August 2008 taking over from Andrea Gillman as Development Coordinator responsible for planning, analysis, research and communications. Kingsley was previously with BC Housing in the Research and Corporate Planning Department for 4 years. Since coming on board, Kingsley has been busy working on the many Communications Working Group initiatives.

RSCH Members

Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee • Alouette Home Start Society • BC Housing • BC Non-Profit Housing Association • Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation • Canadian Red Cross • Child, Youth and Family Network (Maple Ridge) • City of Burnaby • City of Coquitlam • City of New Westminster • City of Richmond • City of Surrey • City of Vancouver • City in Focus • Covenant House Vancouver • Cwenengitl Aboriginal Society • District of Maple Ridge • District of North Vancouver • Family Services of Greater Vancouver • Fraser Health Authority • Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy • La Boussole • Lookout Emergency Aid Society • Lower Mainland Network for Affordable Housing • Maple Ridge Homelessness Network • Metro Vancouver • Ministry of Children and Family Development • Ministry of Housing Social Development • MOSAIC • North Shore Homelessness Task Force • Options Services to Communities Society • Salvation Army • St. James Community Services Society • Seniors Services Society • Service Canada • Surrey Homelessness and Housing Task Force • TRAC Tenants Resource & Advisory Centre • United Food and Commercial Workers • United Way of the Lower Mainland • Vancity Community Foundation • Vancouver Agreement • Vancouver Coastal Health Authority • Western Economic Diversification Canada

Implementation Partners



United Way of the Lower
Mainland



metro
vancouver

Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

4330 Kingsway, Burnaby, BC V5H 4G8

T: (604) 451-6065 F: (604) 436-6960

web: www.metrovancover.org/planning/homelessness

email: rsch@metrovancover.org