

2nd Report
on the
Homeless
in
Tri-Cities

October 2006 – March 2007

Photo was taken by one of our workers at the entrance to an abandoned underground concrete structure in Coquitlam, occupied by the homeless. The graffiti reads, Welcome to Hell.

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Introduction

Homelessness continues to be a very visible and disturbing burden to our culture. Since the publishing of our first report on this issue, this author has been inundated by requests for meetings with various community groups, church groups, task forces, and other interested organizations wishing to help solve this problem. The questions are generally the same:

Why is this happening?

How can we help?

To all it seems inequitable that in an affluent society, we have people among us those that do not have a stable home. As a culture, we feel a degree of guilt around this fact, and as stated in the earlier report, we generally find the whole thing unpalatable. Add to that, the apparent disturbing trend of a steady increase in the homeless population in the face a growing economy and a very positive employment environment. The question which needs to be answered is: Why is this phenomenon happening in the midst of all this affluence?

This report will add to the statistical data gathered during the course of the first 6 month project, completed in September 2006 and draw some comparison data between spring/summer 2006 and fall/winter 2006-2007. As in the first report there will be some anecdotal history and experience of some of the homeless in the Tri-Cities area. It should be noted that information gathered and conclusions drawn will only be relevant to the subject area. The experience and data in other regions of the province may be different from our experience and data here in Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody. Both reports will be made available in PDF format at our website, www.hopeforfreedom.org., the first week of May 2007.

It is our hope that this information will be used positively, by our society in general and all of the various levels of government, its agencies and para-agencies, to learn from this community what works best in terms of connecting with the homeless population and providing housing advocacy for their community. This report will provide data make some observations and draw some conclusions, and it will make recommendations. This author believes that with a year's worth of data and contact with the homeless sub-culture in the Tri-Cities, we can credibly make some specific recommendations that may be helpful in dealing with homelessness in this region. Below is a breakdown of the start and finish of how, why and what was learned as we attempted to make a difference in the lives of the homeless population of the Tri-Cities. Definitions are provided at the beginning of each report breakdown in order to eliminate any misunderstanding and make clear what we were attempting to describe and achieve.

Some of the writing and descriptions below are a carryover or "boiler plate" from our last report, it did not seem necessary to re-write some of the data descriptions. Even though the data had changed from our first report written in October of 2006, the definitions remained the same.

Impetus – a force that moves something along.

In July of 2006 our organization, Hope for Freedom Society (herein called, HFFS), was approached by a representative of B.C. Housing, it was known to them that HFFS was engaged in a six month pilot project among the homeless, and it was their wish to continue this type of outreach in the subject region. The agenda for that meeting centred around the desire of B.C. housing to move forward with outreach and advocacy for at least six months following September 30th, 2006.

After that meeting, B.C. Housing forwarded a contract, which was signed by all parties, and allowed us to continue our work until at least March 31st, 2007. Subsequent to that agreement, B.C. Housing publicly announced their intent to continue this type of homeless outreach support for a further two years. A contract for that additional initiative is pending.

Purpose – *that which is set before, as an object to be reached or accomplished.*

The principle purpose of this initiative was to be the same as our original agreement with the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. It was to contact, establish relationship, trust, and work toward connecting homeless persons to official and un-official resources, with the expressed purpose of changing the trajectory of the existing homeless population of Tri-Cities to a more positive and acceptable living arrangement, one person at a time.

The secondary purpose was to gather additional statistical data from the homeless population, which could be added to the data from first six month project, and further used to track trends, demographics, and a hard census. We would then have a full year's worth of information and other facts which could be interpreted and used to draw conclusions and make recommendations that may be helpful in mitigating this unfortunate trend in our region. It was not our collective desire to make homelessness comfortable for those that find themselves in this life style, but to provide and facilitate resources to help the homeless find a way to home.

Method – *a systematic way of doing or accomplishing something.*

The methods used to achieve our goals and purposes were similar to the methods described in our first report, last September with some subtle differences. HFFS continued to collect data from our encounters and tabulate this information in a format that will allow us to analyze and break-down what we have learned. However, we added to the data we were collecting and we were more deliberate in our attempts to help people get some sort of housing. We basically spent more time with fewer clients in order to increase our success ratio.

The workers used to accomplish the above task, was reduced from 4 part time workers (25 hours/week) to 2 full time workers (40 hours/week). We believed that a "beachhead" was established by our "shock troops" in the first six month, and we could effectively reduce our workers without reducing service. I believe our results will show that we were successful in that strategy.

Our preconceived ideas of homeless concentrations appeared to be very accurate, it was quickly verified that in front of City hall on Shaughnessy Street in Port Coquitlam was "ground zero". By far, the majority of the total homeless population reside in a 1 Kilometre radius from that spot.

We continued to attempt to effectively cover all of the region and the "hot spots" in all 3 cities. However, the need for daily shifts, in order to cover all times of the day, was discontinued during most of this second six month period. During the first pilot study enough geographic and sociological information was gathered and we were able to understand those trends. This allowed the workers to have a more focussed schedule at times and places where the homeless were concentrated. Tracking "camps" was made a little easier as the winter weather reduced the number of "camps". It appeared that some of this population found other places to live during the cold and wet weather.

One of the things our workers added to their tasks was homelessness prevention. Because of the reputation gained in the first six month period we found our selves dealing with people who were at risk of homelessness. The outreach phone number was out and about on many bulletin boards throughout the region and people not yet homeless, but a great risk, have been calling

for help. The recent closing of the Wild Duck Inn, was one of those times when we were called on to try and prevent homelessness. Throughout the last six months some success was made with those at risk.

