

Homelessness Study Project for the Tri-Cities

Companion Document

**Prepared for:
Homelessness Study Project Steering Committee**

**Prepared by:
John Talbot & Associates Inc.**

May 2001

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Introduction:

This companion document contains all the background documentation which was used to prepare the summary report. It is intended as a reference only and should not be used as a stand-alone document. To obtain a copy of the summary report, which includes a recommended action plan, please contact:

Roxann MacDonald
Director of Programs and Services
SHARE Family and Community Services Society
#200-25 King Edward Street
Coquitlam, BC
V3J 6Z4
(604) 540-9161

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Section 1: Summary of Questionnaire Responses

Introduction:

This summary provides an analysis of the homelessness study project questionnaire responses. Its intent is to highlight some of the major findings and to provide background information. To review the verbatim questionnaire responses, please refer to page 4.

Response Rate:

There was an excellent response to the homelessness study project questionnaire. Of the 54 questionnaires that were circulated, 48 were completed and returned for a response rate of 89%. Of note, in some cases, the questionnaire was copied and circulated to other members within an agency or organization. This situation was definitely a factor in the high response rate. To review the listing of questionnaire respondents, please refer to page 21.

Absolute Homelessness:

When asked if they felt that homeless people were living in the Tri-Cities, 38 or 79.2% of respondents stated "yes." Of these respondents, many noted that they had personally witnessed homeless people or that they had personal dealings with them as part of their work. Other respondents commented that they had heard of homeless people by way of newspaper articles or word-of-mouth. Still other respondents had seen physical evidence that was suggestive of the presence of homeless people such as campfires, makeshift shelters and unattended belongings.

Of the respondents that stated yes above, 30 or 78.9% knew of specific locations where homeless people were living in the Tri-Cities. Some of the more often cited locations were along the Coquitlam, Fraser and Pitt Rivers; under bridges and overpasses; and within parks. With regard to the latter, Cottonwood, Mundy and Rocky Point Parks were the most often cited. Other responses included living in campgrounds, cars, derelict buildings and underground parking lots.

When asked to describe the homeless people that they had heard about, personally witnessed or worked with, the most often cited response was middle-aged, single males of Caucasian descent. Other often cited responses included individuals with mental health issues or substance misuse problems and adolescents, especially during the summer months. When asked what factors may have contributed to their homelessness, the most often cited responses were substance misuse problems (44.7%), mental health issues (36.8%), abusive or dysfunctional relationships (31.6%), chronic or long-term unemployment (28.9%) and lack of affordable or secure rental housing (23.7%). Of note, most respondents identified more than one factor, thus the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Verbatim Questionnaire Responses

1. **Do you think that there are homeless people living in the Tri-Cities? Of note, homeless refers to those people living with no physical shelter – e.g., living on the street, in doorways, in parkades, in parks, in vehicles or squatting in vacant buildings.**

• Yes	38	.....	79.2	%
• No	<u>10</u>	.....	<u>20.8</u>	%
	48		100.0	%

2. **What has contributed to your assessment or belief that there are no homeless people living in the Tri-Cities?**

- Based on my six months working at SUCCESS, I have not come across any client who has been without physical shelter.
- I have clients that live in sub-standard housing but all have some form of shelter to call their own.
- I have not noticed any homeless people living in the Tri-Cities.
- I have not seen homeless people wandering the street in the Tri-Cities, as is the case in the City of Vancouver. In talking to my co-workers, they also have not seen homeless people wandering the street.
- I have not seen anyone sleeping on the street and I have had no homeless clients at my office (i.e., SUCCESS).
- If there is homelessness, then it definitely is not visible.
- It appears that most homeless people live in the City of Vancouver. The reason for this is simple; they have the services and supports. I do not think that it is very practical for homeless people to live in the Tri-Cities, given the lack of services and supports. If there are homeless people here, they are not very visible.
- None of my clients have mentioned to me that they were homeless and in need of shelter.
- They are not visible within the community. However, there does appear to be some homeless youth but they remain “underground.”

3. **Homelessness has been documented in a number of other municipalities in the Greater Vancouver Regional District. What factors do you think contribute to the Tri-Cities not experiencing a similar problem?**

- Given the difficulty in travelling between the Tri-Cities and Downtown Vancouver (i.e., no direct access via Sky Train), many homeless people choose another municipality in which to reside (e.g., New Westminister, Surrey, etc.). Additionally, there are few services and supports catering to the homeless in the Tri-Cities.

- Given the lack of services and supports catering to the homeless in the Tri-Cities, there is no reason to remain in these communities. As a result, most move to where the services and supports are located – i.e., New Westminster, Surrey and Vancouver.
- I have lived here for eight years and during this time I have yet to directly encounter a homeless individual.
- If we had community services and supports for the homeless, I am sure that they would be more visible within our communities. As it is, most homeless people move to where the services and supports are located.
- It seems to me that homeless people would migrate to where the services and supports are available – i.e., New Westminster, Surrey or Vancouver. Given the lack of services and supports in the Tri-Cities, there is little or no reason to reside here for any length of time. Additionally, homeless people are likely to go where there are other homeless people for socialization and support.
- One possible reason is that there is a far shorter waitlist for subsidized housing in the Tri-Cities than for the City of Vancouver.
- There are inadequate resources (e.g., food banks, shelters, soup kitchens, etc.) to entice or retain homeless people in the Tri-Cities.
- We have excellent “help” agencies which work to address homelessness.

4. How do you know that homeless people are living in the Tri-Cities?

Multiple Responses:

- I have personally witnessed homeless people in the Tri-Cities – e.g., sleeping under bridges or overpasses, walking the streets with shopping carts, etc. (10)
- By way of word-of-mouth – e.g., community agencies, municipal outside workers, the RCMP, etc. (6)
- I have met and talked to homeless people during the course of my work. (6)
- A recent applicant was homeless. (3)
- There have been a number of newspaper articles about homelessness over the past few years. (2)

Individual Responses:

- From clients who have told me that they are homeless or have told me about a third party who is homeless.
- I am aware of only one homeless individual. He spends two to three hours each morning (6:00 to 9:00 a.m.) sitting in the lobby of the Aquatic Centre and then moving to the library when it opens.
- I had staff refer homeless youth to agencies in New Westminster and Vancouver.
- I have a client who regularly visits with a group of homeless people in the Tri-Cities.
- I have attempted to make shelter arrangements for such individuals.

- I have heard comments from people and I have personally witnessed areas where it would appear that homeless people were living. Additionally, summer staff reported that two people were sleeping on an old couch in Burquitlam Park.
- I have heard staff accounts of people sleeping in bunkers within the forested areas of Mundy Park and along the Coquitlam and Fraser Rivers.
- I have received calls for police assistance with regards to homeless people.
- I have seen homeless people with their belongings in and hanging off of their shopping carts in Port Coquitlam City Centre. While I have only seen a few homeless people, it is still cause for concern.
- I have seen homeless youth at the youth centre.
- I have seen traces of campfires in the wooded areas of Rocky Point Park.
- I have talked to several women who reported sleeping in their cars. Additionally, one women talked about teenagers living in parks during the summer months.
- I have worked with homeless youth aged 18 to 21 that lived in cars, under the Murray Street Overpass and within Rocky Point Park.
- I know of an individual who has bought breakfast for a homeless man on several occasions.
- I live in Port Coquitlam and during the day and evening there are a number of people in the community that appear to be in need. Typically, they are pushing shopping carts full of cans, clothing and other items. These people are locally known as being homeless.
- I personally witnessed people sleeping in the underground parking area at Coquitlam City Hall.
- I place or self-refer clients into hostels. Additionally, I have seen bag ladies in the Tri-Cities.
- It is a logical assumption, as we live in a suburb feeding an urban area.
- It should be recognized that there are homeless people living in every community. Additionally, there have been newspaper reports of homeless people living in parks within the Tri-Cities.
- There are a number of squeegee kids working the streets near Lougheed Mall.
- There are an increasing number of panhandlers on the street and outside the malls.
- There are homeless people sleeping in the stairwells and underground parking area of Coquitlam City Hall. Additionally, homeless people have also been spotted sleeping in the wooded area across from City Hall.
- They utilize our shelter (Fraserside) – i.e., referred by the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security.
- We receive numerous calls from clients looking for shelter. Additionally, we receive bookings from the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security.

5. Do you know of specific locations where homeless people are living in the Tri-Cities?

• Yes	30	.....	62.5	%
• No	18	.....	37.5	%
	48		100.0	%

If yes, can you please identify these locations?

