

EMERGENCY SHELTER FEASIBILITY STUDY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last several years limited access to emergency housing has been identified as a concern in Revelstoke. In particular, finding emergency housing option for men, families that include men, women with teenage male children, women with medical challenges, and women with mental health and/or substance abuse issues can be extremely difficult. This study was commissioned by the Revelstoke Community Housing Society in order to determine the need and feasibility of developing an Emergency Shelter in Revelstoke.

Key causes of homelessness that were identified during the study include: inadequate affordable housing, family violence, inadequate income, mental health and substance abuse challenges, fire water and other natural disasters, weather emergencies and road closures.

Determining the exact number of homeless individuals currently living in Revelstoke is extremely difficult however Data provided by BC Housing and Police-victim services was used to determine the approximate demand for an Emergency Shelter based on the past 5 years.

BC Housing Data indicated that since March 1, 2009, 282 individuals contacting *The Community Connections Housing Outreach Services* have reported some level of homeless status (this includes at risk of homelessness): an average of 56 individuals a year.

Current community resources available to homeless individuals and families in Revelstoke include The Emergency Shelter Fund, The Housing Outreach Program, The Revelstoke Women's Shelter, Moberly Manor, Monashee Court, Mount Begbie Manor, Police-based Victim Services and the local church community. There is currently no Emergency Shelter facilities available in Revelstoke.

Current strategies individuals and families are employing to combat homelessness include couch surfing, camping, living in the woods, exchanging sex for shelter, living on the street, living in condemned or inadequate shared accommodations, requesting incarceration, leaving town, seeking assistance from churches or staying in motels.

This study determined that while an Emergency Shelter may provide homeless individuals with temporary shelter and support, development of a stand-alone homeless shelter without the development of additional supportive housing options would do very little to solve the issues of chronic and long term homelessness in Revelstoke. As such, the study recommends that the Revelstoke Community Housing Society develop a joint facility that combines both an emergency shelter and supportive housing options. Ideally such a facility would accommodate a 3 unit low barrier emergency shelter as one component of a larger 14- 16 unit semi-independent supportive housing facility.

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SETTING THE BACKDROP

Over the last several years, limited access to emergency housing has been identified as a concern in Revelstoke. Multiple agencies within the community have reported that they have received persistent requests from individuals seeking emergency accommodations, particularly in the winter.

Currently, the *Revelstoke Women's Shelter* is the only agency formally providing emergency housing in Revelstoke. Finding emergency housing option for men, families that include men, women with teenage male children, some women with medical challenges, and some women with mental health and/or substance abuse issues can be extremely difficult.

As such, "Establishment of an Emergency Shelter" was one of the key goals identified by the *Revelstoke Poverty Reduction Action Plan* and the *Integrated Community Sustainability Plan* (Revelstoke Social Development Committee, 2013) (Revelstoke Sustainability Action Plan, 2013). The following feasibility study was commissioned by The *Revelstoke Community Housing Society* as a result of these initiatives. The objectives of this study have been identified as follows:

- To determine the need for an emergency shelter
- To determine the feasibility of operating an emergency shelter
- To determine the best suitable sites for an emergency shelter (as needed)

Many individuals including the homeless, community stakeholders and key representatives of social service agencies were consulted in the process of creating this report. The list of individuals consulted includes:

- Individuals who have direct contact with homeless persons in Revelstoke
- Individuals who work in the Emergency Shelter System across BC
- Individuals who are currently homeless or who have experienced some form of homelessness in Revelstoke over the past 5 years
- Individuals who work in the mental health system on both a local and provincial level
- Individuals with expertise in emergency shelters at BC Housing

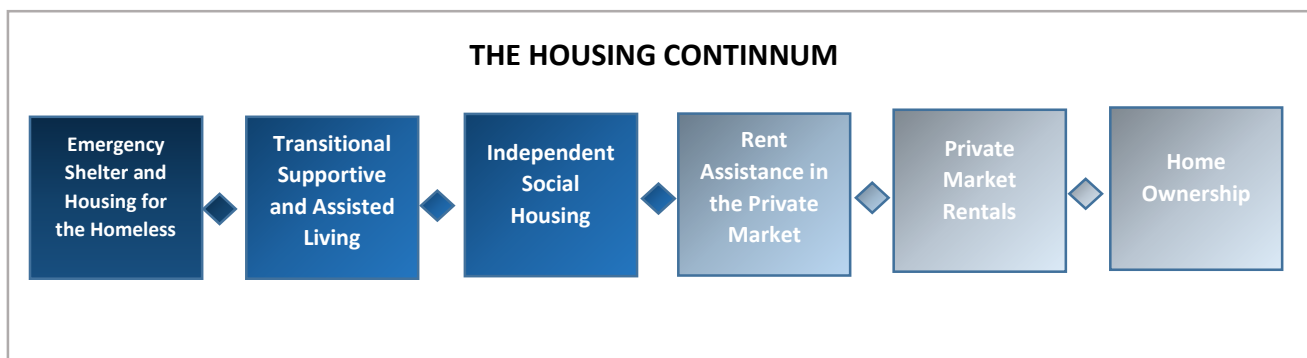
In addition, during this study, numerous provincial and national sources of data and research and best practice reports were consulted. Key learnings from these sources were considered in determining the feasibility of this project.