As was mentioned earlier, we were more deliberate with our contacts and we asked more questions in our attempt to help these people. Our workers continued to open new files and track those already in our system from our initial project. This process of assessing client needs and barriers included the following revised list:

Needs – *things that could be identified as immediate and critical to the individual's well being outside of homelessness.*

- medical care
- clothing
- clean water
- resource information
- access to resources
- dental care
- footwear
- personal hygiene products
- empathy and encouragement
- nutritional needs

Barriers – *beliefs and conditions which contributed to and impaired an individual's ability to find suitable residency.*

- substance abuse
- mental illness
- no financial resources
- familial abuse
- concurrent disorders
- arrest warrants
- urban myth

The above were identified and logged, and based on client willingness; efforts were made to help individuals overcome these needs and barriers. The strategy for accomplishing this task remained the same as in our first six month project, and that was, to connect with other agencies and resources, such as, but not limited to: drug and alcohol recovery; Mental Health services; dry stable housing through available housing or shelters; BC Employment and Assistance offices; access to free showers and/or laundry services. Because of the familiarity gained from being out there this last year, we were able to “fast track” some of the resources necessary to help our clients. For that we are truly grateful.

The advocacy part of our work was “kicked up at notch” during this last six month period, as we learned and understood some of the systems connected to available resources. This allowed our workers to better serve the homeless and facilitate a quicker turn around of assistance. In the last month of the project a concerted effort was made to count all the homeless population in the Tri-Cities area. Achieving a credible hard census was one of the more difficult tasks, as some of the homeless could be seen but not approached. The census was achieved by recording physical descriptions, testimony of other homeless individuals about the existence of un-contacted persons, and other means of identifying people from afar. This data was then compared between workers to eliminate duplication.

Data & Information – *collection of facts from which conclusions can be drawn.*

Data on its own has no meaning, only when interpreted by some kind of processing does it take on meaning and become information.

The following data is based on the personal and repetitive contacts made with 116 individual homeless people in the Tri-Cities area. Personal files were opened for each of the individuals contacted and hard data was collected on each person during the course of this six month project. 49 files were transferred from our initial project during April through September 2006

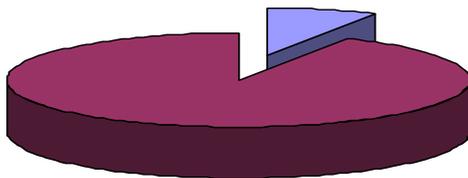
and 67 new files were opened during October 2006 through March 2007. Over the course of 25 weeks, 1861 man hours were spent on 1275 individual encounters with the homeless. From these repetitive and personal contacts information was collected and recorded in each client's personal file. It is from this information we were able to create the charts and graphs for the data section of this report. It was our desire that all of the data reported would be collected and processed in the most scientific way possible, and would survive audit.

Some of the percentages reported below will add up to more than 100%, this is due to the fact that most individuals contacted had more than one barrier and more than one homeless living arrangement. That resulted in overlap in most of the barriers we tracked.

Where do they live?

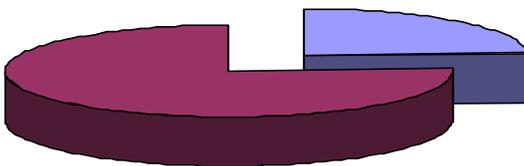
We brought forward the same definitions of homelessness we identified last year. Below are some of the defined forms we encountered. We broke down the various places homelessness occurred in the following manner and calculated the percentages of the total homeless population in those places. There is overlap in these percentages because of client movement from one form of homelessness to another during the course of our study.

Abandoned Buildings 7.8%



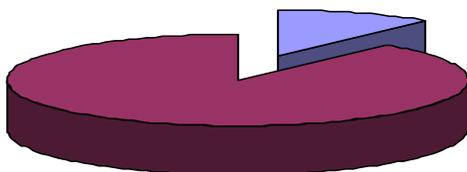
This statistic rose by 3.8% over our 2006 spring and summer data. This is likely because abandoned building would make a more attractive shelter during the cold and wet winter months. Abandoned structures continue to be a regular place for homeless to break-in and occupy.

Homeless Camps 24.1%



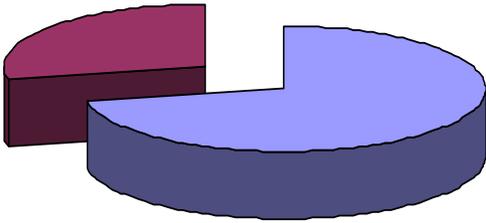
This statistic doubled from 12% recorded during the 2006 spring and summer data. This appears partly due to an increase in people moving between the various degrees of homelessness. There appeared to be more camps but less time spent in them. We also, added those in parks, woods and river into this category.

Crack Shacks 11.2%



This stat went down by 5% since our last data collection. The change is negligible in our opinion. Certainly crack cocaine use has not decreased.

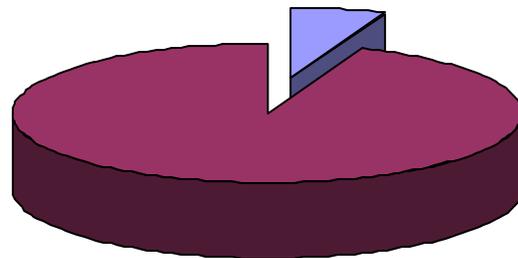
Roaming 71.6%



This was still by far the largest category discovered by our study and it went up by a surprising 19%. It is obvious that large parts of the Tri-Cities homeless population are on the move, on a regular basis. The places they go continue to be those mentioned in this section and others not mentioned like “couch surfing”, short stints with family, shelters, porches, doorways, etc.

This statistic represents no appreciable change from Spring and Summer 2006. Vehicles are relatively short-term places to live and sleep, with some exceptions.

Vehicles 6.0%



Where are they from?

In our first six month period we asked the question: Where was your last permanent address? It became clear after studying the results that the numbers could have been misleading, as the question asked was not specific enough. The only criticism we received from our last report centred around this question. We reframed the question in this last six month period and added questions try and get more accurate information. We asked questions like:

Where do you call home?

