



Nelson Committee on Homelessness

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Dear Citizens of Nelson:

The Nelson Committee on Homelessness (NCOH) released its **10th Annual Report Card** on Homelessness in Nelson on June 26, 2018. Most of the report is based on our 2nd Point in Time (PIT) Homeless Count that took place on April 11th, 2018. The results were surprising even for those of us who have worked in the field for a long time. 132 people were identified as experiencing homelessness. It should be noted that this number is based on those individuals who were approached and willing to be surveyed. We can safely say that this number is an underestimation of the real number.

The report card describes what homelessness looks like in Nelson exploring both “the roads into homelessness” and the “roads out of homelessness” based on the surveys of this population. Striking is the fact that 1/3 of those surveyed were under the age of 24; and 56% or more than ½ of **all** those surveyed first experienced homelessness before they were 19 years old. How is this possible? Many leave home because of family poverty, breakup and violence. Others are not accepted because of gender identity, mental health issues and substance use. Whatever those reasons we as a society have failed those young people. The traditional African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child” has been widely quoted when exploring society’s responsibility for our children. The village of Canada including the City of Nelson has not provided the climate and resources required to nurture many of our youth.

What do these young people need? Those surveyed stated they needed to be able to afford housing, they needed mental health services, they needed housing supports and they needed temporary employment. A national study entitled *Youth Homelessness in Canada: the Road to Solutions* (2015, Raising the Roof) identified access to services, education, employment, housing and mentorship as needed. The following quote from “*Youth Homelessness In Canada, Implications for Policy and Practice* (2013, Canadian Homelessness Research Network) suggests that youth will need support from trustworthy, caring adults sensitive to the issues of trauma.

A key distinction that frames our understanding of youth homelessness is that young people generally are fleeing from – or kicked out of – households where they have been dependent upon adult caregivers. So, youth homelessness is experienced not only as the loss of housing, but also entails ruptured relations with family, and potentially the loss of friends, other supportive adults, and community. It can mean premature withdrawal from school and an early rush towards independence at a time when these youth may be suffering from the trauma of such losses.

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Member Organizations: Nelson CARES (Ward St. Place, Stepping Stones, Transitional Housing, Affordable Housing, Advocacy Centre), Nelson Community Services (Cicada Place Youth Housing, Youth Outreach, Homelessness Prevention, Street Outreach, and Women’s Outreach), Salvation Army, Kootenay Christian Fellowship (Our Daily Bread), Nelson Women’s Centre, ANKORS, City of Nelson representatives (2 Councillors), Anderson Gardens, Nelson Youth Centre, Kootenay Career Development Services, Kootenay Kids, Nelson Food Cupboard, St. Saviour’s Food Pantry

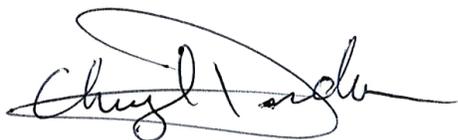
We, the co-chairs of NCOH, are asking that you support the development of services for the homeless youth in our community. Some suggestions about how you might do this are as follows:

- Support the development of emergency housing for youth.
- Support efforts to create more affordable youth housing in Nelson. We have an excellent but small program in Cicada Place. We know it can work and is effective.
- When you see street entrenched youth, smile warmly. Support compassionate support and treatment of this population.
- Support your public school system's responsibility to meet the educational requirements of all BC youth.
- Hire youth when you have temporary employment needs.
- Write municipal, provincial and federal ministers stating your concern for this population and indicating your support for programs and strategies that address the needs of this population.

This letter has focused on the needs of homeless youth but the Report Card content covers much more including housing insecurity, poverty and community indicators. It also describes the programs that are addressing homelessness, food security and income. As a community we have a lot to be proud of. We also have a long way to go as the economic, systemic and structural changes and stresses in our society move more people into precarious life styles.

We challenge our readers to support the elimination of homelessness in our community by supporting the provision of compassionate supports, affordable housing and reduction of poverty at all levels of society and government.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Dowden
NCOH Co-Chair



Phyllis Nash
NCOH Co-Chair

DISCLAIMER: The opinions and interpretations in this letter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.