THE CONTEXT OF HOMELESSNESS

THE EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAM

Emergency shelters are part of a larger *Emergency Shelter Program (ESP)* managed by BC Housing. The program comprises of emergency shelters, seasonal shelters, drop in services and other specialized programs designed to help the homeless across British Columbia. Emergency Shelters in BC are mandated to provide temporary overnight shelter accommodations, essential and gateway services to homeless individuals and families. They are intended to act as “a bridge between the *street* and the opportunity to find more stable accommodation options” (*Emergency Shelter Program: Program Framework, March 2012*).

Emergency Shelters are part of larger housing continuum that extends from emergency shelters and housing for the homeless through to private market rentals and home ownership. The diagram below illustrates this continuum.



This diagram has been adapted from the BC Housing Emergency Shelter Program: Program Framework, March 2012.

KEY RISK FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HOMELESSNESS IN REVELSTOKE

In order to comprehend the demand for an emergency shelter, it is important to understand the key causes of homelessness. As one might expect, the factors contributing to homelessness in Revelstoke are by no means uniform and vary considerably from person to person. However, during the study several key factors were consistently identified by both local community agencies and homeless individuals as being significant. It is important to note that the causes leading to homelessness are often the result of the cumulative impact of multiple factors, and the following list is by no means exhaustive.

Inadequate Affordable Housing and Extremely Low Vacancy Rates

Inadequate affordable housing was identified as a key factor leading to homelessness in Revelstoke. Extremely low vacancy rates and high rental rates have made it increasingly difficult for individuals to find affordable housing, particularly those individuals with low income or fixed incomes. Finding affordable housing for individuals whose primary support is income assistance is virtually impossible: the average rental rates in Revelstoke are considerably higher than the shelter portion of income assistance. Thus, individuals with low incomes, fixed incomes and individuals whose primary income is income assistance often have to settle for less than ideal or inappropriate accommodation arrangements.

Although rental vacancy rates are higher in Revelstoke in the spring and summer months, finding affordable housing options remains very difficult throughout the year. Multiple community agencies identified that despite the increased vacancy rates during the spring and summer months, many landlords were reluctant or unwilling to reduce rental rates for longer term tenants due to their ability to demand considerably higher rental rates in the winter.

Revelstoke Property Services was contacted during the research for this report. An agent for Revelstoke Property Services indicated that many of the properties in their rental pool sold this year. As such, there are far few rental properties on the market. In addition, they have received three times as many individuals and families who have approached them looking for rental accommodations. Although, individuals contacting Revelstoke Property Services are not necessarily the same individuals who require low income housing options, the sheer number of individuals currently requiring rental housing in Revelstoke, makes it increasingly likely that vacancies in low income housing options will continue to be scarce.

Family Violence

Family violence was identified as a key factor leading to homelessness in Revelstoke. Family violence can force Individuals and families to leave home suddenly, often without proper supports in place. Many women involved in incidence of domestic violence are able to access emergency housing through The Revelstoke Women's Shelter.

However, there are several situations in which individuals and families involved in family violence may be unable to access emergency housing. For example, women who are intoxicated are unable to access the Revelstoke Women's Shelter. Women with significant mental health challenges or who have teenage children can also be very difficult to house. There is currently no option for men involved in family violence to access emergency housing. Notably, the Revelstoke RCMP identified that the absence of emergency housing options for men makes it practically inevitable that female parties involved in incidents of family violence will have to seek alternative housing arrangements.

Inadequate Income

Inability to secure adequate income was identified as a key factor leading to homelessness in Revelstoke. Whether as a result of unemployment or underemployment, several participants in the study identified inadequate income as a key factor leading to inability to pay rent, inability to secure a rental deposit and/or inability to pay additional costs associated with housing (heating or gas bills, housing taxes, etc.). More than one community agency identified they were aware of individuals in Revelstoke who currently own their own homes but due to inadequate income were unable to pay their housing taxes or associated housing bills. The current state of their domiciles makes it impossible to sell their homes to secure additional funds, often leaving these individuals living in inappropriate homes.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Mental health and substance abuse was identified as a key factor leading to homelessness in Revelstoke. Individuals with mental health and substance abuse challenges can access support through Canadian Mental Health Society. However, the fact remains that there are many individuals who are unable to maintain stable housing without some form of support. Several community agencies indicated that insufficient supportive housing options for individuals with mental health and substance abuse is a part of the problem.

Fire, Water or other Natural Disasters

Housing affected by fire, flooding or other natural disasters was identified as a factor leading to homelessness for both individuals who own their own homes and individuals in the rental market. Although insurance often covers these types of emergencies, recovering losses through insurance can take an extremely long time. One family indicated that as a result of a house fire they were couch surfing for over 6 months in the last year.