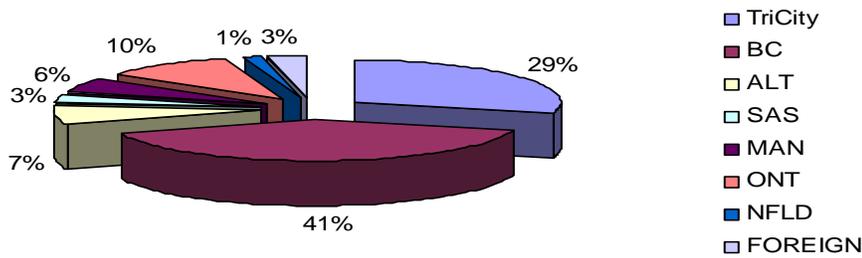
What is your place of origin?

How long have you lived in the Tri-Cities?

The data changed fairly dramatically as a result of this different approach. This whole question of origin will always be a difficult stat to collect as sometimes the answers received change, based on how the client was queried.

Because this part of the data collection is problematic, we will constantly be looking for ways to tighten up this area. Over this next year an attempt will be made to come up with new ways and new questions to ask in an effort to improve accuracy. It is obvious to us and all of the other outreach programs out there, that most “city fathers” believe that the homeless in their region come from somewhere else. We will continue to be as accurate as possible with this sensitive question.

Where are they from?

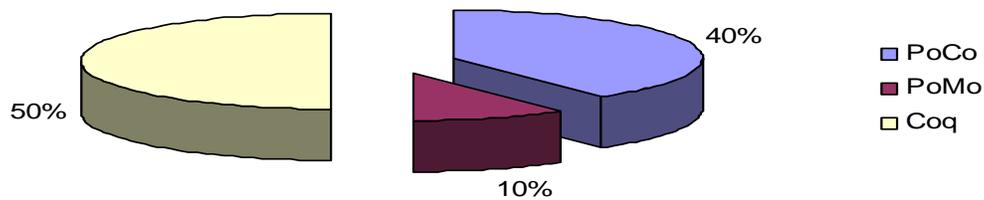


Of all the people polled, 29% claimed that their last permanent address was within the Tri-Cities area.

41% claimed to come from outside the Tri-Cities region, but still in B.C. 27% claimed to be from other parts of Canada, and 3% were foreign.

The individuals claiming to be from inside the Tri-Cities were distributed through the subject region as follows:

Where did they come from within the Tri-Cities

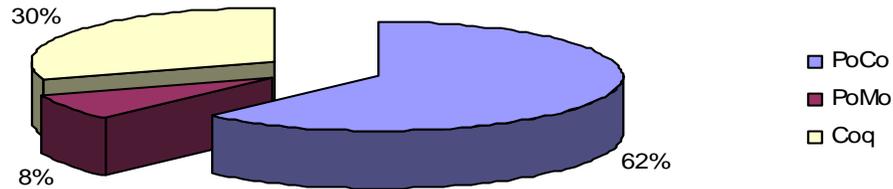


The above is an interesting statistic because one half of the homeless who claim to be from this region, come from Coquitlam. As you will see below, that is not how they are distributed now. One plausible explanation is that some of the present homeless used to reside at Riverview and they had been there long enough to call Coquitlam home. But once they were sent from Riverview, they gravitated to Port Coquitlam area, which has been talked about before as a “perfect” place to be homeless.

Where are they now in the Tri-Cities?

From the census taken during this project, according to the method mentioned above, it is estimated that there are 162 homeless individuals in the Tri-Cities area, percentage error being about 8 percent. Our count suggests that there were fewer homeless in the Tri-Cities than during the last spring and summer when we counted 177. Based on this information, the homeless are distributed in entire region as follows:

Where are they now in the Tri-Cities



Basically, during the fall and winter there some rather interesting changes in the distribution of homelessness in the Tri-Cities region. The homelessness in Coquitlam increased by 14%, the increase in Port Moody doubled for 4% to 8% and Port Coquitlam reduced by 18%. This may be due our workers getting a better handle on where homelessness exists in this area, or a fall/winter re-distribution of this category because of seasonal factors. We are leaning toward the latter in this assessment. This is a positive trend for the City of Port Coquitlam, but a negative trend for the other two cities in this region. We will see how this all plays out over the next year.

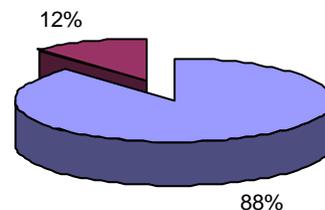
What are their Barriers?

The following are some of the continuing challenges faced by the clients we connected with during our study over this last fall and winter. These barriers listed are not all of the beliefs and conditions that contributed to their homelessness, but they are the main issues we observed during the duration of this project. Most clients had more than one barrier, so there will be overlap in the percentage totals. One of the most significant data overlaps occurred with clients that had both mental illnesses and drug addictions as their main barriers. We did not specifically record other barrier overlaps as they did not appear critical enough to include. Below are some of the conditions that had the largest impact on our client's inability to acquire and sustain permanent housing.

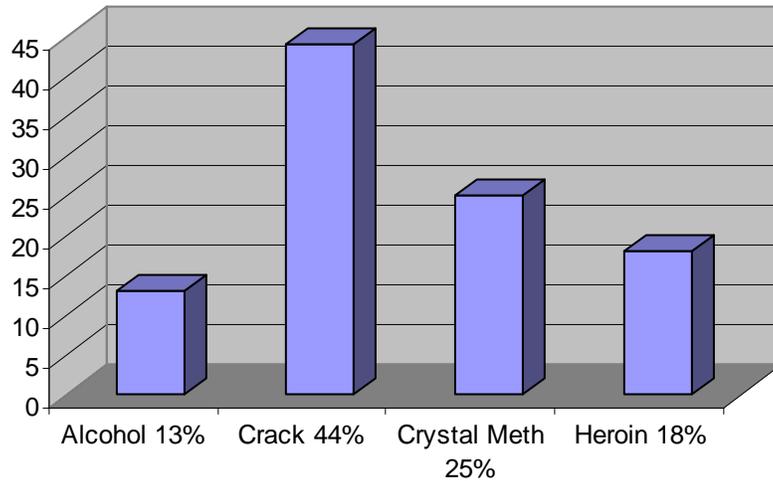
Drug and alcohol addiction was still the single biggest barrier facing the clients we surveyed. Individual stories varied, but it was apparent this is the major contributor to homelessness in the Tri-Cities.