Multiple Responses:

- Along the Coquitlam River – e.g., in Coquitlam River Park, the eastside near Marpole Avenue, north of Prairie Avenue, etc. (10)
- Living in cars. (8)
- Under bridges and overpasses – e.g., Lougheed Highway and Dewdney Trunk Road, Murray Street Overpass, etc. (7)
- In Mundy Park – i.e., there is evidence of campfires and self made huts. (4)
- Under the Pitt River Bridge. (3)
- Along the Fraser River. (2)
- In Cottonwood Park. (2)
- In Rocky Point Park. (2)
- In the underground parking area at Coquitlam City Hall. (2)

Individual Responses:

- A lady named Mary used to live under a tarp in Pioneer Park.
- A squatter's shack was found on Heritage Mountain.
- Adjacent the industrial area and near the railway tracks in Port Coquitlam.
- Adjacent the railway tracks near St. Johns Street in Port Moody.
- Along the Maryhill Bypass.
- Along the Pitt River – i.e., in the vicinity of the Wild Duck Inn.
- Along the PoCo Trail.
- At Douglas College's David Lam Campus.
- Behind the Golden Ears Hotel.
- I have no direct knowledge of there whereabouts, however, I believe this information would be known by the RCMP.
- I have seen homeless people pushing shopping carts full of personal belongings at or near Lougheed Highway and North Road.
- I work for the City of Coquitlam and over the years we have removed people from along the Coquitlam River and in Glen and Mundy Parks.
- In an empty trailer behind SHARE Family and Community Services Society.
- In abandoned or vacant buildings.
- In buildings under construction.

- In Burquitlam Park.
- In Dacre Park.
- In Downtown Port Coquitlam.
- In Lions Park.
- In the Hyde Creek Area.
- In the northwest corner of Shaughnessy Woods.
- In the ravine near Clarke Road.
- In the ravine that borders Montgomery Middle School and in the ravine by Maillard Middle School.
- In Town Centre Park.
- In the wooded area behind Pleasant Side School.
- In the wooded area behind Riverview Hospital.
- In the wooded area near Bedwell Bay Road.
- Living in a baseball batting cage.
- Living in tents in campgrounds.
- On a park bench within the green space between Kitchener and Westwood Street.
- On a small island in the Coquitlam River by Whyte Avenue Elementary School.
- Sleeping in parks and using gas stations for toilet facilities.
- Temporarily staying with family and friends – i.e., “couch surfing.”
- There is a tent by the Trans-Canada Trail.
- Under the Kingsway and Lougheed Highway River Bridges.
- Under the Red Bridge.

6. How would you describe these homeless people – e.g., their age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, mental or physical health, etc.?

Multiple Responses:

- Adult, single males – i.e., usually Caucasian and middle aged. (18)
- Mental health issues. (12)
- Substance misuse problems – i.e., alcohol or drug dependencies. (8)
- Adolescents – i.e., especially during the summer months. (6)
- Physical health problems – e.g., asthma, bronchitis, etc. (4)
- Some couples and women. (4)
- They generally have an unkempt appearance. (3)
- They often wear numerous layers of old clothes and are in possession of a shopping cart. (2)

Individual Responses:

- Couples living in tents within local campgrounds.
- Criminal justice system history.
- First Nations.

- Most appear to be in good physical health.
- Most are mentally stable.
- Non-destructive and polite – i.e., they left premises when requested.
- Not a large enough population to generalize.
- Some are rebellious youth.
- Young adults – i.e., between 18 and 35 years.

7. What factors do you think contributed to their homelessness?

Multiple Responses:

- Substance misuse problems – i.e., alcohol or drug dependencies. (17)
- Mental health issues. (14)
- Abusive or dysfunctional situations – i.e., teenage runaways. (12)
- Chronic or long-term unemployment. (11)
- Lack of affordable and secure rental housing. (9)
- Family breakdown – i.e., divorce, separation, etc. (7)
- Inadequate or no family support network. (5)
- Inadequate community resources or supports. (4)
- Inadequate education – i.e., poor job skills. (4)
- Deinstitutionalization. (3)
- Inadequate income assistance to pay for housing and other basic essentials. (3)
- Lifestyle choice – i.e., they do not want to live by the rules. (3)
- Repeated evictions – i.e., care facilities, hotels, etc. (3)
- Criminal justice system history – i.e., difficulty reintegrating back into the community, trying to evade authorities, etc. (2)
- Ineligible for income assistance – e.g., do not meet residency requirements, underaged, etc. (2)

Individual Responses:

- A homeless individual that I knew felt that his money was better spent on tools than shelter.
- Anger management problems.
- Better alternative than unsafe room in the Downtown Eastside.
- Conflict with roommate.
- Lack of early detox intervention.
- Lack of group homes.
- Landlord/tenant disputes.
- Limited financial resources.
- Long waitlists for non-market or subsidized housing.
- Most do not want to discuss the reasons leading to their homelessness.
- Poor social referral network.

8. Which facilitates or services in the Tri-Cities, if any, do you think they may be using to support themselves – e.g., clothing, food, medical assistance, etc.?

Multiple Responses:

- Local food banks – e.g., SHARE Food Bank. (17)
- Probably not accessing formal social services – i.e., begging for money, scavenging for bottles, clothing or food, etc. (16)
- Local churches. (7)
- Port Coquitlam Salvation Army. (6)
- Port Coquitlam Area Women's Centre. (4)
- SHARE Family and Community Services Society. (4)
- SHARE Thrift Store. (3)
- Kinettes Soup Kitchen. (2)
- Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security. (2)
- No services catering to the homeless. (2)
- Tri-Cities Mental Health Centre. (2)
- Walk-in clinics. (2)
- Youth Centre. (2)

Individual Responses:

- Cameron Recreation Centre – i.e., some homeless people use this facility to shower.
- Como Lake United Church Soup and Sandwich Cafe.
- Community centres, including Youth Centre.
- Mountain View Drop-off – i.e., clothing.
- Neighbourlink (Tri-Cities).
- Our Father's Table.
- SHARE Clothing Exchange.
- Some homeless people sit in the library to keep warm.
- Trinity United Church Thrift Stop.
- With regard to medical assistance, if a homeless individual does not have BC Medical, then they are likely accessing such assistance through the Emergency Ward at Eagle Ridge Hospital.

9. **What do you believe needs to be done, if anything, to address the needs of these homeless people living in the Tri-Cities?**

Multiple Responses:

- Develop an emergency shelter and combine with other community services, including counselling, employment assistance, a food bank and a medical clinic. (14)
- Develop more affordable, non-market housing. (8)
- Provide information to homeless people about available community services and how to access them. (5)
- Increase community awareness about the issue of homelessness in the Tri-Cities. (3)
- Develop a drop-in centre for homeless people – i.e., no identification required to access counselling, food and other services. (3)
- Build relationships and trust with homeless people as a first step to reconnecting them to community. (2)
- Develop another soup kitchen – i.e., this could be one way to learn about the homeless population in the Tri-Cities. (2)
- Expand mental health outreach services – i.e., facilitate access to needed services such as Income Assistance, Medical Services Plan coverage, etc. (2)
- Recruit community mentors to advocate for, assist, inspire and motivate homeless individuals. (2)

Individual Responses:

- After attending to their immediate needs (e.g., clothing, food and shelter), attempt to rehabilitate them (e.g., employment skills, substance misuse counselling, etc.).
- Counter political and public apathy – i.e., this is suburbia and there has been resistance to addressing such issues in the past.
- Create a more receptive attitude by municipal councils for group homes and shelters.
- Determine the number of homeless people in the Tri-Cities.
- Develop a halfway house.
- Develop a non-threatening touching base visitation program – i.e., periodically check-in with those living in the bush or on the street and provide some basic assistance.
- Develop a permanent emergency shelter with specialized counsellors to assess client needs and make referrals to other resources within the Tri-Cities.
- Develop safe, stable transitional housing for men and women – i.e., ensure that residents do not have to submit to the host's beliefs.
- Develop supportive relationships between homeless people and the RCMP.
- Ensure that services are accessible, available and welcoming. Do not ask a lot of questions prior to providing them.
- Establish a community clinic to provide basic medical assistance to those who are ineligible for BC Medical.