Weather Emergencies/ Road Closures

Revelstoke's remote location is sometimes the cause of unique housing challenges. Several community agencies reported concerns that in the event of extreme weather and road closures many individuals may be unable to find shelter. These agencies reported that during winter road closures in 2013 they were contacted by multiple individuals and families who were unable to find accommodations and as a result were left couch surfing or sleeping in their car. Although these individuals may not be technically homeless, the fact remains that during these specific situations they were unable to find appropriate shelter and as a result may have been put in situations of significant risk.

THE DEMAND FOR AN EMERGENCY SHELTER

Due to the vulnerable nature of the homeless population, determining the exact number of individuals who are currently homeless and may require emergency housing can be extremely challenging. There are no accurate statistics that enumerate the size of the homeless population. Moreover, confidentiality is a fundamental principle for organizations that serve vulnerable populations, so lists of names are not appropriate. The following is a series of snapshots collected from agencies that have direct contact with Revelstoke's homeless population.

BC HOUSING DATA

The following tables represent data collected by *Community Connections Homeless Outreach Program*. The data is presented as aggregated information for clients accessing the program between March 1, 2009 and March 31, 2014.

Table 1: Homeless Outreach Program Clients Accessing the Program between March 1, 2009 - March 31, 2014

Homeless Status	Female	Male	Gender Unknown	Total
Absolute Homeless	14	52	2	68
Hidden Homeless	36	26	1	63
Homeless Due to Crisis	12	5	1	18
Risk of Homelessness	72	54	7	133
Total	134	137	11	282

Table 2: Average Number per Year of Homeless Outreach Program Clients Accessing the Program between March 1, 2009-March 31, 2014

Homeless Status: Average Persons Per Year	Female	Male	Gender Unknown	Total
Absolute Homeless	3	10	0	14
Hidden Homeless	7	5	0	13
Homeless Due to Crisis	2	1	0	4
Risk of Homelessness	14	11	1	27
Total Per Year	27	27	2	56

Table 3: Reported Addiction Issue for Homeless Outreach Program Clients between March 1, 2009 - March 31, 2014

Addiction Issue	Number	Percentage
Addiction Issue	56	80%
No Addiction Issue	14	20%
Sub-Total Respondents	70	100%
Unknown Addiction Status	240	
Total	310	

Note: Addiction issue includes self-reported and suspected addiction issues

Table 4: Reported Mental Health Issue for Homeless Outreach Program Clients between March 1, 2009 - March 31, 2014

Mental Health Issue	Number	Percentage
Mental Health Issue	61	84%
No Mental Health Issue	12	16%
Sub-Total Respondents	73	100%
Unknown Mental Health Status	237	
Total	310	

Note: Mental health issue includes self-reported and suspected mental health issue

Table 5: Family Status for Homeless Outreach Program Clients between March 1, 2009 - March 31, 2014

Family Status	Number	Percentage
Couple	32	14%
Family	71	32%
Single	151	68%
Sub-Total Respondents	222	100%
Unknown Family Status	56	
Total	278	

Table 6: Reported Housing Barriers for Homeless Outreach Program Clients between March 1, 2009 - March 31, 2014

Housing Barriers (multiple responses possible)	Number	Percentage
No/Insufficient Income for Deposit	70	67%
Behaviour	21	20%
Pets	20	19%
No References	17	16%
Hygiene	16	15%
Active Addictions	11	10%
Missing Identification	11	10%
Credit Status	8	8%
Other *	90	86%
Sub-Total Respondents	105	
Unknown	205	
Total	310	

**34 "Other" responses added reason as "no shelter available"*

Additional Notes:

1. All percentages are based on the total number of records where there is a response to the question being examined, not the total number of records (i.e. records missing for the indicator in question are excluded from the calculations, so as not to skew responses).
2. Homeless status, reported addiction and mental health issues, and housing barriers may not be updated every time a client accesses the program and, therefore, may be out of date.
3. The indicators in this report are not mandatory for data collection purposes, so not all clients will have data collected for each indicator.

REVELSTOKE POLICE-BASED VICTIM SERVICES DATA

The following table represents data collected by *Revelstoke Police-based Victim Services* and identifies cases that would have benefited from a no/low barrier shelter. The individuals and families that *Revelstoke Police-based Victim Services* work with are victims of crime, tragedy and trauma. This can arise from domestic violence, mental health concerns, motor vehicle incidents, assault, and suicide, notification of next of kin, structure fires, assault, criminal harassment and sudden death.

Individuals who require short term or temporary shelter as a result of stranded traveller events or road closures are the responsibility of the Revelstoke Emergency Management Program, not Victim Services and as such that data is not included.

Table 7: Individuals and Families that Would Have Benefited from a No/low Barrier Shelter between January 2012- June 2014.

