



| June 2016 |

8th Annual

Report card on homelessness
for Nelson B.C.

Researched and Prepared by the Nelson Committee on Homelessness

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8th Annual Report Card on Homelessness For Nelson, B.C. JUNE 2016

This year's Report Card:

- **HIGHLIGHTS** findings from Nelson's first Point-in-Time Count of homeless people
- **REPORTS** on trends and community indicators of homelessness and poverty here
- **FEATURES** voices and stories of people living this reality
- **SHARES** information on local initiatives, successes and the progress being made by our community to address poverty and homelessness.



Point in Time Homeless Count
Volunteer surveyors Carrie
Thurston & Marilyn Miller

This Report Card will bring the reader a better understanding of those who are homeless and at risk of homelessness, what contributes to homelessness in our community and what we can do about it. It is designed to both encourage questions and inform solutions.

The Nelson Committee on Homelessness (NCOH)

is a volunteer committee of service agencies, City and federal government representation and concerned citizens dedicated to long-term solutions to poverty and homelessness in Nelson B.C. Founded in 2001, we work with members of the community, businesses, governments and other stakeholders to:

- ♦ *prevent and alleviate homelessness*
- ♦ *enable a better understanding of local homelessness issues and best practices*
- ♦ *give people, businesses and organizations the opportunity to participate in solutions.*

We do this by:

- ♦ *encouraging collaboration and supporting new initiatives*
- ♦ *leading community research,*
- ♦ *facilitating information sharing and knowledge building, and*
- ♦ *developing community partnerships among all stakeholders to find solutions to address homelessness.*

Voices From the Margins...

"I'm couch-surfing right now ...staying with someone I met a couple of weeks ago. I don't really feel totally welcome there. I have a support worker helping, but I don't have enough rent money and I can't get into most rentals because of my cat. My cat is my best friend."

HOMELESSNESS exists in Nelson.

It is often "hidden" and affects people from all walks of life - from youth couch-surfing, running from an unsafe home to older women house-sitting month after month because they can't afford a permanent place of their own.



ABSOLUTE HOMELESS: People living without shelter, on the streets or in places not meant for human habitation.

SHELTERED HOMELESS: People in overnight, short-term or emergency shelters or in shelters fleeing from family violence.

TEMPORARILY HOUSED: People whose housing is transitional, temporary or an inadequate "make-do" situation — whose long-term housing is not secure or permanent.

AT-RISK: People who are not homeless but whose current financial and/or housing situation is unstable or does not meet basic health and safety standards, and therefor puts them at risk.

Why do people become homeless?

- a lack of affordable, safe and appropriate housing;
- a lack of adequate income;
- a lack of supports and services to help people find, maintain and keep their housing;
- barriers faced by those with mental and physical health challenges, and/or substance use, and
- discrimination because of this - and for age, race, appearance and gender identification as LGBTQ2+.

**People do not choose homelessness.
There are just few alternatives for some.**

Addressing poverty and homelessness this past year

Homelessness Action Week:

NCOH, the Aimee Beaulieu Emergency Shelter, Nelson CARES' Specialized Victim Services, Nelson Community Services' Women's Outreach, Homeless and Prevention workers, the Nelson Women's Centre and women with lived experience teamed up in October for a week of activities to raise awareness about women fleeing violence in Nelson and the crucial role that affordable, safe housing plays for those women and



children trying to re-establish their lives. Touchstones Museum offered a location to display *The Clothesline Project* and Nelson United Church, the Civic Theatre and local movie producer Amy Bohigian donated their time, expertise and venues to enable a public forum and a Thursday-night showing of Bohigian's "*Surviving, Not Thriving*" photo-voice project. Thanks to all, including the Nelson Leafs for the sandbags to secure the clotheslines!

Community Connect Day:



Over 350 people who were finding it difficult to make ends meet visited Wildflower School's gym for an array of free services and goods offered by over 38 service providers and over 30 community volunteers. More than 50 businesses donated items. Dental and eye exams, hair cuts, foot care, medical check-ups and tests, information and referrals were all on hand. Definitely Nelson at its best! 5

11 new units of affordable housing



Ward Street Place's (WSP) Room To Live campaign helped renovate and open seven new units of affordable below-market rental housing units. The four new SRO and three new studio units means 45 rentals are now offered there, all without on-going government operating subsidies.

Nelson CARES also opened four Single-Room Occupancy units for the *Supportive Housing for Independence Program* (SHIP), in partnership with IHA Mental Health, as a separate wing of the new Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter.

New shelter opens:

Nelson's new Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter opened last year, coming up out of the WSP basement and into a beautiful, light-filled house. It offers 17 beds in five rooms, two overflow beds, a lounge, kitchen and a back yard. The space is more suitable and safer for clients and staff, who offer assistance and referrals to those in need of support.



More projects coming...!

- **BC announced \$50 million in 2016 for a Provincial Investment In Affordable Housing Program (PIAH) for low-end-of-market rental units.** Nelson CARES and SHARE Nelson (Kootenay Christian Fellowship) have submitted proposals for low to moderate income rental units:
 - ➔ Nelson CARES hopes to re-develop their Lakeside Project into 39 units - 33 for seniors and 6 for people with disabilities.
 - ➔ SHARE Housing Initiative hopes to develop 42 units for lower-income individuals and couples.
- **The Interior Health Authority has announced a call for 8 detox/recovery beds in West Kootenay/Boundary.**
 - ➔ ANKORS & Nelson CARES have applied for four beds for Nelson.

Homeless Prevention Program helps people find and keep a home

**1 Year. 78 people housed.
262 crises stabilized.**



In one year of working in the new HPP program, Stacey Lock has helped 78 different people find, maintain and sustain their housing. She has stretched the equivalent of 20 rent supplements to help address and stabilize 262 housing crises or potential crises for 48 people, to find housing and keep people housed. The position was created last year through BC Housing and federal government support to Nelson Community Services Centre.

“The people I work with are being released from hospitals, care facilities, incarceration, or are youth transitioning out of care, women fleeing violence or identifying as indigenous. I work with people who are at risk of losing their place or are homeless due to a crisis.”

Her work means more than just providing HPP rent supplements. Taking a “Housing First” approach, she does what it takes to keep people in their housing. This can mean helping people to:

- apply for and secure a disability benefit
- get into social housing
- get onto a senior or family rent supplement
- get onto income assistance, CPP, OAS or GIS
- connect to other services through referrals, and attend case management meetings;
- mediate with landlords
- support them through arbitrations, and
- move out of the community (no affordable housing).

She responds to referrals from both Provincial and community-based services in Nelson.

“The majority of people I work with are single, are women, and live on a disability benefit. The vast majority of them have a mental health condition; some have physical disabilities.

With the LOW vacancy rate (0% for 1 and 2 bedroom units) it is VERY challenging for these folks to compete with others for housing ... and it is always more than they can afford on a disability.

The struggle is real for people that have lost the security of their home. It is easier to help mediate situations to save housing than start from scratch after a crisis and find new existing, vacant AND affordable housing.

**- Homeless
Prevention Worker**

N.C.O.H. AND OUR COMMUNITY THIS PAST YEAR



VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

L-R (top row) Chris Keats, Kenneth Constable, Lucas Davis, Outreach Worker Vanessa Alexander. (bottom row) Henry Native Junior, Michael Donaldson, Shelly Samerson, Bernadette White and Lorna Gould. **PHOTO:** Will Johnson, Nelson Star

Poverty and Modern Times: United Church Calendar Project

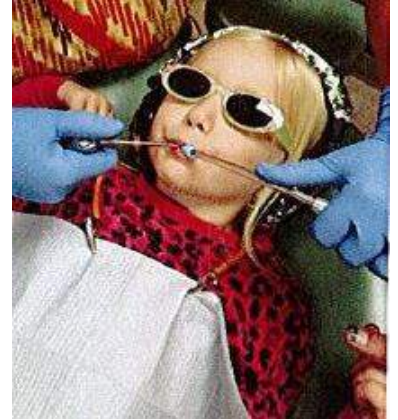
The Nelson United Church's Morgan Gould and its Social Justice Committee undertook a photo calendar project with people who are not often heard from in our community. The photographers presented their photo exhibition and launched the calendar project one October evening, speaking about what their photos represented and how they reflected their lives.