- Even if provided with shelter, some of these homeless individuals may not take advantage of it for a variety of reasons – e.g., distrust, mental health issues, etc.
- Expand counselling programs.
- Facilitate access to support services.
- Hold discussions with agencies in New Westminster, Surrey and Vancouver to determine what has and has not worked with regard to homelessness in these communities.
- Identify factors contributing to homelessness and remedy them.
- Increase response capacity in the shelter system. Our shelter (i.e., Fraserside) operates at capacity (85% or higher).
- Increase the number of halfway houses for people with serious and persistent mental illness.
- Provide access to the food bank on a weekly and not a bi-weekly basis. Additionally, consider relocating the food bank, as the current location is difficult to access.
- Provide job counselling and support to homeless individuals – i.e., assist them to prepare a resume, provide them with clean clothes, work to improve their self-esteem, etc.
- Provide shelter options.
- Recognize that most people are only homeless for a short period of time before they either move on (drifters) or move into conventional rental housing.

10. Do you think that there are people at-risk of being homeless living in the Tri-Cities? Of note, at-risk of being homeless refers to those people living in spaces that do not meet basic health and safety standards, do not offer security of tenure, do not provide for personal safety (e.g., abusive situations, etc.) or present severe affordability problems.

• Yes	45	.....	97.8	%
• No	<u>01</u>	.....	<u>02.2</u>	%
	46		100.0	%

11. What has contributed to your assessment or belief that there are no people who are at-risk of being homeless living in the Tri-Cities?

- By direct contact.

12. What factors do you think contribute to the Tri-Cities not having people who are at-risk of being homeless?

- Most people evicted from their current housing find alternative housing, however, a few, for a wide variety of reasons, do not.
- The absence of any people who are at-risk of homelessness is a direct result of the work of the many community support services, government agencies and other community-minded groups.

13. How do you know that there are people who are at-risk of being homeless living in the Tri-Cities?

Multiple Responses:

- I am aware of numerous individuals who are living in abusive situations. (4)
- I deal with people who are at-risk of being homeless on a daily basis. (3)
- There has been no new non-market or subsidized housing in the Tri-Cities. (3)
- Existence of single room occupancy hotels. (2)
- I have had conversations with clients regarding their housing needs. (2)
- Presence of refugee families, many of whom have insecure or low-paying jobs. (2)
- Presence of sub-standard housing. (2)
- There is a large number of illegal secondary suites in the Tri-Cities. (2)

Individual Responses:

- A large percentage of households are living below the low-income cut-offs – i.e., spending more than 54% of their gross household income on clothing, food and shelter.
- A large percentage of renter households are spending 50% or more of their gross household income on rent.
- Although I have yet to encounter an individual who had no shelter, I know of a lot of people who are at-risk of homelessness. Many of these people are single mothers, who must juggle the dual responsibilities of earning a living and raising a family. For these people, most are only one pay cheque removed from being on the street.
- As an addictions professional, I serve people who struggle to secure and maintain housing. At times, they have no homes and must camp or live in their cars.
- Based on my discussions with a number of landlords.
- Based on my discussions with youth and with ex-youth from the Omega Program.
- By the large number of people who take advantage of SHARE's grocery program every Wednesday.
- From client stories and staff experiences, I know that people do have housing crises for a variety of reasons.
- Higher heating costs are resulting in more households being at-risk of homelessness.
- I am aware of numerous mental health cases in the Tri-Cities.
- I believe that all youth and young adults are at-risk of being homeless given the high rents and lack of employment opportunities in the Tri-Cities.
- I have met them in my work – i.e., usually single women; sometimes with dependants. They are often middle aged (40 to 65 years) with no family or friends in the Tri-Cities.
- I do not know for a fact but I would suspect that people remain in compromising situations as they feel that they have no alternatives or they are not aware of them.
- I have spoken with people who are living in apartment buildings where living conditions can best be described as deplorable – i.e., criminality, safety concerns, etc. Most of these people are single mothers who fear for their children's safety.

- I have witnessed people who were at-risk of being homeless while a line worker and supervisor at the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security.
- I know of a lot of people who are only one paycheque away from being homeless.
- I know of a number of clients who have had their children apprehended due to alcohol or drug dependencies. Of note, these clients are also at-risk of becoming homeless.
- I know of people who have been evicted from marginal housing situations.
- I work with several community groups who have members who have said that they are at-risk of being homeless.
- In the City of Coquitlam, we deal with a wide variety of people who are on income assistance and who are in need of financial assistance to participate in basic recreational programs. Additionally, youth services staff often deal with people who are described as living below the poverty line or who are living in abusive or stressful situations that could lead to mental or physical harm.
- It is more an assumption than knowledge.
- The definition being used for at-risk of being homeless is so broad that probably 50% of households would fall within it.
- The thrift store has a waiting list for some furniture items, including dressers and small tables. Additionally, the turnover of items is very brisk.
- There is a lack of housing options for people with mental health issues.
- There are a number of people at-risk of being homeless living in rundown hotels in the Tri-Cities. These hotel rooms have inadequate cooking facilities and washrooms do not open to the hall.
- There are a number of slum landlords who do not take care of their buildings and do not abide by the landlord/tenancy rules.
- There is no reason why we would be the exception. If homelessness has been documented in other suburban communities, it is likely that we are also experiencing it too.
- There were a number of victims of the major fire in Port Moody.
- There will always be people at-risk of homelessness.
- They use our shelter services (i.e., Fraserside), when there is available space. To be referred, they must be eligible for income assistance.
- Through contact and discussions with people in the community.
- Through the sharing of stories.
- Through word-of-mouth – e.g., community agencies, etc.
- We have had several calls over the past year for assistance. Most of these people could best be described as “at-risk of homelessness.”
- We receive numerous calls for clothing, food, furniture and shelter.

14. How would you describe those people who are at-risk of being homeless – e.g., their age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, etc.?

Multiple Responses:

- Single parents – i.e., predominantly female. (18)
- Women and children living in abusive situations. (14)
- Divorced or single males – i.e., 20 to 45 years. (10)
- Recent immigrants and refugees – i.e., cultural and linguistic barriers. (7)
- The working poor – i.e., those with minimum wage jobs. (7)
- People with mental health issues. (6)
- Substance misusers – i.e., alcohol or drug dependencies. (6)
- Youth living in abusive or dysfunctional situations – i.e., many become runaways. (5)
- Elderly individuals – i.e., many have insufficient income and savings. (4)
- Low education levels and poor job skills. (4)
- People with disabilities. (3)
- Most have previously been in the care of the Ministry for Children and Families. (2)
- One-income families. (2)
- Those on income assistance. (2)

Individual Responses:

- A mix of different ethnic groups.
- Common-law relationships.
- First Nations.
- Full-time college students.
- High school drop-outs – i.e., few job prospects.
- Large families.
- Not enough examples to generalize.
- Socially isolated individuals – i.e., tend to believe that their situation is okay but they have no basis for comparison.
- Teenage girls who are recruited into the sex trade.
- They are from a variety of backgrounds which makes it even more difficult to reach out to them.
- Those with low coping skills.
- Women (40 to 65 years) with no dependants, friends and relatives in the Tri-Cities.
- Women from transition houses.

15. What factors do you think contribute to people being at-risk of being homeless?

Multiple Responses:

- Lack of affordable and secure rental housing. (17)
- Abusive or dysfunctional situations. (14)
- Chronic or long-term unemployment. (13)
- Mental health issues. (12)
- Substance misuse problems – i.e., alcohol or drug dependencies. (12)
- Heavy debt load or limited financial resources – i.e., living from paycheque to paycheque. (9)
- Family breakdown – e.g., divorce, separation, etc. (6)
- Inadequate community services and supports – e.g., drug and alcohol treatment facilities, employment assistance programs, lifeskills training, etc. (6)
- Lack of education or work experience – i.e., high school drop-outs. (5)
- Inadequate or no family support network. (3)
- Lack of information about available community services and supports. (3)
- Mental or physical disabilities – i.e., inability to work. (3)
- Single parenthood. (3)
- Social isolation – i.e., not connected to their community. (3)
- Unstable housing situations – e.g., illegal secondary suites. (3)
- Lack of non-market or subsidized housing – i.e., withdrawal of the federal government funding for such housing. (2)
- Long waitlists for non-market or subsidized housing. (2)
- Low self esteem. (2)
- Poor social skills. (2)
- Refugees, including illegal immigrants. (2)
- Reluctance to get involved in the social welfare system. (2)

Individual Responses:

- Anger management problems.
- Criminal justice system history.
- Eviction.
- High heating costs.
- Lack of first stage, emergency transition housing.
- Lack of market rental housing – i.e., apartments and townhouses.
- Lack of safe housing.
- Lack of supports to assist the mentally ill to maintain their own residences.
- Loss of market rental housing – i.e., condominium conversions and demolitions.
- Prostitution.