Family Status	2014 (Jan. to Jun.)	2013	2012
Single Male	0	11	11
Single Female	4	14	8
Families (no children)	0	9	10
Families with minor children	9	18	28
Total number of individuals	13	52	57

2012 REVELSTOKE COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT

The 2012 Revelstoke Community Survey ran from October 3rd to October 22nd, 2012 as part of the Revelstoke Community Sustainability Plan. A total of 797 surveys were completed. Question 43 in the study is of particular relevance in terms of understanding the prevalence of hidden homelessness within the Revelstoke community.

When asked *“is there anyone currently (or in the past year) staying in your household on a temporary basis, who is NOT a visitor and who does NOT have a regular home or address of their own”*, 12% of respondents (66 individuals) answered Yes.

When those who responded yes were asked if *“they were aware of any individuals that “were NOT able to establish a regular home or address of their own in Revelstoke and still stayed in the community”*, 49% of respondents answered that they knew of at least 1 or more people.

SUMMARY OF DEMAND ANALYSIS

There is no way to know how much overlap there is between individuals accessing services at Victim Services and Community Connections, however both agencies have indicated that it is unlikely that all individuals accounted for were accessing both agencies. Regardless, from the combined reports we can deduce that on average at least 50 individuals a year are either homeless or at high risk of homelessness and would likely benefit from an emergency shelter.

A high percentage of the individuals in need of an emergency shelter have addiction and/ or mental health issues; thus, for an Emergency Shelter to be beneficial in Revelstoke it is imperative that it be a low or minimal barrier shelter. From the BC Housing data, it is evident that there are a considerable number of individuals who are *At Risk of Homelessness*. Given the current vacancy rates and the increasing scarcity of affordable housing in Revelstoke, it is likely that the situation for individuals who are currently *At Risk of Homelessness* may worsen over the next few years.

CURRENT COMMUNITY RESOURCES

In order to comprehend the current demand it is also important to understand the current support services available to homeless individuals and families and those at risk of becoming homeless in Revelstoke. Many of these services are the direct contact points where homeless individuals seek both information and assistance finding emergency accommodations.

The Emergency Shelter Fund

In 2007 an *Emergency Shelter Fund* was set up to respond to an increased demand for emergency housing. A committee was established to determine the distribution of the fund. The fund was to be used to provide temporary housing for members of our community who are homeless or living in unsafe housing conditions. Between 2007 and 2009 monies from the Emergency Shelter Fund were used to top up rent, pay for temporary hotel rooms, pay electrical bills in arrears for renters at risk of becoming homeless, and provide bus fares to assist homeless persons to get to the nearest Emergency Housing Facility. In 2009, The Housing Outreach program was started at Community Connections and the committee distributing the Emergency Shelter Fund became inactive.

Although the fund is no longer accessed on a regular basis, \$6,677 dollars remains in the fund. If a social service agency determines there is demand for emergency housing, they may contact The Housing Society to request funds from the Emergency Shelter Fund. Since 2009 only one request has been made. A request was made and granted in the fall of 2013 to pay a month's rent at a hotel for a homeless person. It is important to note that since the dissolution of the committee overseeing The Emergency Shelter Fund there has been confusion among local social service providers as to the funds status, both in terms of how to access the fund and even in terms of its ongoing existence.

The Housing Outreach Program

In 2009, the *Housing Outreach Program* was set up at *Community Connections* to assist persons who are homeless or at extreme risk of becoming homeless, to access housing in Revelstoke.

The Housing Outreach Worker affiliated with this program provides services that include: assistance applying for Income Assistance, assistance applying to supportive housing, ongoing housing support for clients at risk of homelessness and referrals to numerous other community resources.

Through the Housing Outreach Program individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless can also access a program called the *Homes Up Subsidy*. The *Homes Up Subsidy* is a fund used to provide short term housing support that includes providing first month's rent or damage deposit, topping up rent, temporary rental of hotel rooms or paying for bus tickets to the nearest shelter facilities in Kamloops, Kelowna or Vernon. The *Homes Up Subsidy* provides a maximum of \$300 per person per month. In Revelstoke, the *Homes Up Subsidy* is primarily utilized during the winter months. The Housing Outreach worker indicated that on average, 6-10 people utilized the *Homes Up Subsidy* per month during Winter 2013-2014.

The Revelstoke Women's Shelter

The Revelstoke Women's Shelter is an emergency shelter facility whose primary mandate is to provide temporary shelter and support to women (and their children) at risk of all forms of abuse. Due to a lack of emergency housing options and alternatives, The Revelstoke Women's Shelter does its best to accommodate *all* women in need of emergency shelter. However, in some instances they are unable to provide support. They are unable to provide shelter to women under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and women who are deemed disruptive and/or are a danger to themselves or others.

Police-based Victim Services

Police-based Victim Services in Revelstoke works directly with local police to provide information, referrals and emotional support to victims of all kinds of crime, tragedy and trauma including but not limited to domestic violence, mental health concerns, motor vehicle incidents, assault, suicide, structure fires, criminal harassment and death. Although Revelstoke Police-based Victim Services rarely receive requests from individuals requesting housing specifically, clients regularly identify temporary short-term shelter as a need. Police-based Victim Services has identified that when their clients are in need of emergency housing, they are often challenged in finding a safe place for the victims particularly if the victims are men, women with teenage male children, women with medical challenges, women with mental health and substance abuse challenges, women that have recently consumed drugs and/or alcohol and women that are deemed to be disruptive.