“For me the calendar project and the launch wasn’t about feeding poor people. It was about giving a voice to impoverished persons, hearing their stories and seeing the world through their eyes. It was about those without money asking to be seen, not as “scum”, but as human beings. It was about our similarities and our differences. That event is now etched in my heart – probably for the rest of my life.” - United Church Minister

N.C.O.H. AND OUR COMMUNITY THIS PAST YEAR

The WK Community TEETH Clinic

is a non-profit society offering quality dental care for low income children, families, seniors and others. It is a partnership between dentists, Nelson's Seniors Coordinating Society, Interior Health, dental practitioners, Community First Health Co-op and wonderful funders. This year community support helped them win a \$50,000 Pacific Blue Cross Community Connection Foundation grant!



Homeless Outreach Program helped 103 people

Nelson Community Services Centre's Homeless Outreach Program (HOP) provides supports to help people make the transition from streets to shelter ...and to home.

Demand is high. HOP worker Vanessa Alexander adds to her wait list daily and sometimes has to cap it. It is priority based. People must be 19 years old and have lived in Nelson for at least a year or have significant, historic ties to Nelson. The focus and priority is on local people.

"The ten rent supplements are used to help people secure or maintain their housing. The rent supplements can help a person top up their rent or contribute to a high utility bill or arrears to keep someone housed, or help with a damage deposit to get them a place to live. It is not a long term solution.

"Each person is responsible to work with me towards the goal to either raise their income or lower their cost of living or both, and make up that \$120 rent supplement.

"90% of the people are on some sort of support - from income or disability assistance to ongoing support from Mental Health and Substance Use (MHSU).

- HOP Worker

103

people
were
helped with
housing
services

37

people
obtained
housing
or were
re-housed

90

people
received
other
supports
from HOP

**Ten \$120 monthly
rent supplements
were stretched to help
129 times**

to find or stabilize people in rental housing

N.C.O.H. AND OUR COMMUNITY THIS PAST YEAR



Corrine Younie of Nelson's Age Friendly Communities and Dana Burgess at their office at 709 A Vernon Street.

Seniors' Transportation Coordinator helps make the connections

Seniors have a new friend in Dana Burgess, the regional Seniors' Transportation Coordinator. She can help them link up with transportation services like volunteer driver programs, Handi-Dart, and Rideshare.

Transportation is the key to helping seniors live in their homes for longer, providing an essential services to not just appointments but to shopping and maintaining health through visits to friends, family and community events. Dana can provide information and help seniors throughout the West Kootenay to plan for when they are no longer able to drive. Phone 352-2708 x10 for info. (Nelson CARES).

Workshop training helps people navigate the rental market



Nelson Community Services' Homeless Outreach and Prevention Workers started to offer *Ready to Rent* as a workshop series this past year to homeless, at-risk and low-income people. The workshops help those seeking housing: identify issues that may affect their ability to rent; figure out their housing needs and wants; learn about banking, credit and financing; determine budgets; learn how to introduce themselves as tenants, understand how to complete a rental application and learn about housing rights and responsibilities, including how to get along with landlords, neighbours and room mates. Graduates get a certificate recognized by housing providers and receive on-going support with housing issues.

Jackie Nedelec the local representative of Shoe Bank Canada, has teamed up with NCOH. She has been collecting boots for NCOH's November 19th Community Connect Day this year!





Up and Out of the Margins: **SPEAKING OUT**

REDUCED ACCESS TO SERVICES

Last year the BC Ministry of Social Development and Income Security (MSDSI) reduced the hours that its Nelson regional office was open to just 3 hours a day. NCOH worked to document and communicate the detrimental affects this had on clients and community services. MSDSI re-opened full office

hours earlier this year. NCOH continues to raise the problem of the Ministry's reliance on centralized access to Income Assistance and Disability Benefit services through a computerized application process and phone services for any queries. Wait times on the phone are long and many people lack a reliable phone, computer access or the capacity to navigate the new systems.

CHALLENGING THE OPTICS

Disability Benefit: A \$77 or \$7.25 increase?

There have been no increases in benefits to Persons With Disabilities (PWD) since 2007. Earlier this year the BC government announced a \$77 per month increase. NCOH and hundreds of disability and poverty groups around the province questioned this claim. Why?

At the same time, the government took away bus pass and Special Transportation Subsidy programs and replaced them with another. What used to cost a small once-a-year admin fee mushroomed into a \$52 per month bus pass or \$66 per month Special Transportation payment. Add the still-existing once-a-year administration fee, and the net raise in benefits to people with disabilities ends up being anywhere from \$7.25 to \$21.25 per month. People have been trying to live on \$610 per month on welfare or \$906 per month on a disability benefit for almost 10 years. Over this time costs have risen for food, housing, electricity, and the extra medical expenses people have with a disability. NCOH agrees with groups calling on the BC government to:

- re-instate the old bus pass and Special Transportation Program
- let people on PWD keep the \$77 increase, and
- raise income and disability benefits by October 2016 to reflect the cost of living and then index them to inflation.



Reflections of a Practicum Student

by Kaela Nystrom

Three years ago, I started the Social Service Worker program at Selkirk College. To say it has greatly changed my opinions and ideals would be an understatement. When I moved to Nelson, I walked the streets of this town and saw the brightly painted houses, the mountains views, and the smiles of healthy looking people. I thought of this place as a sort of oasis. Although I still see these things, I now see another side of this town that isn't so apparent or talked about. Here in Nelson, there is homelessness, poverty and people who are desperate and losing hope.

This year I graduate. For my final practicum I have had the opportunity to gain some real-time experience in outreach work and how agencies operate. My practicum was with the Homeless Outreach Program (HOP), run by outreach worker Vanessa Alexander through Nelson Community Services.

I had a number of questions going into my practicum. What resources best support which circumstances? As a service provider, how does one help people find housing in a town with limited options? Now that my practicum is over I definitely feel more knowledgeable, but slightly discouraged. What really shocked me was how little affordable housing is available in Nelson.

Having a safe home is one of the most important things when people are trying to gain stability in their lives. If a person doesn't have housing it makes it that much harder to stay healthy, keep a job, and build connections. Most of the services and programs are full and have a-month-or-more long waiting lists. Seeing people who are in serious need not being able to access programs because they are full is not an easy thing to witness, not to mention frustrating for both client and service provider.

"If a person doesn't have housing, it makes it that much harder to stay healthy, keep a job and build connections."

I'm not sure what the solutions are or what needs to happen. Hopefully my continued career in social work will help me find those answers as well as inspire different ways to create positive change. I do know that being open to and willing to have conversations about issues that do exist is good place to start.

During this practicum I've met many amazing people that go above and beyond their jobs every day - whether it is finding loop holes in services to get people the support they need or taking an extra minute to patiently listen to someone's story. We all have our part to play in creating social change and seeing these people and this kind of commitment in action makes it that much more believable that change for the better is possible.

Street Culture Collaborative stakeholders make six recommendations for action

There is a perception that the number of people who live or survive on Nelson's downtown streets is growing. Claims of public safety concerns and negative impacts on Baker Street businesses have led to various responses - from the City's Anti-Panhandling Bylaw to the formation of a 36-person Street Culture "Collaborative" which involves key sectors like Nelson City Police, local government, community social service providers, the downtown business community and the Interior Health Authority (mental health, substance use, health care and emergency care).

NCOH has made presentations to City Council about the shortcomings and perhaps unintended consequences of the Anti-Panhandling Bylaw, while members of the Collaborative have worked hard to develop alternatives that reflect Nelson as a caring community where everyone can feel welcomed, safe and supported. They have made six recommendations that have been positively supported by a sample group of 'street culture' individuals:

- **Mental Health First Aid Training for everyone:** all stakeholders, street people, service provider and business staff and the general public
- **A Street Outreach Team:** Paid outreach workers would go with trained college students, peers and volunteers - to identify and stabilize health needs, offer supports and make service connections, and work with police and mental health services to provide support to business owners who have challenges with "street people" around their businesses.
- **A Crisis Response Team:** Dedicated first responders to related emergencies
- **Agreements among Service Providers:** So that vulnerable people are prioritized
- **Temporary Work Program:** Supported short-term work options for the 'street culture' including opportunities for businesses to hire and contribute to solutions.
- **One-Stop Drop-In Centre:** Social and health services under one roof with peer support, volunteer and socializing opportunities.

Point-in-Time Count

NELSON, BC April 12/13th , 2016

AT LEAST **116** PEOPLE



were experiencing
some type of
homelessness

At least **34** or **29%**



were without
ANY temporary
or emergency
shelter

In mid-April, 2016 over 50 volunteers hit the streets and local services throughout Nelson over a 24 hour period with surveys and clipboards in hand to produce a “snapshot” of homelessness in Nelson. It was part of a coordinated effort in communities across Canada between January and April, in partnership with the federal government’s Homeless Partnering Strategies Program.