- Recent migration from another Province – i.e., residency restrictions to income assistance.
- Unscrupulous landlords.

16. What do you believe needs to be done, if anything, to address the needs of those people who are at-risk of being homeless in the Tri-Cities?

Multiple Responses:

- Provide more affordable rental housing, including market and non-market housing. (10)
- Increase community awareness about this issue and its potential impacts. (6)
- Consult with people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness to determine their needs and to identify the most appropriate supports. (5)
- Develop a permanent emergency shelter that caters to a variety of different needs. (5)
- Facilitate easier access to support services dealing with mental health issues or substance misuse problems. (3)
- Allocate more resources to early intervention and preventative care – i.e., ensure that children receive adequate services and supports. (2)
- Develop partnerships between the development industry, the government and the non-profit sector in order to build more non-market or subsidized housing. (2)
- Identify advocates for those at-risk of being homeless – i.e., these advocates would make them aware of available programs, assist them to meet eligibility criteria, etc. (2)
- Improve access to information about available community services and supports – e.g., community resource book, website, etc. (2)
- Increase the number of first stage, emergency transition beds for women. (2)
- Retain existing affordable rental housing. (2)

Individual Responses:

- Address the core issues that lead to people being at-risk of homelessness.
- Be more proactive in preventing homelessness before it actually occurs.
- Built local communities that care for each other.
- Co-ordinate food bank promotions.
- Decrease waitlists for non-market or subsidized rental housing.
- Develop a spectrum of services – e.g., income assistance, mental health services, non-market and supported housing, etc.
- Develop affordable, mixed use, subsidized housing for women between the ages of 40 and 65 years. Of note, many of these women may be fleeing abusive situations. Currently, there are only 50 housing units targeting this group in the Province.
- Develop job skills programs that are practical and have community mentoring projects attached.

- Do not discontinue income assistance when someone does not comply with the rules.
- Educate tenants about their rights and obligations.
- Enact and enforce strong tenancy laws, whereby landlords must maintain their buildings to Code and cannot ask for more rent than is legally permitted.
- Enhance supports for those with mental health issues.
- Ensure that all multi-family housing meets basic health and safety standards.
- Ensure that the minimum wage provides for a basic living standard.
- Establish a community kitchen in each municipality.
- Establish a Housing Task Force for the Tri-Cities.
- Establish a youth social centre or centres.
- Expand resources to include all residents (regardless of income) in order to assist them in resolving their individual issues.
- Examine new ways of offering self-esteem building programs.
- Identify service gaps and work to address them.
- Identify ways of keeping at-risk kids in school. This may best be accomplished by supporting their families.
- Improve access to English-as-a-Second Language programs, especially for adults who do not benefit from such offerings in the schools.
- Improve family education in the schools and work to improve coping skills and self-esteem.
- Improve co-ordination between community service providers.
- Increase funding to SHARE Family and Community Services Society.
- Increase community awareness of the Port Coquitlam Area Women's Transition House – e.g., advertising, referral, etc.
- Increase income assistance.
- Interview agencies in Downtown Vancouver and New Westminster to determine how many of their clients are from the Tri-Cities.
- Legalize secondary suites and ensure that they meet basic health and safety standards.
- Offer empowerment workshops – i.e., landlord/tenant issues.
- Offer parent support programs to young mothers involved in the sex trade.
- Provide genuine care and love to those in need in order to build trusting relationships. Only then, can mutual accountability exist.
- Provide seminars on budgeting, including cooking on a budget.
- Research other communities in order to determine successful interventions.
- Review eligibility criteria for non-market or subsidized rental housing with a view to reducing paperwork and restrictions.

17. What other comments or observations do you have with regard to the question of homelessness in the Tri-Cities? You can also use this space to identify people who may have information about homelessness in the Tri-Cities.

- At present, there is no appropriate local referral (other than the transition house which targets short-term stays for women and children fleeing abusive situations). There is not even a housing information clearing centre. As such, we are making use of shelters in Surrey and Vancouver, which means that these individuals are leaving their support networks and potentially placing themselves at greater risk.
- Become more proactive – i.e., stress prevention rather than always reacting to crisis situations.
- Contact All Saints RC Church, Blue Mountain Baptist Church and the Salvation Army in New Westminster.
- Contact Riverview Hospital and the Tri-Cities Mental Health Centre. With regard to the former, I believe that they should be in a position to make suggestions for improving services (including housing) for those with serious and persistent mental illness.
- Contact St. Vincent de Paul Society through Fatima Church (i.e., Ronnie Winkan).
- Contact the Coquitlam Youth Drop-In Centre and the local food banks.
- Develop more government funded facilities, housing and operations for those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. This cost could be partially offset by taxing the development industry. Additionally, our citizens and politicians need to be more socially conscious.
- I believe that it is just a matter of time before we start to see a lot more visible homelessness in the Tri-Cities. Hopefully, more resources will be allocated now to meet future demands for services.
- I do not think that homelessness is a problem in the Tri-Cities. However, homeless individuals (if they do exist) from our communities are not likely to stick around, given the lack of services and supports in the Tri-Cities.
- I have lived in the Tri-Cities for 32 years. I believe that homelessness is a relatively small problem but that it is on the increase. Homelessness tends to occur from poor attachments and connections. Most of the homeless men that I know experienced abusive childhoods.
- I think that there are some areas where low-income families live – e.g., Cottonwood Avenue. However, I have yet to come across a person living on the street.
- Improve information about non-market and rental housing.
- Of note, this SUCCESS office has been serving the Tri-Cities for eight years, and during this time, we have not dealt with any issues or problems pertaining to homelessness. As such, I do not think that absolute homelessness is an issue or problem for the immigrant population.
- Provide counselling and other services to assist individuals with substance misuse problems.

- Recognize that middle class, reasonably well-off citizens are not aware of homelessness in their suburban communities. They tend to think of it as a problem that only occurs in the Downtown Eastside. If not for this project, I am sure that this issue would not be a topic of discussion.
- SHARE Family and Community Services Society does a great job with regard to their counselling and night school programs, as well as their Food Bank and Thrift Store. My question is: "How can we make those most in need more aware of community services and supports in the Tri-Cities?"
- The evidence would suggest that homelessness is on the increase in Canada. To be effective, there needs to be a national program to combat homelessness. Municipalities cannot address homelessness alone. If one municipality has special programs to address homelessness, then more homeless people will just move into that municipality.
- The public generally ignores homelessness in the Tri-Cities, with many people correctly or incorrectly believing that they are on the street by their own choice. Whatever the reason, their plight is unacceptable in Canada, given our attractiveness and our high level of social consciousness. In my opinion, we are not living up to our own high standards when it comes to looking after homeless people who are suffering on our street.
- There is an increasing number of female single parent families and children living in poverty.
- We had better do something in the very near future. The Tri-Cities is becoming a major urban centre and social problems are only going to increase. The Simon Fraser Regional Health Board, SHARE Family and Community Services Society and other such organizations are being taxed to their limits. Perhaps it is time for municipal governments to develop an overall plan that deals with homelessness and other pressing social issues. As taxpayers, we either deal with these problems now when they are manageable or deal with them later when they may be far more problematic.

Listing of Questionnaire Respondents

In total, 48 completed homelessness study project questionnaires were received.