Moberly Manor

Moberly Manor is an 11-unit assisted living development for seniors, funded through the provincial Independent Living BC (ILBC) program with shared funding between BC Housing and

the Interior Health Authority. Moberly Manor could be considered a supportive housing option for homeless seniors; however, due to a habitually significant wait list and very little turnover, Moberly Manor is almost never a realistic option for homeless seniors.

Monashee Court

Monashee Court is a public housing development in Revelstoke owned and managed by BC Housing. It provides 45 units for persons over 55 years of age, and persons under 55 with disabilities. The development consists of 22 bachelor units and 23 one-bedroom units. For the last 5 years Monashee Court has had a consistent waitlist. Currently there are 17 people on the waitlist. As a result, Monashee Court is not an option for homeless individuals or families who require housing in an emergency even if they fit the criteria for Monashee Court.

Mt. Begbie Manor

Mt Begbie Manor is a housing development operated by The Revelstoke Senior Citizen Housing Society that provides long-term independent housing for individuals over the age of 55. Mt. Begbie Manor has 41 units that currently houses 43 tenants. Presently there is a wait list of 8 people. The manager of Mt. Begbie Manor indicated that it can take up to 3 years for an apartment to come available. Over the last six years there have been six homeless seniors housed at Mt. Begbie Manor; however, it often takes several months to house these individuals.

Local Church Community

The local church community was identified by several individuals and local social service providers as a support for homeless individuals and individuals at risk of homelessness. Several church ministers indicated that despite their desire to assist homeless individuals, their ability to provide any kind of emergency housing was very limited. Specifically, restrictions put on church use by their insurance provider was identified as a significant factor limiting churches ability to provide emergency shelter for individuals in need.

STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVING HOMELESSNESS

The following is based on anecdotal reports of how individuals and families in Revelstoke are coping with homelessness. The information was collected through a series of interviews with individuals working directly with the homeless population in Revelstoke as well as with 7 individuals who indicated they have been homeless within the last 5 years.

- “Couch Surfing” was a common strategy identified of how individuals were coping with homelessness. Staying with friends or family for a few nights at a time as well as strangers. While some individuals may couch surf for a few weeks between more long term housing arrangements, other individuals are couch surf for longer periods of time, up to a year or more.
- Camping or “living in the woods” was a common strategy identified of how individuals are coping with homelessness in spring through fall, when temperatures are warmer. Some individuals set up temporary shelter in one particular place in the forest and remain there for a longer period of time while others move more regularly camping at multiple locations throughout spring, summer and fall.
- Exchanging sex for shelter was a strategy identified of how individuals were coping with homelessness. This includes accessing shelter for a longer period of time or simply the right to sleep on a couch for a night in exchange for providing sexual benefits to a landlord, homeowner or rental tenant.
- Living in condemned housing was a strategy identified of how individuals are coping with homelessness. This includes setting up residents in abandoned cottages or mobile homes sometimes with the permission of property owners and other times without. State of the domicile can vary significantly with some having no heat, electricity or access to running water, with others have severe structural damage.
- Living in shared accommodations with multiple families was a strategy identified of how individuals are attempting to avoid homelessness. Although not technically homeless these individuals are living in circumstances that are not sustainable long term and may put individuals at high risk of homelessness.
- Providing assistance for homeless individuals to leave Revelstoke was identified as a strategy for dealing with homelessness. This includes providing individuals seeking temporary shelter with bus tickets to Vernon or Kamloops where there is more access to shelter facilities.
- Sleeping on the street, building entrance ways or taking shelter in community buildings during opening hours was identified as a strategy of how individuals are coping with homelessness.

- Requesting incarcerated or committing crimes to gain access to shelter at the police station was identified as a strategy of how individuals were attempting to deal with homelessness. Sergeant Kurt Krabinsky with the RCMP identified that Individuals unable to find temporary shelter are more likely to commit crimes simply as a way of surviving, seeking out food and shelter where they can.
- Seeking assistance or shelter at churches was a strategy identified as how individuals are coping with homelessness. In rare cases, churches have provided temporary shelter for people requiring shelter; however, their ability to provide shelter is very limited.
- Staying in motels, hostels and hotels on a short-term basis was identified as strategy for dealing with homelessness. During winter months, some homeless individuals have received financial support to stay at a motel, hotel or hostel through the Homes Up Subsidy or the Emergency Shelter Fund.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to establishing demand, there are a number of key considerations that need to be examined when determining the feasibility of having an Emergency Shelter. Key learnings from Emergency Shelters, Emergency Shelter Networks throughout the province as well as BC Housing can give essential context for understanding the best way to address the needs of homeless individuals in Revelstoke.

During this study, 17 emergency shelters and 3 Emergency Weather Response programs were contacted as well as numerous contacts at BC Housing. Key Reports on homelessness published by *BC Housing*, *Shelternet* and the Provincial Government were also consulted. The following represents the key learnings and questions that arose as a result of this research.