This statistic increased slightly by 1.9% over spring and summer of 2006.

Drug & Alcohol Addicted 87.9%

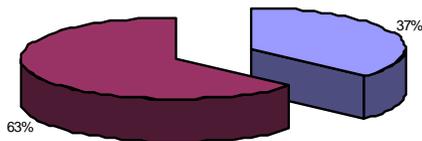


Drug of Choice



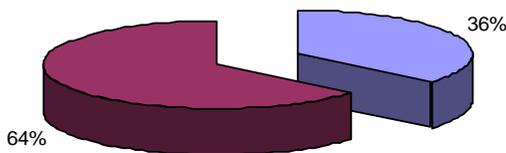
During this last 6 month period we decided to breakdown the addicted statistic by drug of choice. The above graph shows what drug our clients preferred to use. It should be noted that about 80% of those dealing with addiction will use whatever drug is readily available, when they drug of choice is not readily available. Crack cocaine continues to be major drug being used in this region.

Mental Illness 37.1%



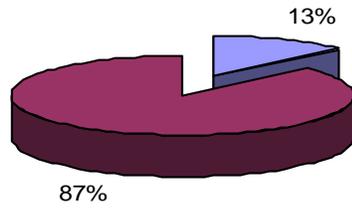
This data comes from direct testimony of affected clients, outreach worker observations, hearsay of others, and information from mental health sources. There was no appreciable change to this statistic.

Concurrent Disorders 36.2%



This statistic rose by over 11% during the fall and winter. During this last 6 months 36.2% of our clients were addicted and also suffered from a mental illness.

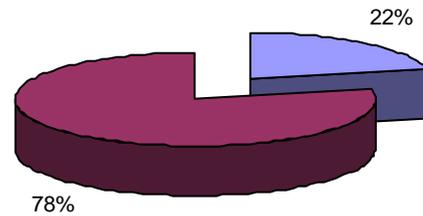
Familial Abuse 12.9%



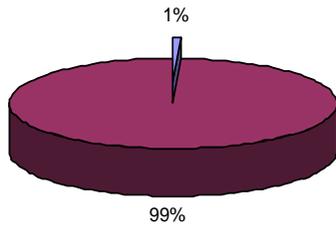
This statistic almost doubled from our last report. We believe this is a more accurate stat than what was report last spring and summer. As our workers gained more and more trust, clients felt more comfortable revealing this information. It is still possible that these numbers may be understated due to the sensitive nature of this issue.

No Resources 21.6%

This chart represents those that had no financial resources, or believed none were available.

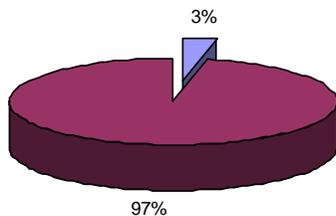


Arrest Warrants 1%



This statistic represents those that had arrest warrants, or believed they did.

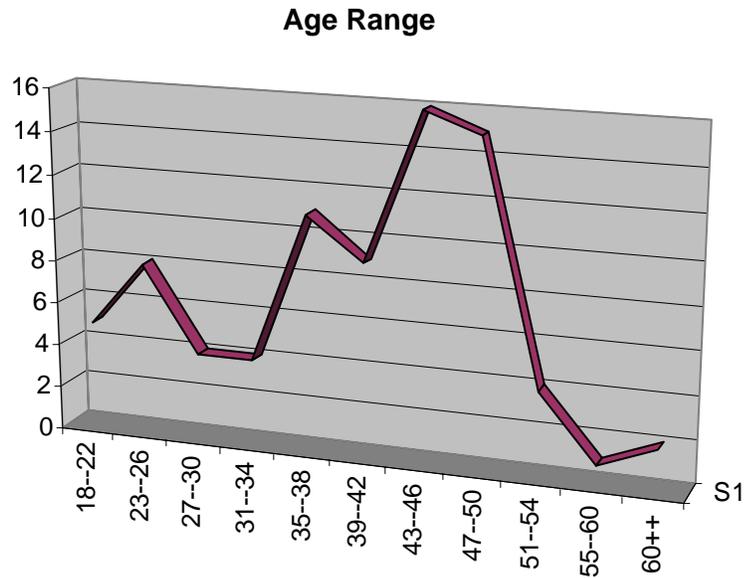
Urban Myth 3%



Some of the homeless believe that “something bad” would happen to them if they “came in out of the cold”. We referred to this phenomenon as, urban myth. Most of these beliefs appear to come from paranoia as a result of substance abuse or a mental health condition.

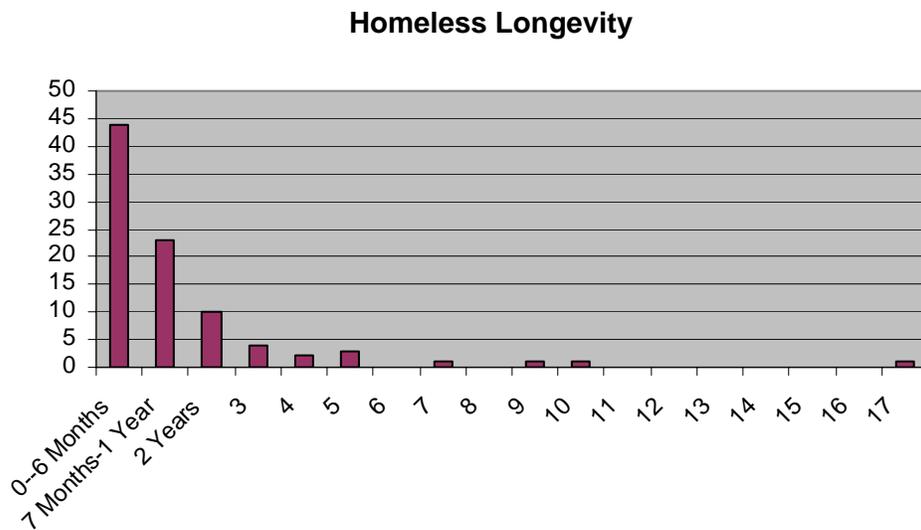
What is the age range?

