

Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness



Comox Valley Point in Time Count Executive Summary September 2016

**Conducted by
Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness
In Partnership with
United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island**



**United Way
Central & Northern
Vancouver Island**

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Executive Summary

In 2016, the Government of Canada conducted a nation-wide Point in Time Count (PiT Count) to look at homelessness trends across Canada for the first time. Information gained through the count is used to identify themes, challenges and characteristics of homelessness across the country and helps to inform service needs at a local, provincial and federal level. The PiT Count is intended to provide a snapshot of the *minimum* number of people who are homeless in a community over one 24-hour period.

The Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, in partnership with United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island, participated in this count in the Comox Valley on April 12th, 2016 using the National PiT Count methodology.

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2012) defines absolute homelessness as individuals who are living in public spaces, emergency shelters or public facilities who do not have a stable residence to return to. Hidden or provisional homelessness includes those who are living in temporary accommodations, time-limited housing or whose tenancy is to be terminated.

The Comox Valley survey (Appendix A) consisted of:

- 5 screening questions
- 12 questions from the National Database
- 6 additional questions that expanded on the 12 core questions
- 7 Canadian Observatory of Homelessness questions
- 3 Local questions (community specific interests)

Surveys were conducted at fixed sites throughout the community, in various unsheltered locations where people are known to sleep, and at an event at a local church lunch club. In addition to the 24-hour count, surveys were conducted at fixed site locations over the week of April 13th – April 19th with the intention of gathering more information on those experiencing homelessness in the Comox Valley.

A total of 157 homeless (70 absolute homeless and 87 hidden homeless) were surveyed in the Comox Valley. The following survey findings **combine data** from the 24 hour and the week-long PiT count.

Survey Findings

- Most (71%) of the people surveyed in the Comox Valley are alone without family support.
- There are a significant number of women who are homeless in the Comox Valley. Of the people surveyed 57% were female and 42% were male.
“I became homeless with a child and was forced to place my child for adoption.” – Female, 45.

- 58% of those surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 44.
- Homelessness starts at a young age. 31% surveyed became homeless under the age of 27 and 26% of respondents had been in the foster care system.
- 66% of people surveyed had completed high school or had some post-secondary education.
- Indigenous people are overrepresented among homeless populations. (42%) of respondents indicated an Indigenous heritage whereas Census figures show only 5% of the region's population is Indigenous.
- The majority (66%) of those surveyed came from the local area and had lived in the Comox Valley for more than a year. Most who moved to the valley in the last year came from other areas of Vancouver Island.
- People want permanent independent housing. 65% of respondents said they would like to live independently in a small house (under 350sq. feet) or a small apartment. ***"The place I'm living in now has poor maintenance. It's unsafe and dirty."*** - Female, 66.

"I'd say my apartment is unfit for human habitation." – Female, 55.
- Most are not homeless by choice. Only 2 people said they did not want a home. ***"My parents died and I was unable to afford the house on my own."*** – Male, 46.

"The hospitalization of my partner in Victoria caused me to lose my house." Female, 45.
- People become homeless for a variety of reasons: evictions and landlord/co-tenant conflict (30%), family conflict (19%), addiction and substance use (17%), illness (13%), job loss (12%) domestic abuse (11%), unsafe housing (8%).
Note: People surveyed could give more than one reason.
"Being unemployed is keeping me from finding a home." - Male, 48.

"It's harder to find a place to live that allows kids." - Female, 30.
- Employed people are homeless in the Comox Valley. 13% of those surveyed were employed while 41% were on Income Assistance and 33% were on Disability Assistance. 8% had no income at all.
"I have difficulties making ends meet. There is just not enough full time hours of work." – Male, 48.
- People cited low incomes, high rents and lack of affordable, suitable and available housing as the major barriers to them being able to find housing.
"My house has no heat or hot water. I can't afford it." – Female, 55

“There’s a lack of jobs and I can’t afford to keep paying \$1000 in rent right now” – Male, 29.

“I experienced age discrimination when I tried to find housing.” Female, 57.

- People who are homeless need services to help them address food security (food banks and soup kitchens), addictions and substance use issues, mental health issues, serious medical conditions, as well as trauma counseling and legal advocacy.
- People who are homeless want drop-in services. 69% said they would attend a drop-in centre. The services they are looking for at a drop-in centre include laundry, shower facilities and lockers, access to phones, access to meals and common meal preparation, access to health care, general counseling and legal help, access to exercise and group support.
“I want a safe drop-in. Something safe for families, and families with addiction issues, there is a lot of stigma around mothering and substance abuse!” – Female, 45.

The information gathered from this survey provides valuable information to inform the Coalition’s five-year plan regarding needed support services and housing in the valley. The findings will also help all levels of government and community agencies continue to plan and provide supports for people who are homeless in our community.

The Coalition and the United Way recognize the count underrepresents the ***actual*** number of homeless in our community. This is expected the first time a community uses the nationally developed methodology. Through conducting this PiT count the Coalition has learned how to better survey those who are homeless and as we continue to do counts on a bi-annual basis we can build strengthened capacity for conducting the count, further involve community partners and identify trends over subsequent years to build a more comprehensive picture of homelessness at the local level.