The PiT Count was a voluntary survey to gather information about the extent and nature of homelessness in Nelson, hear about people’s situations, discover what barriers they face in securing safe, permanent housing and record what they think could best help them. Over 660 people were approached. The final tally includes 71 surveys (76 people) and 37 who were observed and counted as homeless - 12 in Sheltered locations and 25 in Unsheltered locations.¹

These pages contain some highlights of the PiT Count findings.



**Some of the
downtown
survey teams:**

L to R:

*Margaret-Anne Murphy,
Sojourn Anisesoliel,
Arle Matheson,
Bernadette White.*

Photo:

Scott Jacob Martens

Totals were arrived at after screening for duplications, inappropriateness (not homeless during that 24 hour period) or “Observed homeless” counts that were not sufficiently substantiated.

14 *That said, a Point-in-Time Count does not identify everyone struggling with homelessness.*

Nelson's Point-in-Time Homeless Count

Of those surveyed,
or at emergency or
transitional housing

91

**PEOPLE WERE FOUND TO BE EXPERIENCING
THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS**

UNSHELTERED

27

EMERGENCY

13

TRANSITIONAL

22

HOSPITAL,
CORRECTIONS,
IN CARE

5

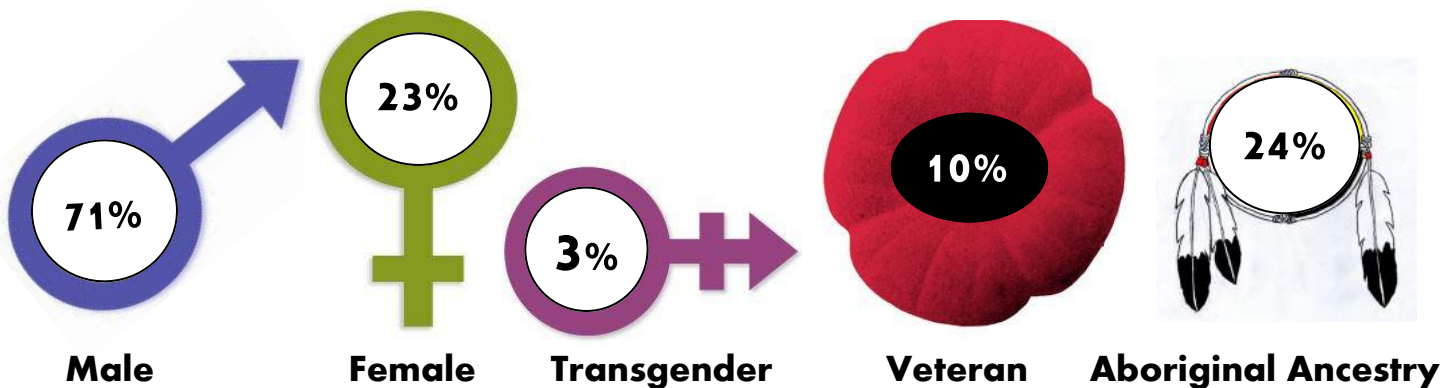
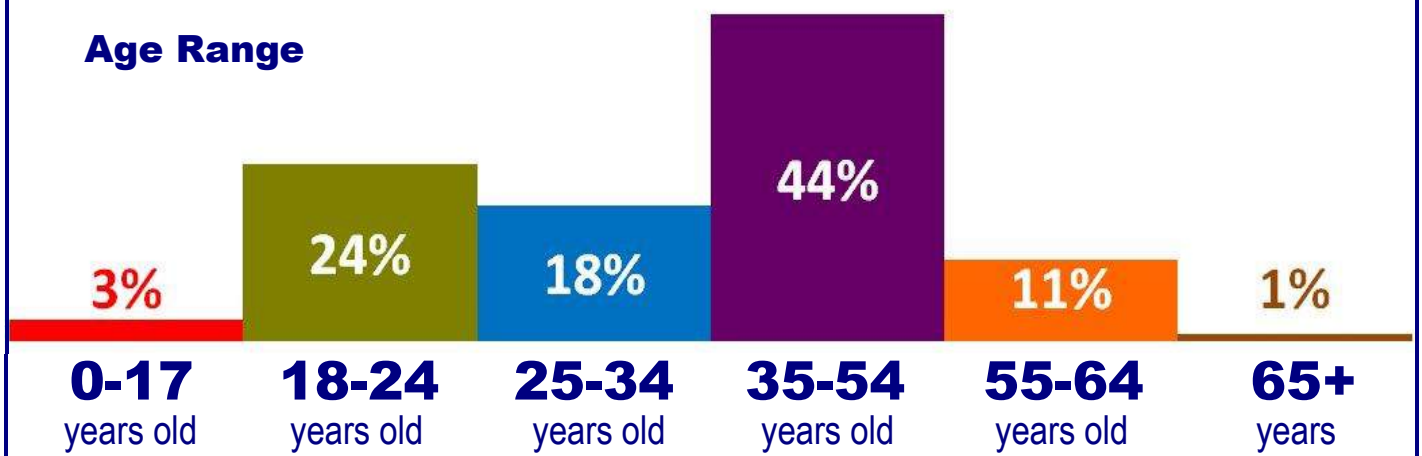
COUCH SURFING /
TEMPORARY

17

25

additional people not surveyed nor counted at shelters or transitional housing were observed or stated that they were experiencing homelessness.

Age Range










Because everyone counts!

Nelson's Point-in-Time Homeless Count



The April 13th Headquarters for the PiT Count at the Salvation Army was busy from 7:00 am - 6pm with volunteers providing kits, registering surveyors, and debriefing them upon their return.

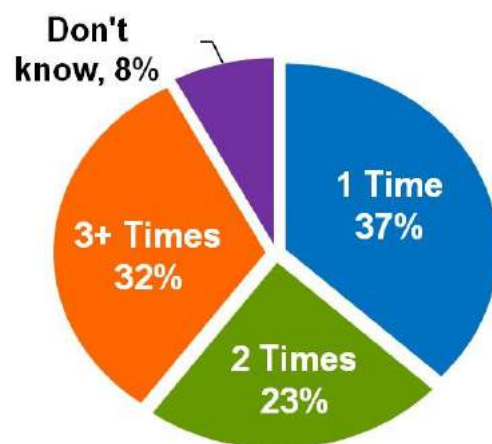
Reasons for Housing Loss

-  **29%** Health reasons: (20) illness, substance use or hospitalization/treatment
-  **26%** Evicted: (18) unable to pay rent or for other reasons
-  **38%** Financial Reasons: (26) job loss, unable to pay rent, rents too high, moved for hope of work income
-  **17%** Family Conflicts /Abuse (12)
-  **9%** Unsafe Housing (6)
-  **3%** Left Child Protection (3)
-  **19%** Other: (13) Left to travel, jail, death in family, lost temporary housing, other



Chronically Homeless

53% (35 people) were homeless for 6 months or more within the past year.



Episodically Homeless

32% (21 people) experienced 3 or more episodes of homelessness within the past year

Nelson's Point-in-Time Homeless Count

57

people indicated that they were part of the

Hidden Homeless

in the past year, "couch-surfing" at someone else's place, in a motel/hotel, other temporary accommodation or institution with no place to live once they left.



Surveyors get ready to hit the streets.

People said they need services for:

36%

Serious/ongoing medical condition: 25

23%

Physical Disability: 16

25%

Learning Disability: 17

38%

Addictions and Substance Use: 26

45%

Mental Illness: 31

14%

Brain Injury: 10

3%

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD): 2

From the Margins...

A mother I surveyed has been looking for six months for housing for her older daughter with a mental disability. She has worked. She needs independent living and affordable housing. "\$400/month including utilities would be affordable," she said.

"I've been living in an apartment for 12 years. My rent is now \$643 / month plus utilities. I live on \$891 /mon. I would like to move."

-Male in his 60s

NOTE: Figures on these two pages and the next are based on those people SURVEYED who responded. Total respondents vary by question.

Nelson's Point-in-Time Homeless Count

13% (9)

identified with the
Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual,
Two-Spirited or
Queer
COMMUNITY

49% (35)

indicated they had
stayed in an
**EMERGENCY
SHELTER**
within the
past year

39% (24)

reported
they were
UNDER 20
when they first
became homeless

From the Margins

*"I can't have boarders to help pay rent.
I have a child, a part-time job, but I'm on
welfare and can't make ends meet."*

*"I've moved four times in four months. I'm
just unable to afford it and there are
limited options."*

Barriers to finding permanent safe housing:*



HOUSING: (77%) Rents too high; not enough affordable housing



INCOME: (72%) low income, no income assistance, discrimination by source of income



Mental Health issues (31%)



Chronic Illness, disabilities (28%)



Housing in poor condition, unsafe (28%)



Addictions / Substance Use



Discrimination (27%)



Family Breakdown, Conflict or Domestic Violence (25%)

47% (30) saw health issues as a barrier.