Through our observations and gathered testimony from our clients, we encountered people from age 18 to 60 years old. Minors were not really a factor in the Tri-Cities. We came across 2 minor children in our first six month study, but none in this last six month period. The average age of the homeless in the Tri-Cities is 40 years.



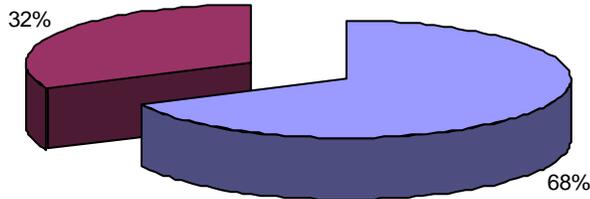
How long have they been out there?

All of the people we encountered in this sub-culture were asked about the length of time they had been homeless, the results of this survey is recorded below. The average length of time spent homeless by the people interviewed in the Tri-Cities region was 1.2 years.



What is the male/female breakdown?

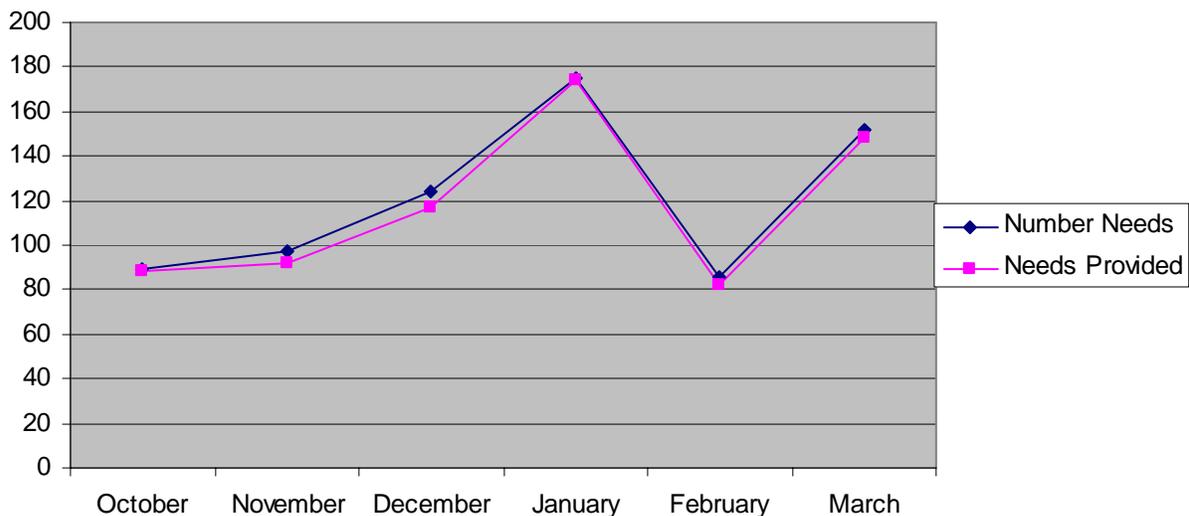
Men 68% Women 32%



The number of women increased over the fall and winter by 7%. We really do not know why this stat went up.

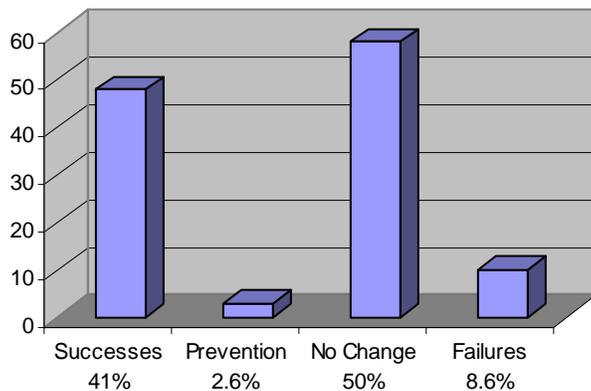
Were some of their needs met?

Wants and needs are sometimes difficult to separate. We try to help with what we believe are legitimate needs without making homelessness to comfortable. Our ultimate purpose is to facilitate getting homeless people off the streets and into appropriate housing, so we walk a fine line meeting some of their needs while we try to achieve that purpose. It is very difficult to starve to death in the Tri-Cities, with the multiple food banks in the area, homeless can always find nourishment. Clothing also is generally not an issue, as there are several clothing banks in the region, however, this last winter appropriate cold weather clothing and footwear was sometimes difficult to find. We believe we were able to walk that fine line fairly well and we did get many opportunities to provide some the basic needs of those we encountered. It, also, gave us as good reason to engage the homeless in conversation and continue to send the message of hope for their unfortunate situation.



Our Successes and Failures

Over the course of this project we were able to effectively move 48 individuals off the street and into something other than homelessness. We consider those 48 as our successes, as finding appropriate housing was our principle purpose. Of those 48 people, 22 of them found long term housing. The rest found accommodation in shorter term facilities. 3 of our 48 successes were prevented from homelessness by the work of our outreach staff, they never actually lived on the streets, but were a day or 2 away from that fate. Of the 48, 10 have slid back into homelessness, these mostly from the group that found shorter term accommodations. We consider those 10 people as our failures, in spite of our best efforts. We continue to work with those people in order to get them back on track. As we walked beside these clients that were spiralling up out of homelessness, we also wanted to stand beside those that spiralled down. Our workers continue to care deeply for the people they met and have helped in some way. There are some out there, that push away any help offered them. We try to communicate that when they are ready, we will be there.



Most of our successes came from informing our clients and following through with connections of existing community resources.

Conclusions – any thought or opinion one arrives at through pondering facts and information.

This report concludes a full year of data gathered since April of 2006. As mentioned in our last report, this report is only relevant to the region which includes, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody. This data cannot be assumed to be the same in other regions of the lower mainland or any other part of British Columbia. From what we were able to gather we can make some comparisons between the Spring/Summer season and the Fall/Winter season. Some things really did not change.