Will an emergency shelter assist individuals and families who are homeless long term?

In accordance with BC Housing mandates, emergency shelters in BC are facilities that provide temporary overnight shelter as well as essential and gateway services. As previously mentioned, they are part of a housing continuum that extends from emergency shelter programs through to the private rental market and home ownership. The absolute homeless are the primary target for the Emergency Shelter Program in BC.

Emergency shelters in BC are mandated to provide shelter for individuals for up to 30 days at a time. However, all but one of the shelters contacted during this study acknowledged that many of the individuals they served stayed longer than 30 days. One shelter administrator stated that

they had clients that had stayed at the emergency shelter for over a year. BC Housing is aware that in many cases the 30 day limit is not being adhered to.

The primary demographic of emergency shelters is the absolute homeless or chronically homeless. Individuals in this category often require significant support to make the transition out of homelessness. All of the shelters contacted underlined the importance of access gateway and support services as essential to the emergency shelters success. Gateway and support services mentioned were not limited to but included addiction counselling, employment counselling, housing support workers, mental health support, assistance filling out forms, skills programs and lifestyle classes.

The availability of transitional housing, supportive housing and low income housing was identified by all of the shelters contacted as being key components in their ability to successfully assist their clients to secure housing. Almost all of the shelters contacted identified that without adequate access to transitional housing, supportive housing and social housing it is almost impossible to house chronically homeless individuals' long term.

Will an emergency shelter attract a transient homeless population to Revelstoke?

The majority of emergency shelters contacted indicated that the majority of the clients they sheltered were local to their community. This including emergency shelters located along the TransCanada Highway. Several shelters mentioned that they had policies that inhibited misuse of the shelter by individuals "travelling through" the community. For example, Nelson gives priority access to individuals who live in the community and have a 3-day limit for individuals who are "travelling through" the community. Many shelters also mentioned that all individuals staying at the shelter must be "working towards a plan". Those individuals not "working towards a plan" were granted limited access to the shelter.

Low Barrier versus High Barrier shelter?

The majority of emergency shelters in BC are low to no barrier emergency shelters. The emergency shelters contacted indicated that many of their clients would fail to meet the requirements of a high barrier shelter and it was imperative that they were a low barrier shelter in order to serve the population most in need of emergency housing. Several emergency shelters contacted mentioned low barrier shelters can be difficult to manage with only one staff person (funding for number of staff is determined by number of shelter beds). As well, several shelter contacts identified that low barrier or no barrier shelters are not ideal for families and suggested that if your shelter serves families, separate space for families, needs to be a priority.

What is the best location for an emergency shelter?

Several emergency shelters contacted identified that residential neighborhoods are rarely in favor of having an emergency shelter nearby. Working with community members to

understand the importance of having an emergency shelter in the community is imperative to the success of the project. Clients of emergency shelters often require additional social services to successfully transition out of homelessness. Ideally additional services need to be available at the shelter or accessibly nearby. Several shelter contacts also mentioned that additional noise and foot traffic often occurs outside the shelter and needs to be taken into account when choosing a location.

KEY FINDINGS

There is “evidence of need” for an emergency shelter in Revelstoke. It is extremely difficult to find temporary emergency accommodations particularly for all men, women with male children over 12, women who are intoxicated, families that include men and some women with mental health challenges or criminal charges. Data provided by BC Housing and Police-based Victim Services indicate that there are multiple individuals and families who would have benefited if there was an emergency shelter in Revelstoke over the last 5 years.

While determining the exact number of homeless persons currently in Revelstoke is next to impossible, it would be reasonable to estimate that at least 50 individuals in Revelstoke seek assistance finding emergency shelter or accommodations. As such, if a 4 – 6 shelter beds were available in Revelstoke it would be at full occupancy the majority of the time.

However, emergency shelters are one element of a larger housing continuum and support network. In order for an emergency shelter to be successful at housing the homeless long term it is imperative that additional housing options, gateway and support services be available.

Currently in Revelstoke there are very few supportive housing options or social housing options available (The only social housing options currently available are for seniors and some individuals with disabilities and have significant waitlists and very little turnover).

While an Emergency Shelter may provide homeless individuals with temporary shelter and support, without additional intermediate housing options, low income housing options and/ or supportive housing options made available, creating an emergency shelter would do very little to solving the issue of chronic and long term homelessness in Revelstoke.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the preceding data and information the consultant recommends the following:

- Development of a small 3-4 unit low barrier emergency shelter as one component of a larger semi-independent supportive housing facility.
- Management of the facility to be conducted by *Community Connections*. This recommendation is based on analysis of several local agencies. Specific considerations include: management capacity, management experience, mission, vision and goals, history of service, current network of support services and overall interest in the project.
- Gateway and additional support services will need to be provided to assure the success of the project.
- Because of the critical shortage of housing supply for purchase or rental, the consultant recommends renovation of an existing motel as the preferred approach over buying and renovating an existing apartment building. Renovating an existing apartment building to accommodate the recommended facility will only put increased pressure on an already extremely tight rental market.
- The Province of BC is actively involved in creating partnerships with municipal governments, community-based non-profit groups and regional organizations to meet the housing needs of the homeless population and vulnerable people. Based on the precedence of similar projects in several other towns and cities it is recommended that funding for operations and ongoing support services be sought out from BC Housing in partnership with the federal government, the municipal government, corporate and private donors, non-profit housing and local service providers.
- Staffing costs included in the operating budget of such a facility would need to include support for mental health and addiction support.