* Out of 64 respondents



PiT Count surveyors Joe Reiner and Tyanna Nugent **Photo:** Scott Jacob-Martens

Nelson's Point-in-Time Homeless Count

IN THE PAST YEAR



29 people were hospitalized a total of **75 times** between them, totalling **187 days**



33 people used the Emergency Ward, totalling **95 times**



14 people used an ambulance for a total of **23 times**



28 people had run-ins with the police, totalling **208 times**



12 people were in jail a total of **22 times** between them, totalling **495 days**

66% (47)

of surveyed homeless had lived in Nelson for more than one year.

34% (24)

Had lived here less than a year of which

9

hoped to stay, looking for work or with school plans

From the Margins...

I surveyed a woman in her 20's. She is renting a mobile home way up the Slocan Valley since last year because she still can't find an affordable place in Nelson. She has to drive every day to get her partner to work at a pizza place. He has to either hitch home or she has to stay in town all day with a 4.5 year old and a 12 day old baby... OR spend money on gas to pick him up, which they don't have on his single wage.

Here's what 62 people said would help them find and keep permanent, safe housing:

- Employment (26% /16)
- Higher incomes/income assistance (26%/16)
- Affordable rents (27% /17)
- More rental housing available (15% /9)
- Supports: (18%/11) rehab, housing worker, mental health worker, supported housing, outreach worker, phone access, help to settle
- Other: (18% /11) help to find good room-mates; good landlords & housing conditions & health; less stigma; housing for low-income couples

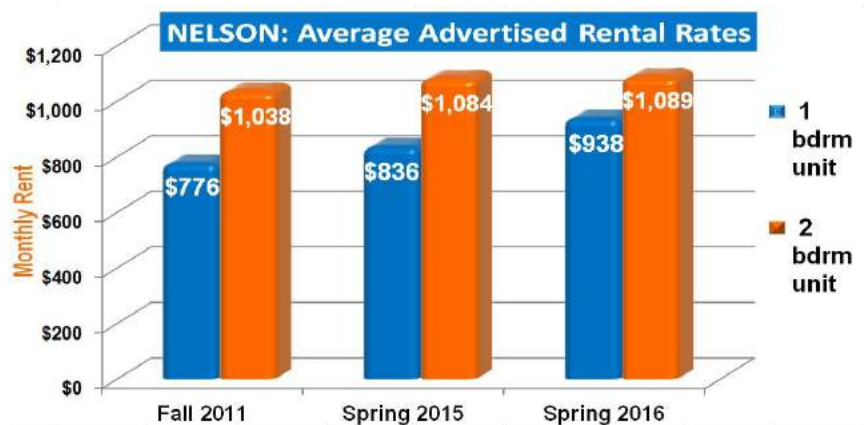
NELSON COMMUNITY INDICATORS & TRENDS

Community Indicators are a standardized method to document the context of local homelessness and monitor changes over time.

Rental Rates:¹

One and Two Bedrooms:

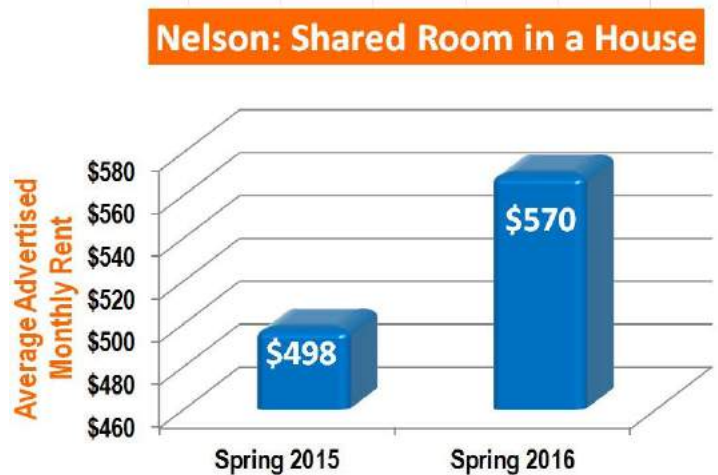
Advertised rates for one-bedroom units shot up 12.2% or by over \$100 in one year. Since 2011 advertised rents have risen 21% for one-bedrooms. Two-bedroom advertised rates rose only slightly.



The sampling was not large enough to establish an advertised rental rate for 3-bedroom units, SRO's or bachelor units, indicating their scarcity on the market.

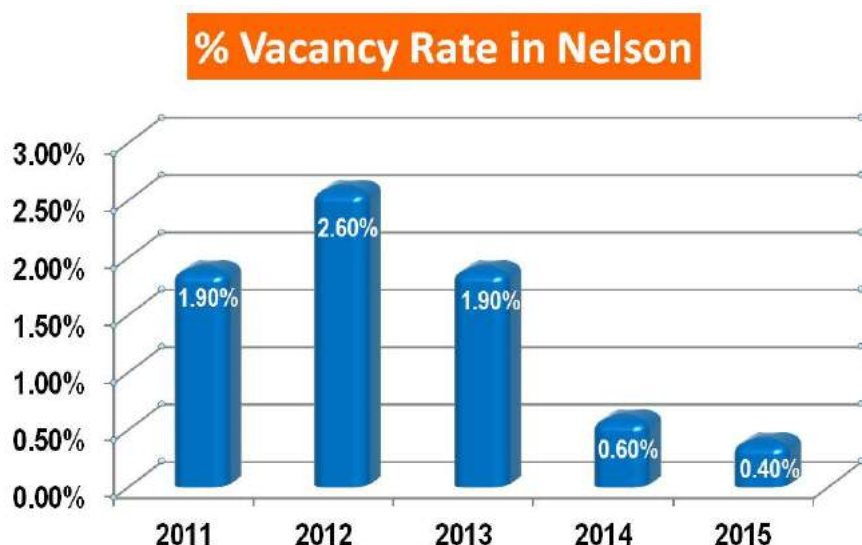
Shared Room in a House:

This was the most advertised type of accommodation during the survey period, possibly reflecting the scarcity of affordable self-contained rentals. Rates jumped by 14.5% in one year.



Vacancy Rates:²

A healthy vacancy rate for availability of affordable rental housing is 3.0%. Nelson's vacancy rate has been consistently below this since 2005, and was the worst reported in BC in 2014 and second-worst in 2015. The rate as of October 2015 for one and two bedroom units was officially 0%.



¹ NCOH Rental Survey May 1-18, 2016 of published and online Nelson Star, Pennywise, Nelson Daily, I Love Nelson, Kajiji, Craig's List, WK Rentals, Coldwell Banker, Discover Nelson and phone calls to landlords..

Rental Market:

POPULATION GROWING: From 2011-2015 Nelson increased its population by 4%, or 431 residents, the highest growth rate in the Columbia Basin/Boundary.³ Nelson created 307 units of single and multi-unit residential housing in this time ⁴.

PRIVATE RENTAL UNITS DECLINING: Nelson has been losing affordable rental housing - from the loss of the Kerr apartment building by fire to problems with aging private and non-profit rental stock. Some landlord owners are choosing to sell now to a more profitable private ownership market. Others are upgrading rental units by combining smaller units into larger ones, or renovating and then increasing rents. Current tenants on fixed incomes worry about their security of tenure and ability to pay the increases. 49.2% of Nelson's housing stock was built before 1960.⁵ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Fall 2015 report surveyed **nine units less** of private purpose-built rental housing in Nelson than counted in 2013.

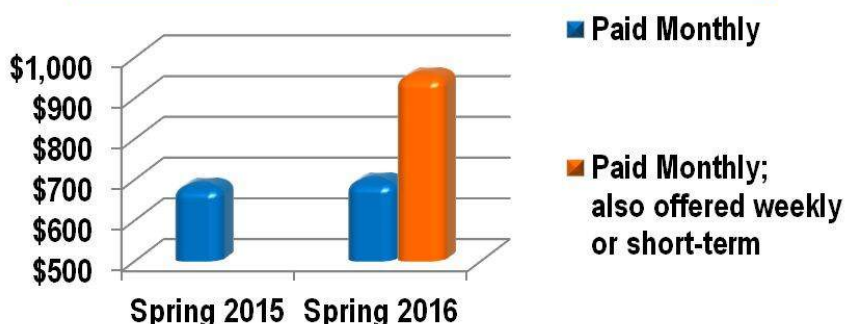
VACATION RENTALS:

There has also been more scrutiny this year of whether vacation rental units affect the housing rental market. The City has undertaken a study that will hopefully determine their impact. It is not known how many of

the 14+ secondary suites built in 2015 ⁶, for example, are serving the monthly or vacation rental market, or are for family members. There is also no current information on absentee ownership of privately-owned houses and condos in Nelson.