Port Coquitlam continues to be the city of choice for the region's homeless population. In talking to the members of this sub-culture, our original assumption has proved to be correct. The geography of the downtown area of PoCo is ideal for homeless people. The fall and winter months showed a decrease in the homeless population in PoCo, but an increase in Coquitlam and Port Moody, it will be interesting to see if the Port Coquitlam population increases over this next spring and summer.

As mentioned above, in the data section, the origins of the homeless population was not as represented in our last report. I believe our last report was skewed by a bad question and that was our mistake. I think we are getting closer, but the true origins of the population of this sub-culture may ultimately be very illusive. The testimony for our contacts changes for time to time and that makes this a difficult statistic to achieve accuracy.

The high percentage of drug addicted and mentally ill remains unacceptably high. Shortages of resources like detox, emergency shelter beds and drug treatment facilities continued to be a regular frustration for our workers. However, the cooperation and continued assistance of the resources where we do have access has been very gratifying. Local community groups, churches, businesses and individuals have stepped up to assist us in a variety of ways.

The ratio of men to women went up, 25% to 32%, that is a 28% increase over spring and summer of last year. We find this a little alarming, especially in the winter time. We have not been able to ascertain the reason for this increase; women typically have an easier time finding shelter. This something to watch as this year progresses, it is our hope that this is a short term anomaly.

During this last period we attempted to track the type of drugs used by those admitting to addiction. As reported above, crack is still the most prevalent narcotic used by the homeless population, however, most addicts admit to using all other forms of narcotic based on supply and ease of access. There are too many “crack shacks” in the region, I suspect our law enforcement is undermanned to deal with them all, but something needs to be done.

The hopelessness our workers encounter on a daily basis is truly heart breaking and we are driven to do what is necessary to provide some immediate comfort and support without encouraging a continuation of this dark life style. As a culture, and specifically as a community, we need to do what ever it takes to mitigate this problem.

Presently, individuals with mental challenges are victimized by others in that sub-culture because there are limited safe places for them to go, that needs to change.

Presently, individuals with addiction issues cannot get help when they are finally willing accept help. They can't get into detox, they can't get into recovery, that needs to change.

Presently, there are no resources in the region to deal with immediate temporary emergency housing needs for people ready to get out of homelessness, that needs to change.

Recommendations – that which recommends, or commends favour; anything as worthy or desirable.

In the last report filed by Hope for Freedom Outreach & Advocacy we deliberately avoided making any recommendations, as we believed, that it would be presumptuous considering our relatively short term experience with the homeless culture in our region. We now believe it is appropriate for us to make some specific recommendations based on our experience and data gathered over the last year. The recommendations we are making by no means meets all of the needs around homelessness and those at risk of homelessness, it is small piece of a larger broader continuum. The whole solution needs to be put together with the cooperation of all levels of government and their respective agencies, local community groups, churches, local business, etc. What we are recommending is the piece at the beginning, since we are “in the trenches” with people living in a “cardboard box by the river”, we are looking for triage, a MASH unit so to speak. We will leave it to others to “bang the drum” for the necessary second stage housing beyond what we see as the immediate, triage need. It is obvious that to us that the whole homeless issue needs to be addressed, we just do not feel qualified to comment on anything beyond first stage housing.

We need to provide a safe, caring and controlled environment for people with mental challenges to live and work. This does not have to be expensive government controlled and, therefore organized labour environments. This is where we can engage the faith community and other community organizations to facilitate this need. We need to exploit the non-profit sector of our culture far more than we do presently, non-profits can do a lot more than government at a

fraction of the cost, and they are driven to do it because of their collective desire to give back to the community in which they live.

We need a local detox facility, medical or non-medical, we need it; 10 beds minimum. One of the challenges faced in this last 6 month period is the inability to get willing clients into a detox facility. We are not able to send anyone from this region into any of the Vancouver detox facilities because of their ACCESS policies and the closest detox used to be in Burnaby, but it has now moved to Surrey. The only other facility east of Vancouver is in Chilliwack. Since most of the homeless population is drug addicted, it appears critical that when one of them wishes to get help, we need to be able to get them into an appropriate place quickly. Once an individual is detoxed, it is easier to get them to the next stage, which is treatment or recovery. This author has some opinions about where detox should be located in this region, however, I will not discuss those opinions at this time. Location for this type of facility is a politically charged issue which I need to process and understand before I speak.

We need an emergency shelter, not just a wet or extreme weather shelter, something that is open 365 days a year. Our recommendation is for a 20 bed shelter for adult men and women. Presently, we do not see a need for a youth shelter, as we simply have had very few encounters with youth in this region. This is a contradiction of the recommendations of the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, recently published. Their recommendation for this region is 30 beds for adult men and women and 30 beds for youth 18 – 24. Their report projects out to the year 2015 and assumes a continued increase in homelessness. We do not see the need to be that great, for adults or youth, and we are optimistic that with a combined cooperative effort of the whole Tri-Cities community, we will be able to shrink this problem.

We need more available beds for drug and alcohol treatment and recovery, not necessarily in the Tri-Cities, but available somewhere in the lower mainland. These do not have to be expensive fully funded beds, but private or subsidized beds provided by a well run organization like Inner Visions or Hope for Freedom Society. Hope for Freedom Society is presently looking to expand and is negotiating that expansion in East Vancouver and Abbotsford.

Finally, it is of prime importance that all of the governments and agencies and other interested stakeholders in the homelessness issue, “check their political agendas” at the door and pull together to draft a “made in Tri-Cities” solution for the homeless. There are unique issues in the Tri-Cities that will not be encountered in other regions of B.C., therefore, we need to have some home grown solutions. There is a group in the region that has been in existence since 2001, but has recently been re-virtualized by new leadership and new members. This group has been able to attract many of the stakeholders and representatives from all levels of government and a number of provincial government agencies. All three cities in the region have appointed counsellors to sit on the committee and there is representation from three of the MLAs elected in the region. This group is called the Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Group, list of members is attached at the end of this report.