The identified questionnaire responses were from:

- Anita and Rob, Ending Violence Against Women, SHARE Family and Community Services Society
- Robert Anderson, The Salvation Army
- Krissie Annan, Food Bank and Thrift Store, SHARE Family and Community Services Society
- Bill Blakeston, Leisure and Parks Services, City of Coquitlam
- George Blevings, Tri-Cities Mental Health Centre
- Caroline Bonesky, Fraserside Community Services Society
- Steve Borthwick, Leisure and Parks Services, City of Coquitlam
- Patricia Chang, SUCCESS (Tri-Cities Office)
- Karin Clevior, SHARE Family and Community Services Society
- Sharon Folkes, Planning Division, City of Port Coquitlam
- Merry Fowler, Como Lake United Church
- Michele Gagnon
- Mike Goheen, Alcohol and Drug Clinic, SHARE Family and Community Services Society
- Corporal Hannibal, Coquitlam RCMP
- Louise Hara, Port Coquitlam Area Women's Centre
- Karen Headridge, Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security
- Sally Herbert, Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security
- Katrina Kiefer and Ninna Snyder, SHARE Family and Community Services Society
- Rita Lachance, Adult and Community Support, Simon Fraser Health Region
- Jim Lacroix, City of Coquitlam
- Jenny Lam, SUCCESS (Tri-Cities Office)
- David Leavers, City of Coquitlam Leisure and Parks Services
- Joyce Lissimore, Trinity United Church
- Tammy Lohnes, SHARE Family and Community Services Society
- Dale Lutes, Omega Residential Program, SHARE Family and Community Services Society
- Sergeant Robb McGirr, Public Safety and Law Enforcement, Port Moody Police Department
- Cheryl McKeever, Society for Community Development
- Greg Mohr, King of Life Lutheran Church
- NCO – "D" Watch, Coquitlam RCMP
- Doug Okabe, City of Port Moody
- Lenore Phillips, Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security
- Mike Rogers, 43 Housing Society, SHARE Family and Community Services Society

- Lois Rougeau, Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security
- Wendy Toohey, Neighbourlink (Tri-Cities)
- Don Ward, Parks, Recreational and Cultural Services, City of Port Moody
- Carrie Wilcott, Community Resources/Victim Assistance Program, Coquitlam RCMP
- Scott Young, Tri City Vineyard Church

There were ten unidentified responses, including:

- Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (3)
- SUCCESS (3)
- Leisure and Parks Services, City of Coquitlam
- Parks, Recreational and Cultural Services, City of Port Moody
- Eagle Ridge United Church
- Other

Section 2: Service Provider Interviews

Interview: Robert Anderson, The Salvation Army (March 26, 2001)

1. What programs or services does the Salvation Army provide, if any, in the Tri-Cities?

Robert stated that the Salvation Army operates a thrift store in Port Coquitlam and that it provided human resources and food to get the Kinettes soup kitchen started in this same municipality. With regard to the latter service, he noted that his agency's assistance lasted about nine months and that this soup kitchen now serves between 30 and 40 individuals per week. He also noted that the soup kitchen has a very high repeat clientele.

Robert stated that the Salvation Army operates its central warehouse in Port Coquitlam, which supplies clothes and other items to a number of thrift stores in the Lower Mainland. He noted that this warehouse does not directly serve clients but that some homeless people may be taking clothing items left for pick-up the next working day.

Robert stated that residents of the Tri-Cities are eligible to receive services in New Westminster, including clothing vouchers and shelter accommodation. To access these services, he noted that they must physically come to New Westminster.

2. Do you have any plans to provide new programs or services in the Tri-Cities?

Robert stated that the Salvation Army, with the assistance of the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (MSDES), is considering opening a satellite office in the Tri-Cities. He noted that this office would operate a third party cheque administration service for MSDES, provide a pro bono legal clinic and offer a minimum amount of emergency assistance (i.e., clothing and food). With regard to the former, he noted that this service would target difficult and high need clients who are not allowed to access a Ministry office and that its revenues would subsidize the other operations. Robert stressed that staffing is a problem and that this initiative would not proceed without the assistance of MSDES.

Robert stated that such a satellite office would likely be located in Coquitlam, possibly near Austin Avenue and Marmont Street. However, he noted, that if MSDES decides that the office should serve the Tri-Cities and Ridge Meadows, then the likely location would be in Port Coquitlam. In either case, he commented that the location would need to be located near public transportation facilities and preferably close to a bank and other community and retail services.

3. Can you provide some information about the homeless shelters that you operate in New Westminster? For example, how many beds do they have, who uses them, etc.?

Robert stated that the Salvation Army operates two emergency shelters in New Westminster - i.e., the Garfield Hostel (1107 Royal Avenue) and Stevenson House (32 Elliot Street). He noted that the former shelter offers ten beds for men and women, as well as six mats as part of the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy. Of note, the mats are only available during the winter months and are offered on a first come first serve basis. As for Stevenson House, he commented that this shelter offers ten beds for men only. Robert added that access to the shelter beds is by referral from Emergency Social Services.

4. Do you have any information on the number of homeless individuals using your shelters that may have previously been living in the Tri-Cities?

Robert shared the preliminary results of a questionnaire that is being administered to those homeless individuals using the Matt Program at the Garfield Hostel. He noted that of the 18 individuals that had completed the questionnaire to date, three or 16.7% had identified their normal place of residence as either Coquitlam or Port Coquitlam. Robert stated that this initiative will be continuing until May and that he would provide regular updates.

5. If a homeless shelter was developed in the Tri-Cities, what would you suggest it look like? What is a workable number of beds? What programs or services, if any, should it include?

Robert stated that for a shelter to be economical to operate it must have a minimum of at least ten beds. He noted that it should operate between 10 and 16 hours per day (i.e., during the evening and early morning hours) and that it should offer emergency assistance during the day. Robert commented that it should be based on a continuum of care model.

6. Do you have other suggestions to address the needs of homeless people?

Robert suggested that more bridge or halfway housing be developed. He stated that this housing can accommodate individuals undergoing addiction recovery and that it can provide them with a supportive environment in which to integrate back into the community. Robert also suggested that more second stage housing and support services be developed. He stated that the maximum stay in an emergency shelter is only ten days and that this is too short a period of time to make a difference in an individual's life. By comparison, he noted that the maximum stay in second stage housing is between 60 and 90 days and that this extended period of time can facilitate positive change.

7. What would you suggest to increase public awareness of homelessness or raise the profile of this issue in the Tri-Cities?

Robert stated that the public likely does not perceive homelessness as a problem because it is not very visible in the Tri-Cities. He also stated that municipal governments are reluctant to discuss this issue for fear of receiving negative publicity.

Robert stated that there is a need to document that homeless people are indeed living in the Tri-Cities and then to get this message out to the public. He noted that this study is a good first step. Robert commented that even if a number of homeless people are identified as being in need of services, it will be difficult to convince municipal governments and others to take action. He stated that there is always the fear that "if you build a shelter, they will come."

8. Do you have any other comments, questions and/or suggestions?

Robert stated that the Salvation Army is examining the possibility of taking over the operation of the Garfield Hostel in New Westminster.

Interview: Louise Hara, Port Coquitlam Area Women's Centre (March 27, 2001)

1. What programs or services does the Port Coquitlam Area Women's Centre provide in the Tri-Cities?

Louise stated that the Port Coquitlam Area Women's Centre offers a variety of programs and services, many of which are applicable to women who are homeless or are at-risk of homelessness. She noted that her agency distributes food vouchers, operates a clothing exchange and food cupboard, and provides a potluck lunch everyday. She also noted that her agency operates six to seven community kitchens and a food buying club. Louise commented that the former program brings together women to prepare food dishes for their families and learn from each other about budgeting, cooking and nutrition. As for the latter program, she stated that it caters to women who want to make the most of their food buying dollars. She noted that these women meet once to choose and pay for groceries (usually in bulk), then meet again to sort the goods to take home.

Louise stated that her agency also offers a legal clinic, a number of support groups (e.g., for lesbians, single mothers, etc.) and PATH counselling for survivors of abuse. Additionally, she noted that her agency operates 14 first stage, emergency transition beds which are available to women and children for up to 30 days. She commented that most women and children using these beds are fleeing abusive situations.

2. Do you have any plans to provide new programs or services in the Tri-Cities?

Louise stated that her agency was involved in the approval process for 23 units of subsidized housing in Port Moody. She noted that this housing will cater to women 40 to 65 years who are economically marginalized and who have no dependants, family or friends. She commented that this sub-group of women are at-risk homelessness due to the lack of safe, affordable housing. Louise stated that after habitation, attempts will be made to connect this sub-group of women to appropriate community support services and the larger community. She noted that the housing in question will be connected with a hospice and seniors housing, and that this could provide employment or volunteer opportunities. She also noted that consideration was given to including several units catering to transients but that this would likely not be possible.

3. Do you have other suggestions to address the needs of homeless people?

Louise stated that there is a need for greater public awareness about homelessness. She noted that the recently released community status report is a good first step and she hoped that it would promote greater public interest in social issues. She noted that the local newspapers could play an integral role in informing public opinion by including features on homelessness and possibly profiling homeless individuals. She commented that if this issue had a greater public profile, then the various levels of government may be more willing to commit resources.

Louise suggested that it would be advantageous for each municipality to have a social advisory committee and possibly a social planning component. She also suggested that there be regular monitoring of social issues, including homelessness, to determine the trends that may be occurring and appropriate responses, if necessary.