From a small sampling available, however, there was a marked difference in advertised rental rates between bachelor units offered on a monthly basis and those also offered for shorter periods of time.¹ Whether this is due to these units being newer housing stock or more spacious is not known.

Average Advertised Bachelor Rental Rates per month



3 Trends Analysis: Population by Age and Gender, Winter 2016, Rural Development Institute

4 City of Nelson Building Permit Statistics (2011-2015)

5 Canada Census, 2011, Dwellings by Period of Construction

6 City of Nelson, 2015 Building Permit Reports, Building Permit Statistics (Jan-Dec).

Non-Market and Affordable Rental Housing

There are a number of programs that assist individuals and families on fixed, low and moderate incomes to find and keep a roof over their head.

Rent Supplements: These offer cash assistance towards monthly rental costs on the private market. They do not work as well in tight housing markets like Nelson, where there are upward pressures on rental rates that lessen the level of assistance of rent supplements. The vacancy rate also presents a challenge to FIND any available rental unit, especially within the moderate rental rate help offered by the programs.

RAP - The Residential Assistance Program helps families with children with household incomes less than \$35,000 who are not on income assistance.

SAFER - Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters helps seniors 60+ years old. It works better for singles than couples with two incomes.

http://bchousing.org/Options/Rental_market has more information.

Other rent supplements offered in Nelson include:

HPP - Homeless Prevention Program (See P. 7),

HOP - Homeless Outreach Program (See P. 9) and a few supplements offered through Nelson CARES in scattered units and in partnership with the Nelson Mental Health Unit: Supported Housing Independence Program (**SHIP**).

FINDINGS:

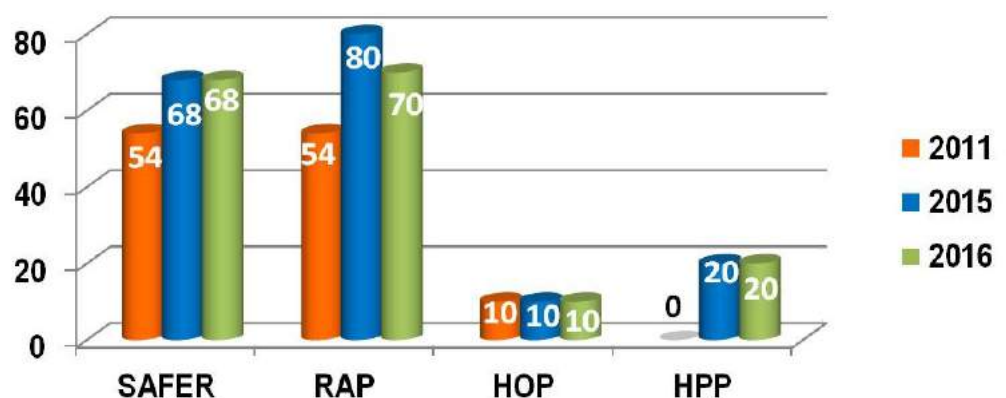
→ **HPP:** Nelson received a significant increase in rent supplements in 2015 with the Homeless Prevention Program.

→ **Less Family RAP Take-up:** The take-up by families

for rent supplements in Nelson decreased by 12.5% since last year. This could be because there were no family-suited rental units available or because price increases have driven low-income families out of Nelson.

→ **No increase in SAFER numbers:** Possibly because no additional, appropriate rental housing for seniors is available, because increased demand is the trend.

of Rent Supplements in Nelson at March 31 each year



NELSON COMMUNITY INDICATORS & TRENDS

Housing First: A stable housing environment can help people address other issues in their life, through a Housing First approach.

Nelson CARES' Ward Street Place and Lakeside Place work with both the HOP and HPP programs, and a **Transitional Assistance Program (TAP)** funded by the federal Homeless Partnering Strategies, to help move people from street to shelter to more permanent housing. Nelson Cares also operates four SRO's with the **Supportive Housing for Independence Program (SHIP)** attached to their Emergency Shelter, in partnership with the Nelson Mental Health Unit.

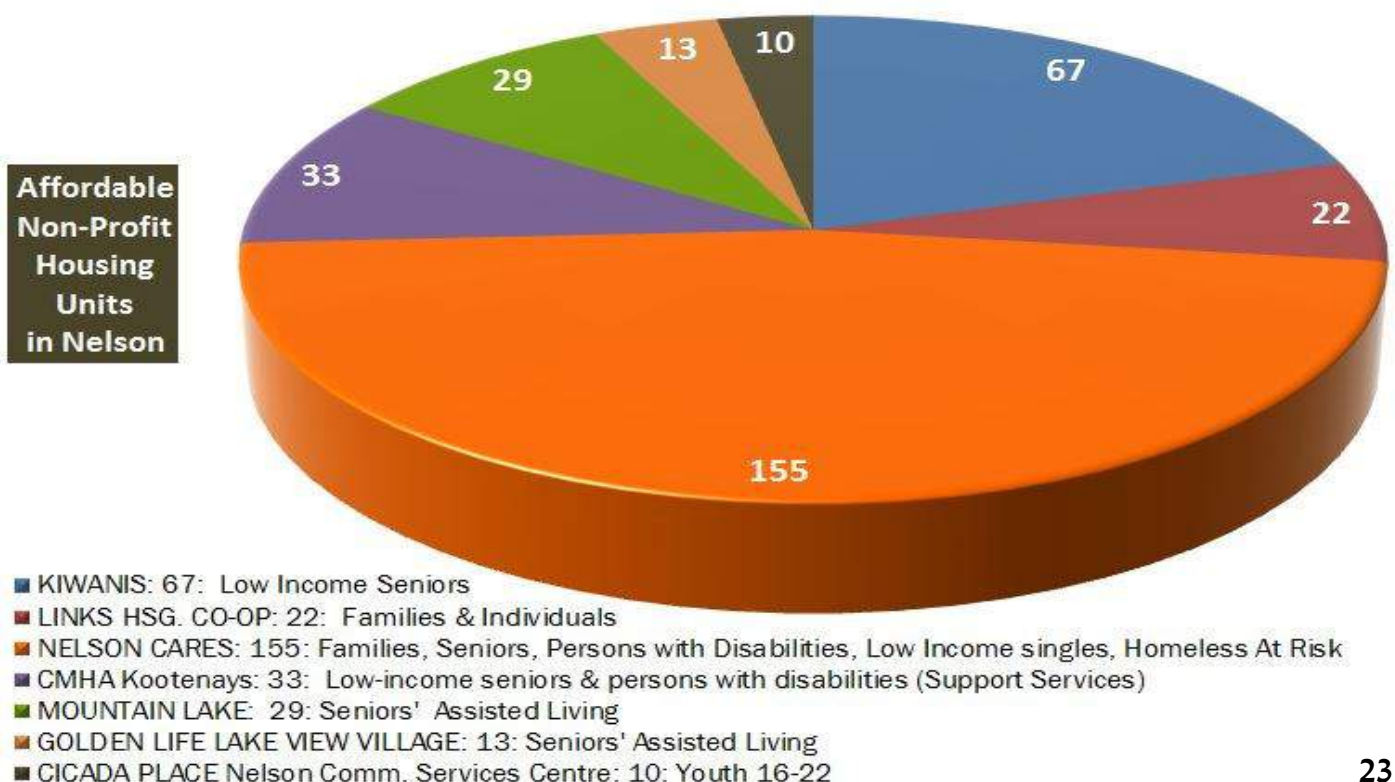
The TAP Program
helped place and support
10 people
in transitional housing

The TAP Program
helped
61 people
to stabilize and keep their housing.