CONCLUSION

There is a consistent population of homeless individuals living in Revelstoke year after year. In addition, more recently increasing rental rates and extremely low vacancy rates have put increased pressure on already limited housing options, increasing the risk of homelessness particularly for vulnerable populations and individuals on fixed incomes.

It imperative that there be increased access to emergency housing in Revelstoke. However, emergency shelters exist on a continuum of housing options, and additional housing options are required in order to assist the chronically homeless long term. Currently in Revelstoke there are next to no supportive housing options (The only social housing options currently available are for seniors, consistently have significant waitlists and very little turnover) and extremely

limited low income housing options. Thus, while an Emergency Shelter may provide homeless individuals with temporary shelter and support, without additional supportive housing options made available, creating an emergency shelter would do very little to solve the issue of chronic and long term homelessness in Revelstoke. As such, the consultant recommends the creation of a joint facility that would house both a small emergency shelter and 14-16 units of semi-independent supportive housing.

As might be expected, securing the financial support to fund a joint emergency shelter and supportive housing facility will be the biggest challenge. Such a project would require a broad partnership of local community agencies along with BC Housing, the City of Revelstoke, the Real Estate Foundation of BC, Columbia Basin Trust and the local private sector.

CASE STUDY: THE THUNDERBIRD MOTEL

In the process of researching the feasibility of an Emergency Shelter in Revelstoke, several alternative models for addressing housing for the homeless were considered. Of the options currently in practice, the consultant believes that the model with the most potential in Revelstoke is the *Thunderbird Motel Project* based in Hope, BC. The following case study

highlights the key elements of the *Thunderbird Motel Project* that are relevant to a future project in Revelstoke.

OVERVIEW

The Thunderbird Motel Project is a 24-unit motel based in Hope, BC that has been converted into a semi-independent supportive housing program and 4-bed emergency shelter. It was created to support Hope's most vulnerable community members, specifically, the homeless, those at risk of homelessness and those who face multiple barriers to securing and maintaining long-term housing. Similarly to Revelstoke, Hope has a population of 6, 170 individuals and is located on the TransCanada Highway. One major difference between Hope and Revelstoke is that unlike Revelstoke, several of the motels in Hope have fairly high vacancy rates year round.

THE TENANTS

Currently there are 30 individuals living at the Thunderbird Motel Project. Two-thirds of the tenants are male and one-third are female. The homeless program coordinator indicated that ninety-nine percent of individuals living at the Thunderbird Motel Project have mental health and/or addiction issues and over half are on disability. The vast majority of tenants staying at the motel do not have jobs. There are a few couples living at the motel, however there are no families with children living at the motel. The program coordinator indicated that the project was not appropriate for housing families with children.

In terms of turnover, approximately two-thirds of the tenants are stable long term tenants and approximately one-third of the tenants tend to turn-over more regularly. The program coordinator also indicated that there was considerably more turn-over in the first couple of years, but over time the project was able to support tenants to identify their personal barriers and as a result many of the tenants have become considerably more stable.

THE FACILITY

The majority of supportive housing units are single occupancy; however, a small number of the units are double occupancy. All supportive housing units have kitchen facilities. All individuals living at the motel have access to dedicated communal drop-in space. The homeless program coordinator has an office attached to the communal drop-in space.

The Emergency Shelter is located in the motel's manager suite. It has two bedrooms that can accommodate 2 females and 2 males as well as a shared living room, kitchen and bathroom. Individuals staying at the emergency shelter have access to food, clothing and personal supplies. The emergency shelter is a *moderate barrier shelter*. The program coordinator indicated that this is far from ideal; however, due to financial constraints they are unable to provide 24-hour staffing for the shelter and as such, individuals who are intoxicated or have

severe mental health issues cannot always be housed in the emergency shelter safely.