Louise felt that the Society for Community Development could play an important role in both increasing public awareness about homelessness and in working with all levels of government to develop appropriate responses to this issue.

4. In your questionnaire response, you discussed the need for second stage housing for women fleeing abusive situations? How many beds should be developed to address the needs of this particular group in the Tri-Cities?

Louise stated that there are only 14 first stage, emergency transition beds and no second stage housing for women and children fleeing abusive situations in the Tri-Cities. As a result of the lack of second stage housing, she noted that women and children must leave their community of residence and temporarily move to Mission, North Vancouver or Vancouver. She commented that while such a move may be justified for safety reasons, it can have a negative effect on families, by uprooting them from their support networks (e.g., family, friends, schools, support services, etc.). As such, Louise suggested that second stage housing be developed in the Tri-Cities.

5. Do you have any other comments, questions and/or suggestions?

Louise stated that there is probably a need for a short and longer term strategy. In the short term, she suggested establishing a housing and homelessness task force, increasing public awareness about homelessness (e.g., its causes, its health and social impacts, etc.), improving the co-ordination of existing services to address this issue and studying the feasibility of developing an integrated shelter. As for the longer term, she suggested developing more affordable, secure housing, including non-market and supportive housing. Louise noted that this housing would need to address the needs of all individuals who are at-risk of homelessness – e.g., disabled people, isolated seniors, runaway youth, single mothers, those with mental health or substance misuse issues, etc.

Finally, Louise stated that there is a need to study the housing needs of illegal aliens and refugees. She noted that these individuals are often living in deplorable housing and are extremely reluctant to speak out or ask for assistance. She also noted that many have high needs, given that they may not speak or understand English, have been abandoned (e.g., sex trade workers) and/or have experienced traumatic events in their lives (e.g., rape, torture, war, etc.) in their country of origin.

Interview: Merry Fowler, Como Lake United Church (March 27, 2001)

1. What programs or services does Como Lake United Church provide in the Tri-Cities?

Merry stated that Como Lake United Church provides a large number of outreach programs¹ to the larger community. She noted that the church operates a Soup and Sandwich Cafe every Tuesday between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. and that most of the 60 seats are usually filled. She commented that this service charges a small fee to cover costs but that this fee can be waived for those who cannot afford it. Merry stated that they do not advertise this service and that most people find out about it through word-of-mouth.

Merry stated that the church operates a thrift shop on Tuesdays and Fridays, as well as furniture sales. She noted that all goods are affordable, clean and operational. She also noted that there is a major garage sale each Spring and that most of the unsold items are donated to the Mentally Handicapped Society. In addition to these services, she stated that the church participates in the Christmas Hamper Program (which is co-ordinated by SHARE) and that she provides discretionary financial assistance to people in need. Merry noted that this financial assistance can take the form of bus passes (for people to access services in other municipalities) or food certificates at local grocery stores or restaurants.

¹ The Tri-Cities United Churches all offer the customary outreach activities of denomination Thrift Shops, Benevolent Funds, Christmas Hamper Drives, support for food banks and support for the street ministries of First United Church in Vancouver. They also co-operate with community initiatives which promote public health and respond to community disasters such as the recent co-op housing fire in Port Moody.

Merry stated that services held at the church include: Baby Talk which is facilitated by a public health nurse (Simon Fraser Health Region) and Parents and Tots which is offered twice weekly (Parks and Recreation Department), as well as the meetings of both Al-Anon and Alcohol Anonymous. In addition, she noted that her church refers people in need to community service agencies in the Tri-Cities and New Westminster.

2. Do you have any plans to provide new programs or services?

Merry stated that Como Lake United Church always tries to rise to the challenge of providing new programs and services. She noted that participation often depends on community needs and the willingness of other service providers to get involved. She also noted that her church is currently operating at near capacity.

3. What are other faith based organizations doing to address either poverty or homelessness in the Tri-Cities?

Merry stated that churches have been active in the fight against poverty in the Tri-Cities. She noted that many churches offer or contribute to community kitchens, food banks, thrift shops, etc. She commented that it would take some leg work to get a complete picture, as it would be necessary to individually contact each church.

Merry stated that the United Churches of the Lower Mainland (north of the Fraser River) are presently engaged in a study as to how best they can pool their resources for the future and how they can more effectively serve their communities. She noted that churches can and do play an important supportive role in addressing the issues of both poverty and homelessness.

4. In your questionnaire response, you discussed the need for a designated emergency shelter in the Tri-Cities. What would this look like? What programs or services, if any, should be offered in conjunction with this shelter?

Merry stated that she was in favour of an emergency shelter in the Tri-Cities. She noted that such a shelter should limit stays to three days or less per week in order to ensure bed availability. She commented that it should also offer some auxiliary services such as basic health care, clothing and food. Merry stated that churches could assist by providing clean clothing and food. She also stated that such a shelter could act as a referral centre for other community services and supports, including those offered by churches.

5. Do you have other comments, questions and/or suggestions?

Merry stated that she would like to see more community kitchens in the Tri-Cities. She noted that these kitchens bring people together to prepare meals and, at the same time, teaches them about budgeting, food preparation and nutrition. She also noted that there is a need to raise public awareness about homelessness in the Tri-Cities and she felt that this study is a good first step.

Interview: Carrie Wilcott, Community Resources Co-ordinator, Coquitlam RCMP (April 11, 2001)

Carrie was away from her office for a period of time. On her return, an interview time could not be arranged given her tight schedule. As such, she agreed to respond to several of the proposed interview questions. Of note, Carrie also responded to the homelessness study project questionnaire and her comments and suggestions are included as part of the summary of responses.

1. What is the Coquitlam RCMP's policy with regard to responding to citizen complaints about homelessness?

Carrie reported that the RCMP has no set policy. She stated that the response would vary based on the call. She noted that an officer would try to locate the individual, assess his or her needs and transport him or her to an appropriate resource.

2. Does the Coquitlam RCMP refer homeless people to appropriate community supports – e.g., MSDES, SHARE, etc.?

Carrie reported that this was the case. She stated that an officer would refer and sometimes transport the individual to an emergency shelter, food bank or thrift store. If necessary, an officer would transport the individual to a medical facility. Additionally, she noted that an individual could be referred for follow-up to Victim Assistance.

3. Does the Coquitlam RCMP document incidences of homelessness? If no, would there be any interest in doing so in the future?

Carrie reported that the Coquitlam RCMP does not currently document incidences of homelessness. She stated that a report may be filed in cases where a public complaint has been made. Carrie noted that each case is handled individually.

Section 3: Homeless Individual Interviews

Possible Interview Questions:

The following questions were used as a guide when interviewing formerly homeless or homeless individuals in the Tri-Cities?

- How long have you been living in the Tri-Cities?
- Where else have you lived in the past year?
- How many other homeless people do you think are living in the Tri-Cities?
- How did you become homeless?
- Do you use community services in the Tri-Cities – e.g., food banks, soup kitchens, thrift shops, etc.?
- How do you make ends meet?
- If a homeless shelter was developed in the Tri-Cities, would you use it? If yes, what services, if any, would you like to see included as part of this shelter?
- For recording purposes, what is your first name?

Interview: Ken (February 13, 2001)

This interview was arranged by Rita Lachance, Adult Community Support Services Coordinator, Simon Fraser Health Region.

Ken stated that there are between 15 and 20 homeless individuals living in the Tri-Cities at any one time. He noted that this number usually increases during the summer months when proximity to a shelter is less important. Ken commented that the majority are male and that most range in age from 15 to 50, with one individual being 62.

Ken stated that these homeless individuals live along the rivers (both the Coquitlam and Fraser Rivers), under bridges and overpasses, and in abandoned or derelict buildings. He noted that they can usually be found by following dirt trails that deviate from the pedestrian pathways that border the rivers or by looking for sites that offer shelter from the elements and some privacy. Ken commented that physical evidence of their presence includes makeshift shelters, old mattresses, plastic bags containing clothing and other belongings, and unauthorized fire pits.

Ken stated that most of the older homeless men are from the Downtown Eastside. He noted that they move to the suburbs to escape the drug scene or to evade police harassment. He commented that most of these men have a criminal record and are known to police in Vancouver. As such their activities are monitored and some may face arrest if picked up. Ken stated that the Tri-Cities provides a safe haven, at least in the short term.