Affordable Housing Options:

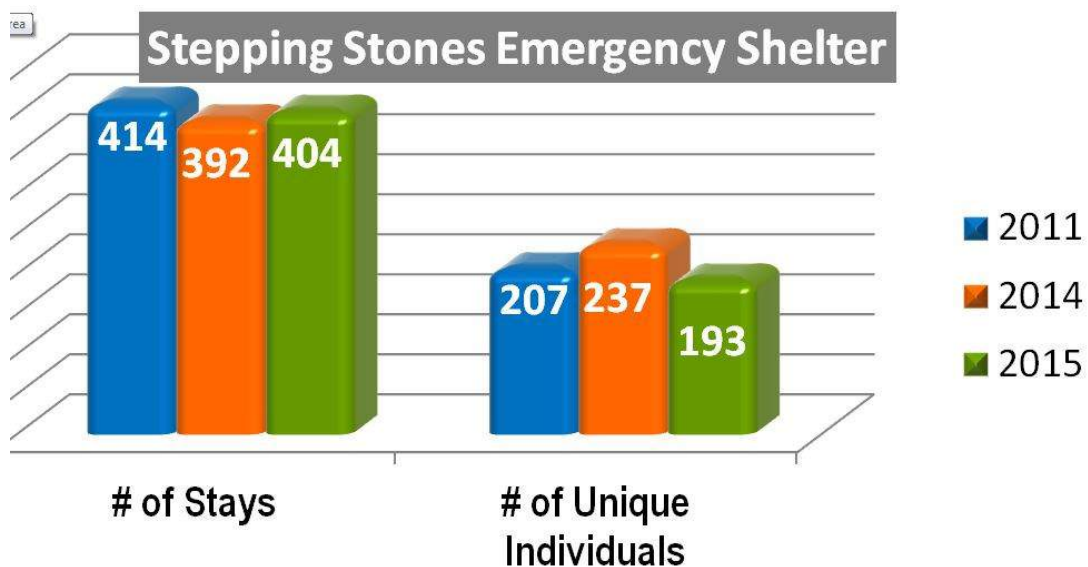
Nelson is fortunate to have a number of affordable housing options that community groups have worked hard to develop over the decades. At least 74 of the 329 units are run without provincial BC Housing assistance.

FINDING: Nelson gained 7 new such units of affordable housing last year, all through Ward Street Place renovations by Nelson CARES.



Stepping Stones Shelter

Stepping Stones for Success Emergency Shelter opened the doors to its new location on Vernon Street in April of 2015. It provides 17 shelter beds for up to 30 days for some of the most marginalized people in our community and region. It also offers two overflow/overnight emergency beds. Priority is given to local people. People who have run out of money to pay for a roof over their heads, who have fled their housing because they don't feel safe, or have been kicked-out of their housing by family, friends or landlords... and have no-where else to turn can usually find short-term shelter here.

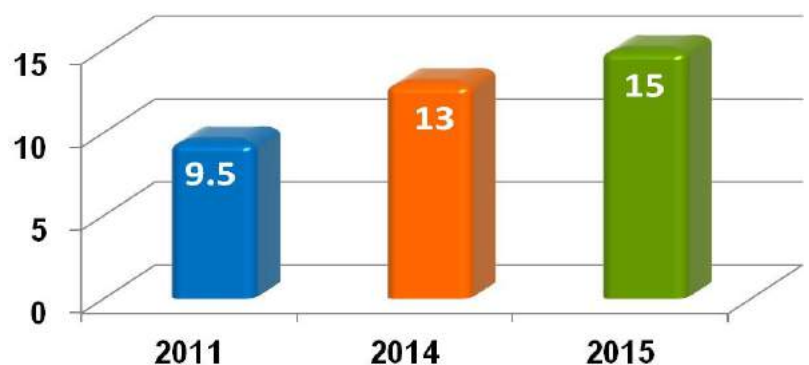


Finding: The number of stays per year rose slightly since last year by 2%, but are down from 2011. The number of unique individuals seeking overnight shelter continues to decrease, down -4.5% from last year and -6.8% from 2011.

Shelter lengths of stay increasing

The average length of stay at Stepping Stones continues to increase, up to 15 days in 2015, up 15.4% from 2014 and 58% since 2011.

Average Stay at Shelter (Days)



This increase, along with the increase in the number of stays this past year may reflect the tighter rental housing market and the difficulty of finding and keeping housing.

NELSON COMMUNITY INDICATORS & TRENDS

Coming up out of a downtown building's dark basement to a new more residential location was a big and welcomed change.

Lower Right: The beautiful back yard of the new emergency shelter, at the rear entrance.

Upper Right: The backyard gazebo, bench and sitting area

Left: Staffers Mike McGaw and Randy Shaak



Stepping Stones by the numbers:

55

people (28%) found housing while staying at Stepping Stones

26%

of people reported being employed

54%

reported they were clients of Mental Health Services

31%

reported they received disability or income assistance

85%

of capacity, or 5,251 bed nights filled

79

The age of the oldest person (a woman) receiving shelter. The average age was between 35-40 years old.

210

people received drop-in assistance and follow-up support

80

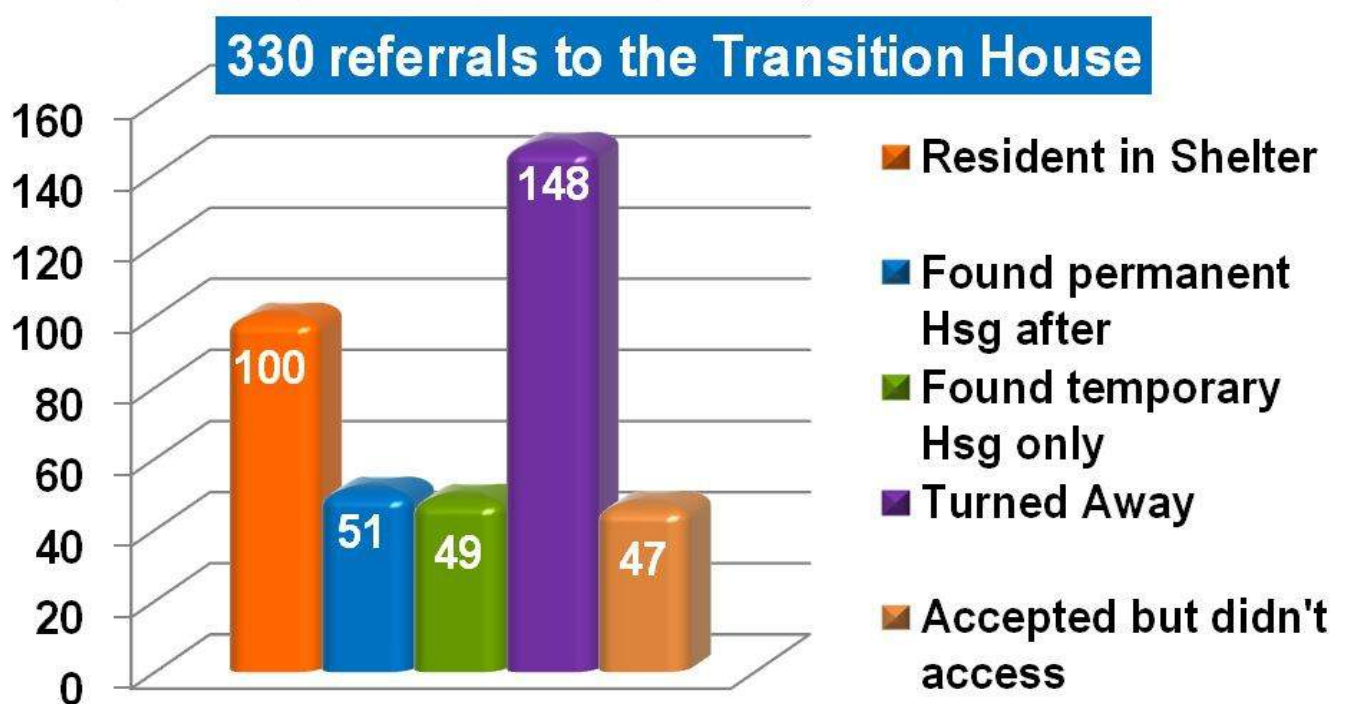
people were turned away, 29 because it was full, and others because they didn't meet program criteria.

42%

of people were locals to the Kootenays 33% were from other parts of B.C.

2015: 20th year for Women's Emergency Shelter

Aimee Beaulieu Transition House is an emergency shelter for physically, emotionally and/or sexually abused women and their children. The staff supports women and children who are at risk of or have experienced violence. The "T" House provides up to 30 days shelter, and access to safe, secure and confidential information and supports for decision-making, referrals to other services and links to affordable housing.



45%

Increase in **number of people sheltered** over last year, from 69 to 100, including 63 women and 37 children.