It is our belief that the Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Group gives us the best chance at developing a comprehensive strategy to overcome homelessness in our region. We encourage all who read this report to watch for the initiatives that will come out of this task group in the future. Any recommendations that come out of this group should be given very careful consideration as they represent a broad cross section of the Tri-Cities community.

Stories – *the relation of an incident or minor event; a short narrative with or without editorial.*

Below are stories written by our outreach field workers. These stories come from the personal interaction of these worker and the homeless; these workers have many, many stories. Names are not used to protect anonymity. There are also, some photographs taken in the course of their work.

Turning it around

Last year I met a man who was so lost in his own thoughts that it was hard to see any hope. Everything was a conspiracy, from a government agency after him to his secret contacts he had to sue different agencies. He spoke in riddles and for awhile I thought that he had permanently damaged his brain from the drugs. He started hanging out at the food bank and eventually started to help out. This is where he began to change. His weekly service turned into months and he stopped using drugs as he enjoyed the fellowship of clean and sober people. It didn't take long before his thinking ability returned and when he realized the joy of helping the less fortunate it put things into perspective for him. Within the next few months this man has had a complete makeover.

He has a job, a partner and a new life. I can tell that is very rewarding to have a case like this as it shows that when a person is willing we can find and use the limited resources available to us.

This is how it worked:

- Homeless
- Shelter
- Social assistance
- Support and stability
- Job
- Re-integration

Darren C.



Eight Days

That is how much notice this seventy two year old man had to move. Not only pack his belongings, but find a new place to live. A little stressful, I'd say, but that is exactly the window of time this man had. This guy was no slouch. He immediately went to work. We received this case on day 3 of 8 and he had already made contact with various seniors housing complexes with the same response, a waiting list. On day five our stress levels were going up and time was not on our side. My partner and I had to re-think our strategy and possibly downgrade our search from a residence to a shelter unless something happened quickly. Day 6 of 8. Finally a breakthrough. At a local seniors complex a single unit came available right out of the blue and because he faced homelessness he was put on the priority list. He was contacted and after viewing the place he took it. On the last day we moved his belongings into his new bachelor suite. In the week that followed we were able to provide this man with good used furniture from our donations and this determined, feisty guy settled in nicely.

Darren C.

All I need is.....Part two

A Job, a place, a damage deposit, a chance, and the list could go on and on and on. These are the most common phrases I hear amongst the active addicts that live outside. Yet when I ask them how they ended up homeless they blame others, situations and once I had a guy tell me that he just wanted to see what it was like. (A year later he is still doing research) recently, a local hotel closed and three people were given a substantial amount of money to secure housing. My partner and I were there when they received their cheques and this is what they said.

I am going to get a place.

I am going to get my kids back

I am going to start over.

I am going to get my life back.

I could go on, but I think you get my message.

Sad to say I saw the man a week later, broke, malnourished, and skinny and broke. The two women lasted a few days longer before they reappeared asking for blankets, clothing and camping supplies.

The Bottom Line is this: All I need is...Honesty.



Darren C.

TWEAKER

This is a story of a very special Young woman entrenched in street life here in the tri cities. She is a survivor and definitely a character, we can call her Megan. She won't deny that she is addicted to drugs or struggles with Mental Health issues or that it's holding her in the lifestyle. We have helped her several times to access resources for Treatment, shelters etc. The wait lists for some of these places are so long that it's hard for her to keep calling and hoping to get in for weeks on end. When and if she gets in she will stay from a couple days to a couple months than to leave for one reason or another. While to some people it may be discouraging that it doesn't seem to stick. I can't help but shake the thought that one day she might just have a shot at a long fulfilling life. She is Young and when you wipe the sadness and the drugs away you can see how beautiful she is. I don't think that she has ever had a semblance of normal life. Megan knows the reality of her situation that people die on the streets or even worse, just exist. I will never forget the winter of 2006; the snow fell as hard as she did. I was at city hall as usual giving out coffee and snacks when she plunked down shivering beside me. Even with a blanket wrapped around her and the body heat of her junkyard dog she was on the verge of hypothermia. I am usually the one who is a stickler about keeping a professional distance but that night my heart broke for her. She looked at me with sad exhausted eyes and said, "Please just sit beside me and give me your warmth". I let her huddle up next to me and gave her some coffee. One thing I have noticed about Megan is she never gives up and I admire that. I know any day we could get a call asking for help again. That is what we are here for, that's our Job. Sometimes it takes a long time or never happens but when our clients are ready and willing we help them. I think we all need someone who believes in use no matter where we are in life; someone who will never give up, and stand by our side. I know that for Megan, I plan to be there, because tomorrow is when the miracle could happen. In the mean time I will be here to listen and hopefully she won't feel so alone.

Laura

HOME

I met Vince about 4-5 months ago when some concerned city workers called me in to do an assessment. They were tearing down his “camp” and wanted us to help him find some resources. It turns out I had seen him around a few times but had never really got to know him until that day. I did not expect what I found when I arrived. Vince had built with his own two hands what looked like a little cabin! Using whatever materials he could find he had fashioned himself a shack. He even ran extension cords from nearby businesses at night to provide light. Vince and I got to talking and decided on a course of action as he was soon going to lose his



beloved shack. I can't remember exactly why but I know it was not exactly a legal set up, no permits etc. We kept in contact and my partner Darren and I continued to encourage him in his quest to change his lifestyle. A couple weeks later I came by his shack to get pictures before the city tore it down. There he was looking rather distraught tearing it down himself! He said he built it with his own two hands so he should be the one to tear it down. It occurred to me that given the opportunity this man could find a way to improve any aspect of his life

physical, emotional, financial etc. while addressing the barriers he faced (addiction being one of them) would never compare justly to the shack he built. It is that same spirit of determination that can carry a person from the streets to a new way of life. Not everybody is there yet though, sometimes an individual won't see their world tumbling down around them. The reality of life on the street is bleak at best so why would any person want to face that? Vince still accesses some of the resources we provide but is back on the street again today. I hope it won't be for long because I know given the right tools he could build anything. Even a new life.