Ken stated that these homeless individuals have little or no contact with government and social service agencies in the Tri-Cities, and none are eligible for income assistance, as they do not have a fixed address. He noted that they do make use of the Salvation Army, usually after hours, and by rummaging through clothing that has been left outside its doors for collection the following day. He commented that most make ends meet by collecting and returning bottles, by getting handouts from the food bank or by doing "odd jobs."

Ken stated that there is little tolerance for homeless people in the Tri-Cities and that the police and other municipal staff often dismantle makeshift shelters, confiscate unattended belongings and request that homeless individuals move elsewhere. He noted that these actions have just pushed homelessness further out of public sight but have not discouraged homeless individuals from living in the Tri-Cities.

Ken stated that most of these homeless individuals would take advantage of a shelter if one was located in the Tri-Cities. He noted that for a shelter to be successful, it should be operated by a former homeless individual or someone that can relate to them and understand their needs. He commented that it should offer a warm bed with not a lot of questions, that it should offer some degree of privacy, that it should offer a hot meal and shower and that it should offer some form of recreation, whether it be an old pool table or a small library. Ken stated that it should also offer one-on-one counselling if requested and referral to other community services such as detox. Other services could include a clothing exchange and job counselling. He did concede that this is a wish list and that on most nights, a warm bed would be sufficient. Ken noted that he would be willing to do chores in exchange for a bed and a meal, and that he felt that such a policy would help build responsibility and self-esteem in others.

Ken stated that he would talk to some of the homeless individuals that he keeps in contact with and arrange for a meeting or meetings with myself. He noted that most would be willing to talk if they felt that I could be trusted and if there was some form of remuneration - e.g., cigarettes or sandwiches. Of note, Ken would also attend these meetings.

Interview: Sean (March 30, 2001)

This interview occurred as a result of a walk through of potential sites where homeless people were reported living. The interview took place in Coquitlam River Park between the Coquitlam River and Shaughnessy Street.

Sean stated that he has been homeless on and off for the past three years and that he has lived in a number of municipalities, including New Westminster, Surrey and Vancouver. He noted that he became homeless as a result of an addiction to alcohol. He commented that this addiction resulted in him losing his job and later his common-law wife. Sean stated that he had been on both employment insurance and income assistance in the past. He noted that he lost his "battle with the bottle," fell behind in his rent payments and found himself on the street.

Sean stated that he grew up in Coquitlam and is "familiar with bush." As such, he noted that he always seems to return. Additionally, he commented that he has an old friend where he can crash when the temperature drops or he needs to sober up. He commented that he does not outstay his welcome because "you never know when you will need a warm place to stay." Sean stated that there are several homeless people living along the Coquitlam River and that a group of youth set up camp there last summer. As for other homeless people living in the Tri-Cities, he stated that they are not hard to find if you know where to look. In Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam, he noted that there are probably between 20 and 30 homeless people. As for Port Moody, he commented that he is unfamiliar with this municipality.

Sean stated that he makes ends meet by accepting handouts, collecting bottles, doing favours and taking advantage of opportunities. When asked to be more specific, he noted that he does what is needed to survive. He also noted that when times get really tough, he will borrow money from family but not friends. Sean stated that he knows about of the food bank and the soup kitchen in Port Coquitlam but that he is reluctant to answer questions or stand in line. He noted that they will not serve you "if you have been at the bottle."

Sean stated that he would use a homeless shelter if one was developed in the Tri-Cities, as long as they do not ask a lot of questions or "preach to you." He noted that a hot meal and warm place to stay would be sufficient. Additionally, he commented that such a shelter should have storage lockers to safeguard belongings while staying at the shelter. Sean felt that such a shelter should be located between Coquitlam Centre and Downtown Port Coquitlam. He also felt that an industrial or warehouse area would be preferable to avoid resident protests.

Interview: Malcolm (March 30, 2001)

This interview occurred as a result of a walk through of potential sites where homeless people were reported living. The interview took place near Maple Street (which straddles the Coquitlam River) in Port Coquitlam.

Malcolm stated that he is from Winnipeg and came west to find a decent paying job. He noted that he stayed with a friend until recently, when the two had an altercation and he found himself on the street. He commented that he has a good sleeping bag and will continue to camp out until he can find a job. If he cannot find a job locally, he added that he will thumb to Vancouver and may even consider going back home to Manitoba.

Malcolm stated that he knows of a few other people who are "living rough." Besides these people, he noted that he would not have a clue. He commented that the area is "prime," as there are lots of trees where one can hide out without being hassled. In the summer, he stated that the river would be a real plus, as you could wash yourself and your clothes. He joked that "you would have waterfront property without the mortgage payments."

Malcolm stated that he has not made use of any community services, however, he had heard of a local soup kitchen. He noted that he has enough money to keep himself going for at least a couple of weeks. When asked about income assistance, he commented that he was not eligible (at least that is what he has heard) given that he has only been in the province for about a month.

Malcolm stated that he might use a homeless shelter if one was available. He noted that it would be nice to have a hot shower in the morning and to know where you will be sleeping the next night. He also noted that it would be nice to have a place to wash and thoroughly dry your clothes. When asked about possible related services, he stated that assistance in finding a job and locating a room would be helpful. Malcolm joked that "the latter would, of course, be dependent on finding a job."

Malcolm stated that this is the only place in Canada where one can be homeless year round. He noted that "the rain can get to you but it will not kill you."

Interview: Dale (April 3, 2001)

This interview occurred as a result of a walk through of potential sites where homeless people were reported living. The interview took place near the Lougheed Highway and the Pitt River (in the vicinity of the Wild Duck Inn).

Dale stated that he has been homeless for the better part of a year and that he has drifted from Abbotsford to Vancouver. He noted that he suffers from depression and that he also has a drinking problem. He commented that he has trouble holding a job and that nobody appears willing to give him a break. Dale also commented that he has no contact with his family and that he has no friends who would offer him a place to stay.

Dale stated that he knows of other homeless people living along the rivers or in forested areas. He noted that it is impossible to state how many, as they are always coming and going. When asked for an answer, he commented that there are at least 20. (It was unclear whether he was referring to Port Coquitlam or to the larger Tri-Cities.)

Dale stated that he had visited the local soup kitchen and that he would use the food bank if it was not located so far away. He noted that he had been on income assistance but that he could not hold a job and became discouraged by the constant counselling and training. He also noted that his worker was always on his case. Dale commented that he makes ends meet by asking for handouts at local churches and restaurants, rummaging through dumpsters, returning bottles and drink cartons, and taking items left for pick-up at the Salvation Army. He also commented that if gets hungry enough, he will beg or shoplift.

Dale stated that he would use a homeless shelter if one was available. As for related services, he noted that "beggars cannot be choosers." When asked for an answer, he commented that it would be nice if you got a hot coffee and sandwich, as well as some breakfast the next morning. He added that the hardest thing is getting going in the morning, especially on an empty stomach.

Dale stated that you should not be refused services if you have a drinking problem. Instead, he noted that if you show up "happy," they should provide you with a space to sober up. He also noted that sending someone away on a cold, wet night could result in death. Dale commented that they should ask if you want help with your problem but that they should not tie services to you actually seeking help.

Section 4: Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security Focus Group

This focus group was held on April 5, 2001 and involved the following participants:

- Sally Herbert, Community Services Co-ordinator
- Lisa Kirwan, Port Coquitlam Financial Aid Worker
- Lillian Lusk, Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services Co-ordinator
- Joneen McCormick, Port Coquitlam District Supervisor
- Lois Rougeau, Port Moody District Supervisor
- Angela Shaw, Port Moody Financial Aid Worker
- Lynn Simpson, Coquitlam Financial Aid Worker
- Olly Sumner-Richter, Port Moody Financial Aid Worker

1. What is MSDES currently doing to address the needs of people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in the Tri-Cities?

One group member stated that MSDES provides financial support and emergency accommodation to employable, temporarily excused or temporarily disabled persons eligible under the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act. (Of note, MSDES does not have to issue costs if there are none.) This member also noted that it supports persons participating in job search and training programs that help them to become more independent.

One group member stated that eligible persons who have no fixed address and who are without other resources can be referred to emergency accommodation. This member noted that MSDES usually refers single persons to hostels and families to emergency shelters. Another member noted that MSDES works in close association with New View Society in Port Coquitlam, which links persons with non-violent mental health problems to suitable housing. It was also noted that MSDES maintains a list of housing contacts and assists eligible individuals to find non-market or subsidized housing.