155%

Increase in the number of people **finding permanent housing** once they left the shelter - up from 20 to 51 people, including 26 women and 25 children

2%

Increase in the people **finding only temporary housing** when they left, including 37 women and 12 children

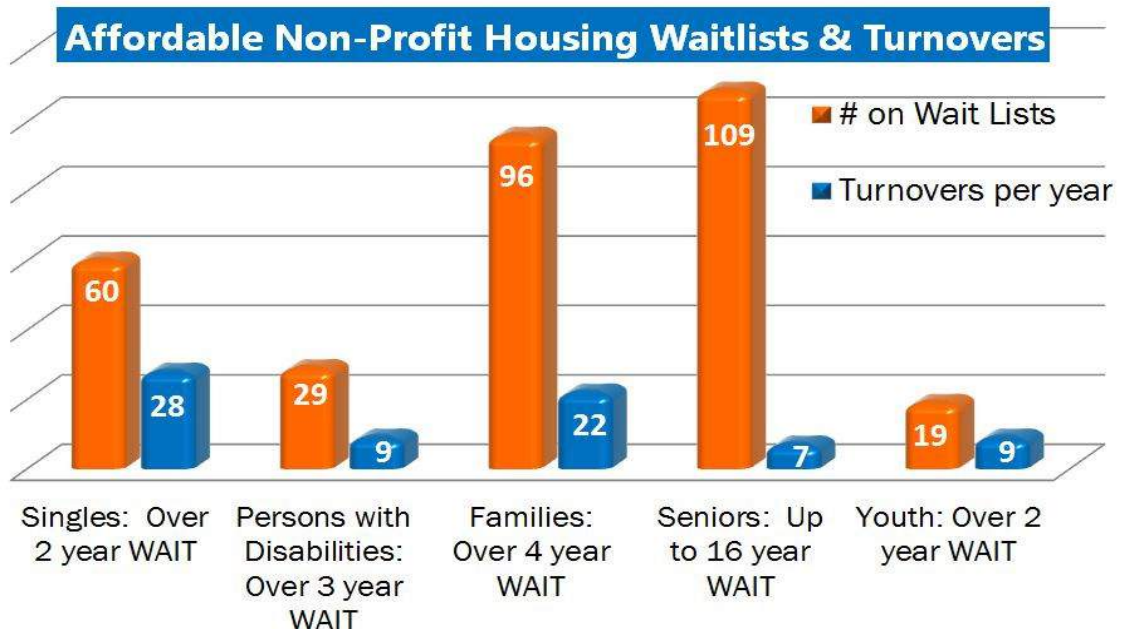
25%

Increase in people (108 women, 40 children) **turned away** (at capacity or not the appropriate service), up from 118 in 2014.

Poverty is the most significant barrier to housing that women face when they leave violence. Affordable housing plays a crucial role.

Wait Lists for Affordable Housing remain long

Wait lists remain long for affordable housing, despite the 329 units offered in the non-profit sector. Demand is highest for appropriate and affordable seniors housing, although many families have given up hope of finding affordable housing in Nelson and are putting pressure on surrounding rural housing markets.



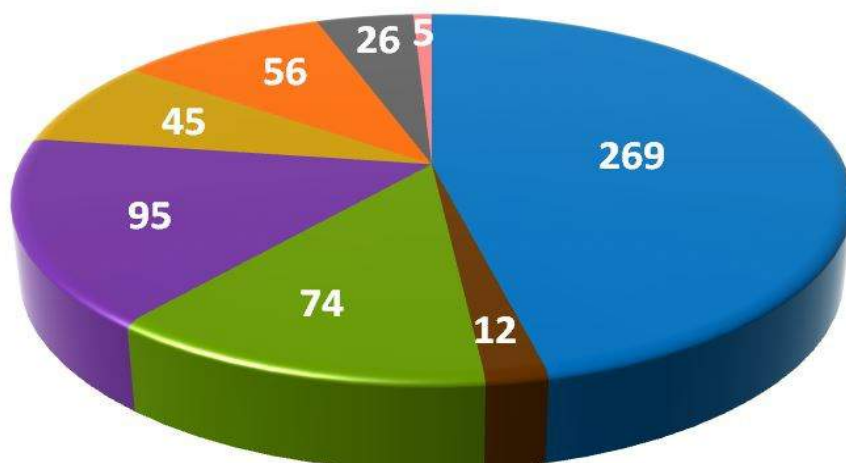
Households continue to struggle on low incomes

13% of households using the Salvation Army Food Bank in March 2016 reported employment as their primary source of income, with another 2% on EI.

72% of households reported government fixed incomes (disability benefits, welfare or Old Age Pension) as their primary source.

8% had no income.

Salvation Army Food Bank Users' Primary Sources of Income: March 2016



- Disability Benefits: 46%
- Employment Insurance: 2%
- Employment: 13%
- Income Assistance: 16%
- NO income: 8%
- Old Age Pension: 10%
- Other income: 4%
- Student Loan/Scholar.: 1%

The increased cost of living

B.C.'s Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased 1.8% from April 2015 to April 2016. It has increased 10.7% since 2007, the last time income and disability assistance rates were really raised. Costs for the basic items to survive have increased at an even higher rate over the years.

24.5%

of Nelsonites make under \$15,000 / year ²

\$21,736

Annual minimum wage

\$37,520

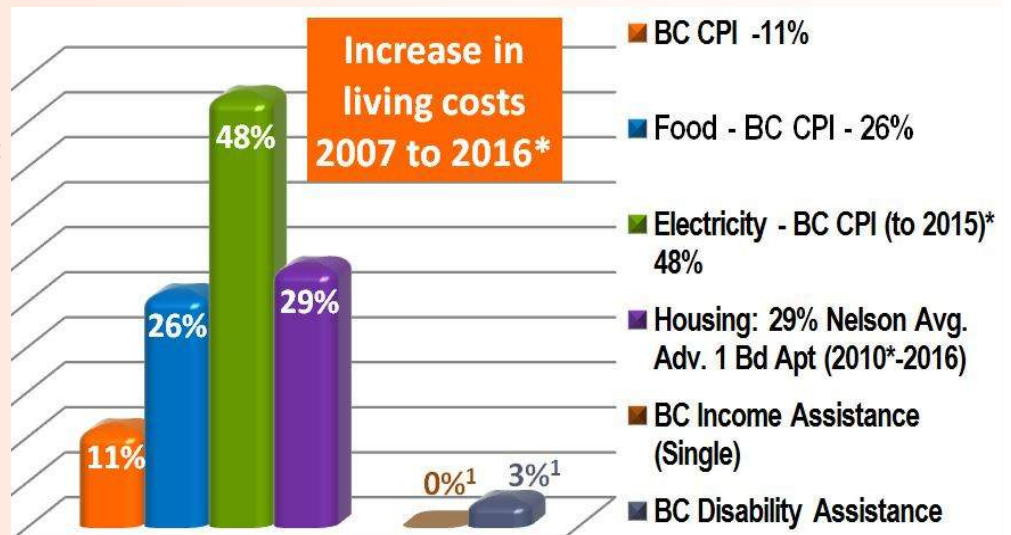
Income needed to pay 30% of it for an average-priced 1 Bedroom Rental in Nelson (2016)

46.8%

Of Nelson renters pay more than 30% of their income for housing.³

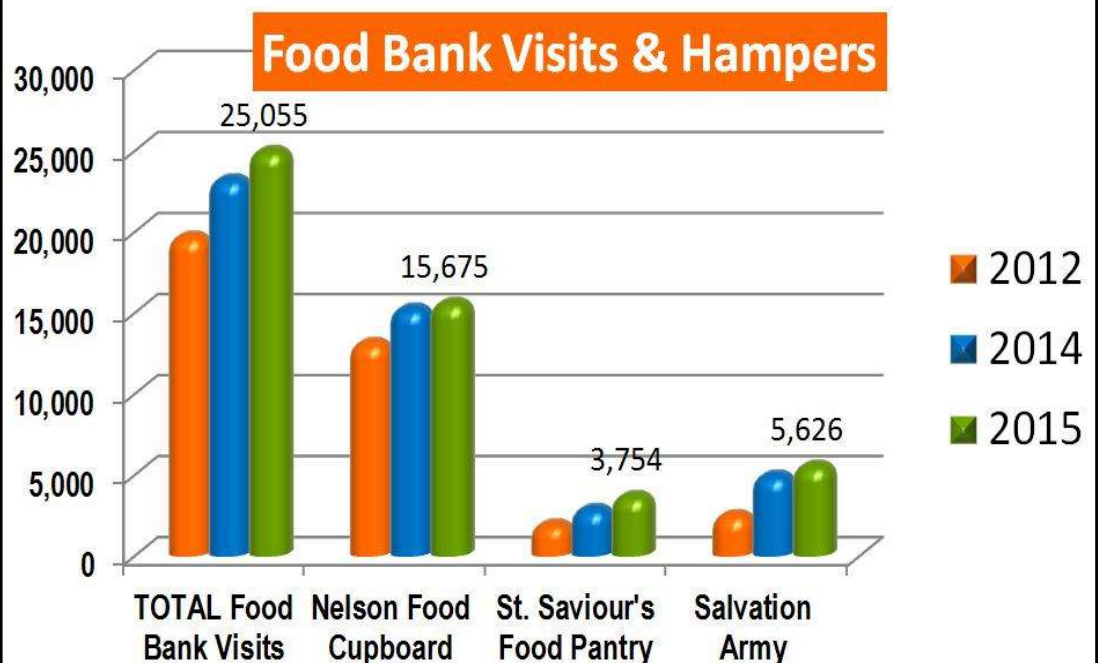
26.1%

of children in the RDCK live below the Low-Income cut-off, a measurement of poverty²



Local food services try to meet increased demand

Nelson food banks saw an overall 7.5% increase in people using their services from 2014 to 2015 and a steep 27% increase in consumer demand since 2012. Many services have a "Locals Only" or "Locals First" policy at times now.