PROGRAM POLICIES

- Admittance into the Thunderbird Motel Project is based on applicant's motivation towards working on identified personal barriers that have led to homelessness. In general there is no limit on how long a tenant can stay at the Motel Project and tenants are encouraged to consider the motel their home.
- All tenants pay rent and are expected to pay rent at the beginning of each month. Tenants who fail to pay their rent on time may be issued a *Notice to End Tenancy* and be evicted no earlier than 10 days after the notice is given. Tenants are encouraged to allow the rent portion of ministry cheques to be paid directly to the project. Almost all tenants at the Thunderbird Motel have agreed to have their rent paid directly.
- There is no strike policy for tenancy violations, warning occur as needed on an individual basis. However abusive language and behaviour is not tolerated and if not immediately resolved, eviction will follow in order to ensure safety and security for all tenants, staff and volunteers.
- Drinking and Drug use is not permitted outside individual units. Any space outside individual units is considered public space and belongs to the Thunderbird Motel Project.
- Tenants are permitted to have pets following the completion and approval of a *Pet Application Form*. The general rule used is if a tenant can't care for themselves or their unit, then they cannot have a pet.
- To ensure the safety and security of residents, guests are discouraged at the motel after 11pm. Only individuals listed on the tenancy agreement are permitted to reside at the motel.
- All tenants are required to do 2 hours of weekly volunteer work. Tenants are encouraged to participate in volunteer work according to their specific availability, ability and interest. Examples of volunteer jobs include helping with breakfast, cleaning, doing odd jobs, gardening, etc.
- Tenants are required to work on their identified barriers during their residency at the motel. The Homeless program Coordinator is available to meet with tenants to support and provide the necessary referrals for them to help them work on identified barriers.

SUPPORT SERVICES

The program coordinator indicated that the facility would not be successful without additional support services provided. In addition to housing, tenants of the Thunderbird Motel project have access to mental health and addiction support, legal advocacy, medical support, clothing

and food, counselling services, and life skills development.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The project is primarily funded by the Hope & Area Transition Society, BC Housing and community donors. In terms of management, BC Housing provides funding for 2 staff positions: a homeless program coordinator and an overnight staff person. The homeless program coordinator is the primary person managing both the supportive housing units and the emergency shelter. Rental income and damage deposits are collected from each tenant. The Hope & Area Transition Society does not actually own the motel. The Thunderbird Motel continues to be owned by a private landlord. The landlord is responsible for repairing all damages to the property and individual units as well as paying all heating and utility bills. The landlord has agreed to continue to support the project on an ongoing basis, however there is actually no lease or ongoing agreement governing the project.

KEY DEFINITIONS

All definitions are adapted from the BC Housing *Homeless Outreach Program: Program Framework*, (March 2012, 3rd Edition).

Absolute Homeless: Individuals and families who are living in public spaces without legal claim (i.e. on the street, in abandoned buildings, etc.), a homeless shelter or a public facility or service

(i.e. a hospital, rehabilitation centre) and cannot return to a stable residence; or individuals who are financially, sexually, physically or emotionally exploited to maintain their shelter.

At Risk of Homelessness: Individuals and families who are living in: temporary accommodations, accommodations where they do not have control over the length and tenure of accommodations or do not have adequate personal space, time limited housing designed to help them transition from being homeless (i.e. transitional housing or second-stage housing, or accommodation where tenancy will be terminated within 3 months (i.e. pending release from prison, given notice by landlord).

Emergency Shelter: A facility that provides core services that includes a) essential services such as temporary overnight shelter accommodation, food and other services to meet the basic nutritional and hygiene needs of people who are homeless and b) gateway services in the form of stable housing and key support services.

Emergency Shelter Program: The Emergency Shelter Program (ESP) provides funding to homeless shelters and drop in centres in British Columbia. The program is managed by BC Housing.

Gateway Services: services that facilitate the movement of shelter clients along the housing continuum and act as a bridge to more stable housing and support services. Gateway services include assessment, case planning, information and referrals that assist clients to access key support services in the community.

Hidden Homeless: Individuals who are living in accommodations where they do not have control over the length and conditions of tenure (i.e. couch surfing).

High Barrier Shelter: an emergency shelter with a number of requirements for entry into the shelter. High barrier shelters generally require clients to be sober (and some require sobriety for a minimum period of time) to gain entry into the shelter. High Barrier Shelters may have other requirements for access such as having valid identification or committing to treatment.

Homeless due to Crisis: Individuals and families who are homeless because their previous residence became uninhabitable due to a human cause or natural disaster.

Housing Continuum: describes a housing spectrum that is bound by street homelessness on one end and private market housing on the other end. The continuum inherently infers that individuals and families are able to move along the housing pathway from one stage to another. Stages on the continuum include: living on the streets, emergency shelters, transitional or supportive housing, independent non-market housing, or rent assistance in the private market, and private housing market, and private housing market in the form of rental housing or ownership.

Minimal or Low Barrier Shelter: an emergency shelter that has few requirements for entry into the shelter. In a minimal barrier shelter, a client's ability to remain in the shelter is generally determined by their behaviour towards other clients and staff. Minimal Barrier Shelters are sometimes referred to as "Damp Shelters".

Support Services: a broad range of community based programs, services and supports that are available to persons either experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. Such services are external to the gateway services provided by the emergency shelter.

Transitional Housing: Transitional housing is intended to offer a supportive living environment with tools and opportunities to offer social and skill development. While transitional housing has limits on the length of stay, it is an intermediate step beyond emergency shelters (maximum 30 day stay) along the housing continuum.

Wet Shelter: an emergency shelter which, through a controlled program, allows clients to consume alcohol inside the shelter.