Laura

A Daughter's love

I learned an important lesson tonight. It wasn't a lesson about doing, making or changing something; rather it was about the love of a daughter for her father. The father has been homeless for a number of years and we've been working with him since the beginning of the project, which is now a year old. He's tried recovery but found that the restrictions of that centre were too binding and so he left. I suppose that when you've been “away “from society for a long period of time it's hard to readjust. Anyway, as I was walking toward the place where we all gather for an hour, I noticed a young couple standing there with a stroller just waiting. I introduced myself as did they and what I found out is that they had just come over from Victoria and were here to show her dad his three week old grandson. The daughter knows that her dad is homeless and they haven't seen each other in over a year, but none of that mattered as he rode up on his well worn mountain bike. As I stood back and watched this tearful reunion, it occurred to me that this young woman with a newborn didn't look at her father's appearance, but rather with incredible pride as she showed him the baby. We all make choices in life, some good, some bad and we have to live with the consequences of those choices, but what I saw in this man's eyes after his daughter left was a glimmer of hope. Whatever choices he makes in the future about his situation we will be there to support him in a positive manner.

CHANGE

“To alter or make different.”

That is what one definition in the “Webster’s Dictionary” states. This is perhaps the most challenging part of my job when it comes to helping people with their belief system. I am not going to go into too much detail about this topic as I can go on for quite awhile. I am going to share with you an experience I had with a mother who had made the decision to change. She came down from the Sunshine Coast to help her daughter and her two babies who were abandoned by her boyfriend. However, the grandmother had a serious drug addiction and at first I doubted her will to get clean without treatment but she was determined. She had been using crack cocaine for the last 18 years and was about to quit cold turkey. When the grandmother arrived, her daughter was now living in a one bedroom suite that was below ground. It was dark, gloomy and way too small for the four of them. To make matters worse the 26 year old addicted brother also came and slept over for a number of days before he was asked to leave. Then, after living there for only a week, a water main broke outside and flooded their place. During this time the grandmother was in full detox mode and was not exactly the happiest person during this time. However she hung in there and stayed clean. Right after the flood, they had to get out of there as mould was starting to appear on the walls and so the daughter started looking immediately. It has now been seven weeks that the grandmother has stayed off the crack and it is not only her determination and stubbornness that has done this, but her willingness to look at her old belief system, behaviours and make the effort to change. Today, they are getting ready to move into a newer three bedroom upstairs portion of a house with lots of fresh air and plenty of light. By staying off the crack, the grandmother has found renewed strength and an increasing love of life. I’ve told her from the beginning that when you make the decision to clean up and make changes, good things will happen.

Darren C



Outreach workers and Fraser Health Nurses on the way to administer meds to the homeless



At the Office



Large Camp in PoCo



Occupant of the “Home”

Acknowledgements

The following is a list of people and organizations that were instrumental in the overall success of this project. If there are omissions, it is simply an oversight and not a slight. The list is random, not in order of importance.

Hope for Freedom Outreach & Advocacy field workers:

Laura Binette
Darren Charuk

Brent Miller, HFFS staff and resident computer technician

Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance & their branch offices in Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam

B.C. Housing

SHARE and all of its' local affiliates

Coquitlam Rotary

Tri-City News

Coquitlam NOW

Iain Black, MLA

Diane Thorne, MLA

Mike Farnworth, MLA

Harry Bloy, MLA

Dawn Black, MP

Scott Young, Mayor, City of Port Coquitlam

City of Port Coquitlam, Parks & Rec.

City of Port Coquitlam, By-Laws

Maxine Wilson, Mayor, City of Coquitlam

North Side Church

Coquitlam Alliance Church

Hope Lutheran Church

Westwood Baptist Church

Trinity United Church

Tri-Cities Mental Health

New View Society

RCMP, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam detachment & its community police stations

Tri-Cities Housing Coalition

Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Group

Salvation Army

Tri- Cities Homelessness Task Group

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Alex Bempong	Salvation Army
Amanda Murphy	RCMP Victim Services
Art Long	SHARE Food Bank – Port Coq.
Bonnie Moriarty	Elizabeth Fry Society
Brad West	Office of Mike Farnworth, MLA
Cathy van Poorten	City of Coquitlam
Cheryl McKeever	Society for Comm. Development
Coun. Doug Macdonell	City of Coquitlam
Coun. Darryl Penner	City of Port Coquitlam
Coun. Bob Elliott	City of Port Moody
Dan Scoones	City of Port Coquitlam
Darin Froese	BC Housing
Dave Teixeira	Office of Harry Bloy, MLA
Dawn Black	MP, New Westminster-Coquitlam
Diane Thorne	MLA, Coquitlam-Maillardville
Emma Arthur	New View Society
Harry Bloy	MLA - Burquitlam
Helen Popple	City of Port Coquitlam
Iain Black	MLA – Port Moody-Westwood
Jill Cook	Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce
Joyce Lissimore	Trinity United Church
Judith Roche	MCFD
Kevan Oxley	St. Laurence Anglican Church
Laura Binette	Hope for Freedom Outreach & Adv.
Lois Rougeau	MEIA
Louise Berketa	Service Canada
Louise Jolicoeur	New View Society
Lynn Grears	Service Canada
Mary MacDougall	EWR Coordinator
Maureen Woods	Coquitlam Public Library
Michelle Ames	Calvary Baptist
Mike Farnworth	MLA – Port Coquitlam-Burke Mtn.
Rob Thiessen	Hope for Freedom Society
Roxann MacDonald	SHARE Family & Comm. Services
Sandy Burpee	Tri-Cities Housing Coalition
Sheila Aherne	Tri-City Women's Resource Society
Stuart Elmes	Innervisions
Sue Noga	RSCH
Tania Jarzebiak	Office of Dawn Black, MP
Tarry Grieve	PM Community Care Cmtee (Rep.)
Tony Bosnjak	Fraser Health Authority
Trent Brown	MEIA
Walid Chahine	Fraser Health Authority