¹ BC announced a \$77 "increase" in disability benefits this year, but many argue this was only a \$7.25 to \$21.25 increase because of the bus pass and Transportation Program claw back. See P. 11.

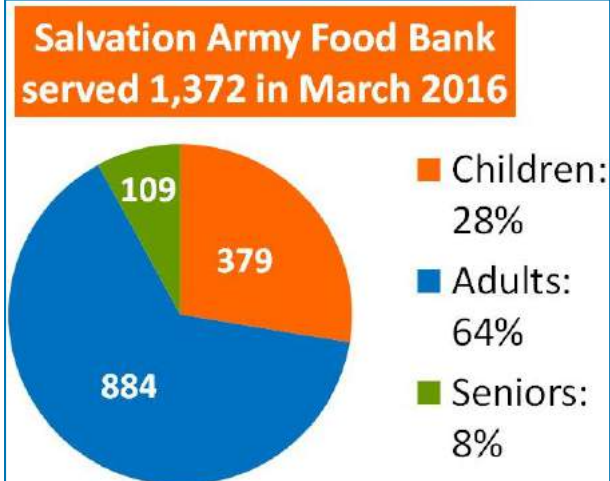
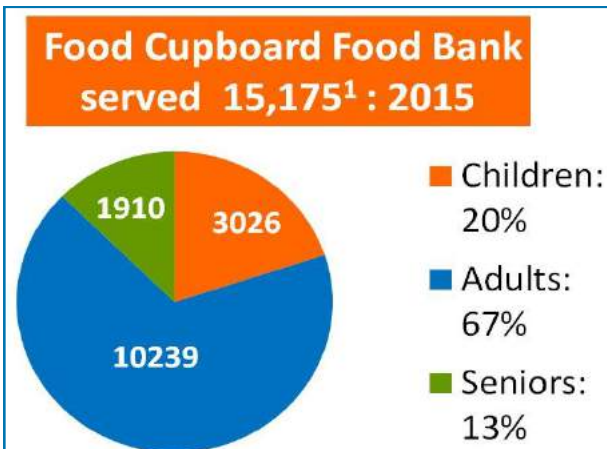
² 2013 Taxfiler information, and ³ 2011 Canada Census, Statistics Canada

NELSON COMMUNITY INDICATORS & TRENDS

Our Daily Bread (ODB) of the Kootenay Christian Fellowship reported the number of meals they served this past year dropped slightly, partly because some of the people they work with had found work, and also because the Salvation Army has extended the hours of their meal service.



The Nelson Food Cupboard reported that the number of customers who used their food bank increased by 8% over the same four month period as last year.



In March 2016 the Salvation Army Food Bank served:

114

Aboriginal people

149

Single-parent families

22

Post-Secondary Students

From the Margins...

...and they keep telling me I don't know how to budget.

- A BC disability assistance recipient

A single mother suffered a debilitating injury, lost her job and had a devastating income reduction. Divorce and insecure housing followed. Mental health issues set in.

- Food program worker

"I have housing for now but it isn't 'permanent'. I can barely afford it. I use a lot of my food money to pay rent. I have to move frequently."

"I live 30 minutes out of town because I couldn't find anything affordable in town. I still need a roommate to make rent, but that seems to go month to month and it's very insecure."

¹ Figure does not include 500 Food Hampers

² Hunger Count 2016 Survey, Food Banks Canada



AN OPEN LETTER FROM CO-CHAIRS

Phyllis Nash and Cheryl Dowden
of the Nelson Committee on Homelessness

Dear Citizens of Nelson:

The Nelson Committee on Homelessness (NCOH) is a very active group that meets monthly to share information and develop strategies to address issues of those experiencing homelessness in our community. As a federal “Designated Community” we recommend how the federal grant from their Homelessness Partnering Strategy is directed. Membership includes service-providing agencies, faith communities, government agencies and concerned citizens.

The report card this year highlights the findings from a Point-in-Time Count of homeless individuals in Nelson that took place in mid-April and the Nelson services which help address some of the issues faced by this population. The number of homeless individuals counted surprised all of us. In many ways, it is only an indication of the depth of homelessness in Nelson as we did not count the hidden homeless (primarily youth and women) or those at risk of becoming homeless as accommodation becomes scarcer and more costly.

Nelson has a number of excellent programs addressing homelessness and we need to support and celebrate them. Certainly the existing and new affordable housing units, the Homeless Prevention Program, the Homeless Outreach Program, Stepping Stones, the Transitional Assistance Program, the support services of the Salvation Army, services to seniors, the lunch program at Our Daily Bread and the food programs at Nelson Food Cupboard and St. Saviour’s Food Pantry are all helping to alleviate some of the difficulties faced by the homeless population - but they have not been able to end homelessness in our community. There are many other services offered by ANKORS, Kootenay Kids, Nelson Community Services, and Nelson CARES that support individuals experiencing one form or another of homelessness. Yet, we still have a significant need to address the near 0% vacancy rate and the ever-increasing rental rates.

We also need to recognize that we are losing local housing. Some of the older affordable housing in Nelson is deteriorating and becoming uninhabitable. These units will need to be rebuilt or replaced. Others are
30 being upgraded and becoming unaffordable.

Homelessness is not just a local problem. It is being experienced across the country and certainly in every community in the province. British Columbia is gearing up for a provincial election in May 2017. As the government sets its priorities on resource development, we remain the province with the highest level of child poverty in Canada. We also experience the largest income gap between the bottom 20% of earners and the top 20%. ¹ We continue to be the only province in Canada without a poverty reduction plan.

The Provincial budget in February announced a slight increase in disability benefits by \$77 per month. It was the first increase in nine years. It soon became evident that this increase replaced the transportation subsidies, a total real increase of only \$7.25 to \$21.25 per month for many individuals with a disability. Social Assistance rates have remained the same for the past nine years, yet costs of housing, food and electricity have increased dramatically since then.

The Provincial Investment in Affordable Housing (PIAH) is making \$50 million available this year to develop low-end-of-market rental units. Given the cost of land and construction it will only develop a few projects. Definitely this will be a start to the creation of more rental housing stock but it will not address the fact that many renters do not have adequate funds to pay the rents that are necessary without subsidy to cover operating costs. Many others (disabled and mentally ill for example) will not be able to maintain this housing without significant supplementation and personal support.

So what are we asking you to do?

- ➔ Become educated on the issues. They are complex and there are not simple answers.
- ➔ It is important that the citizens of Nelson and British Columbia let our governments know that we are not doing enough to address homelessness and poverty in this province.
- ➔ Write your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and let them know that affordable housing is a priority in addressing poverty. Copy the Premier.
- ➔ Support compassionate approaches to assisting those who are experiencing homelessness
- ➔ Support local housing initiatives

NCOH challenges all readers of this report card to take action to support the elimination of homelessness in our community.

¹ www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/releases/info2012/in1204.pdf

The Nelson Committee on Homelessness

is a coalition of citizens and stakeholders dedicated to long-term solutions to homelessness, housing and poverty in Nelson, BC.

We invite you to learn more about homelessness, volunteer at one of our upcoming events this year or volunteer with one of the many local community groups working to address homelessness.

Share local facts on homelessness and poverty with your family, friends, neighbours and co-workers. **Pass this Report Card on to them.**

What's ahead this year?

NEWS! NCOH has received word that our federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) funding will be increased this year. Stay tuned for more news!

HOMELESSNESS ACTION WEEK: October 9th to 15th

COMMUNITY CONNECT DAY: Saturday, November 19, Central School Gym

Acknowledgements:

The Annual Report Card is made possible by many people. Sincere thanks go to all the community members who shared their stories and to the local organizations who contributed their annual statistics, stories, photos and information.

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facebook.

This report is available for download at www.nelsoncares.ca

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