One group member referred to the Jobs Partnership Program and Job Start. This member stated that the former program focuses on job placement, while the latter program targets youth 17 to 24 who are not in school and who have no job experience.

2. What more could MSDES be doing to address the needs of people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in the Tri-Cities?

Several group members stated that some people who are eligible for income assistance may be reluctant to apply because of all the paperwork and other requirements. One member noted that applicants are asked to self identify if they have no fixed address or if they have a mental health or substance misuse problem. This member commented that there are no exemptions and that this can be a very humiliating process.

One group member stated that people with substance misuse problems can be temporarily excused from job search or training programs. This member noted that these people are referred to the Ministry of Health or SHARE, and are informed of detox and treatment facilities. Another member noted that the 30 day treatment program is not long enough and that many only complete the first step, which often results in them relapsing.

One group member discussed the Youth Agreement. As part of this agreement, this member stated that staff are instructed to contact the parents. In most cases, this member noted, the parents are willing to take their son or daughter back if they follow the rules. This member commented that the original problem usually resurfaces and the youth in question is again back on the street and more reluctant than ever to seek out assistance. Another member *stated that mental health and substance misuse problems begin to surface during youth, and this can further complicate matters. For many, one member noted, the end result is time spent on the streets of the Downtown Eastside.*

While this discussion addressed some of the issues around income assistance and eligibility, group members did make a number of suggestions as to how MSDES could better address the needs of people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in the Tri-Cities. These suggestions included:

- Increase community awareness about income assistance and eligibility criteria.
- Prepare potential applicants for the fact that they will have to disclose personal information.
- Stress that all information will be kept strictly confidential.
- Consider having the application process take place in a less intimidating site than in the District Office – e.g., in a drop-in centre.
- Improve staff training in order to enhance detection of potential barriers to employment (e.g. mental illness, substance misuse, etc).
- Enhance the capacity to deal with dual diagnosis clients.
- Maintain closer contact with the Mental Health Offices. In certain situations, it may be necessary to know if there is an open file on an individual. For example, staff could refer this individual to appropriate services and supports.
- Provide more information on the MSDES system to uniform front line staff about an individual's status in order to serve them better.
- Assign a worker to the North Fraser Pretrial Centre. This worker would take applications from individuals who are about to be released into the community. It was felt that this assistance may deter them from reoffending. (Of note, this action was implemented starting in 2011.)

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- Maintain closer contact with the Mental Health Office. In certain situations, it may be advantageous to know if there is an open file on an individual. For example, staff could then refer this individual to appropriate services and supports.
- Place a cautionary alert on the MSDES system to inform front line staff about an individual's diagnosis in order to serve them better.
- Assign a worker to the North Fraser Pretrial Centre. This worker would take applications from those who are about to be released into the community. It was felt that this assistance may deter them from reoffending. (Of note, this action was implemented starting April 2, 2001.)

3. How many absolutely homeless people are living in the Tri-Cities?

Group members stated that it is difficult to know how many absolutely homeless people are living in the Tri-Cities. One group member placed the number at about 175 but qualified her answer by saying that this total included those homeless people who are temporarily residing with others. Another group member noted that she felt the number was in the range of 75 to 90 but conceded that this was only an educated guess. Several group members referred to the large number of people who have mental health issues, while others commented that many homeless people may have relocated to another municipality in order to access emergency shelter accommodation and related services.

4. What are the challenges to addressing homelessness in the Tri-Cities?

Group members identified a number of challenges to addressing homelessness in the Tri-Cities. They included:

- diverse needs of the homeless population – i.e., how do you prioritize them;
- lack of coordination and information sharing between agencies;
- lack of information about the number of homeless people and their needs;
- lack of public awareness about homelessness and its impacts;
- large geographic area, incorporating five municipal governments;
- no central referral system;
- no municipal social planning function;
- presence of NIMBY;
- reluctance of various levels of government to get involved and commit resources.

5. What would you suggest needs to be done to address homelessness in the Tri-Cities?

Group members identified a number of actions to address homelessness in the Tri-Cities. They included:

- Develop a drop-in centre where homeless people can come in off the street, have a coffee, take a shower, use a washroom and/or obtain counselling or referral to other services.
- Develop supported housing for people with mental illness, people with substance misuse problems and people with multiple diagnoses.
- Establish a rental bank.
- Establish an outreach worker or team. This outreach worker or team would establish a rapport with homeless people living with mental illness and eventually engage them in the services that they need. This initiative could be a joint initiative of Riverview Hospital and the Simon Fraser Health Region.
- Improve public transportation within the Tri-Cities. Currently, a lot of people have difficulty accessing available services and supports due to poor transportation.
- Increase the number of emergency transition beds and provide second stage housing in the Tri-Cities.

- Increase the supply of permanent affordable housing for individuals who can live independently in the community.
- Open a permanent emergency shelter that caters to the diverse needs of a variety of different groups, including men, women, youth, etc. Additionally, consider providing minimum barrier beds or mats as part of the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy.
- Provide a continuum of services to deal with those people who have substance misuse issues, including detox beds.
- Purchase the Golden Ears Hotel in Port Coquitlam and convert it into a homeless hostel.
- Retain existing single room occupancy hotels – i.e., we have already lost the Cariboo and Wild Duck Inn.

Section 5: Community Solutions Forum

The Community Solutions Forum was held on March 28, 2001 at Douglas College's David Lam Campus in Coquitlam. At this forum, which was attended by about 60 people, the Mayors of Port Coquitlam and Port Moody and the Acting Mayor of Coquitlam presented the highlights of the Community Status Report for the Tri-Cities and the two neighbouring villages of Anmore and Belcarra. Following this presentation and a brief question and answer session, forum participants were asked to join a break-out group to discuss one of six issue areas highlighted in the report, including that of homelessness.

The break-out group on homelessness was comprised of the following individuals:

- Sarah Carter, Simon Fraser Health Region
- Gwen Ford, Port Moody Parks and Recreation Commission
- Michelle Ninow, United Way of the Lower Mainland
- Kevin Oxley, Coquitlam Resident and Member of St. Lawrence Anglican Church
- Daisy Quon, United Way of the Lower Mainland
- John Stark, Consultant and Group Leader

The break-out group on homelessness discussed: (1) who was at-risk of homelessness; (2) what was currently occurring to address this issue in the Tri-Cities; and (3) what actions, if any, were needed to reduce the incidence of homelessness in the future.

With regard to the first topic area, group members felt that a large segment of the population was at-risk of homelessness. There was agreement that the following groups were particularly vulnerable: disabled people, the elderly (especially those that live alone), single mothers, those people with mental health or substance misuse problems, women living in abusive relationships, and youth (especially those who have dropped-out of school). One group member stated that higher housing costs are placing more families at-risk of homelessness; while another group member noted that the working poor (i.e., those earning minimum wage) are only one paycheck away from being homeless.

As for the second topic (i.e., current initiatives to address homelessness in the Tri-Cities), the group felt that not enough was being done. Group members stated that homelessness has all but been ignored in the Tri-Cities. It was noted that there has been no studies to determine the extent of the problem and only limited coverage in the local press. One group member commented that politicians and residents turn a blind eye to this problem, believing that if they ignore it that it will simply go away. As a result, group members felt that people's lives were being placed at-risk, especially during the winter months. One group member blamed the lack of interest on stereotyping with regards to homeless people. This group member stated that many residents believe that the homeless are older men with drinking problems that choose not to participate in society.

The group stated that there are a number of community supports (e.g., clothing exchanges, food banks, soup kitchens, thrift stores, etc.) to assist those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. However, group members felt that these community supports are poorly co-ordinated and are probably little known amongst those who need them most. Additionally, group members noted that these community supports may help fend off the cold and hunger but they are no substitute for affordable housing or emergency shelter accommodation. One group member referred to the fact that only 222 non-market housing units have been constructed in the Tri-Cities since 1994 and that over 1,800 households were on BC Housing's waitlist for non-market housing in 1999. Another group member added that there are only 14 first stage, emergency transition beds and no shelter beds in the Tri-Cities.

With regard to the third topic area (i.e., actions needed to reduce the incidence of homelessness in the future), the group was in agreement that there needed to be a short and longer term action plan. In the short term, group members stated that there needed to be a comprehensive study of homelessness (currently underway) in the Tri-Cities. They also felt that all levels of government needed to get involved, along with the non-profit and private sectors, to address this issue. Group members stated that if this study demonstrated that people's lives are being placed at-risk due to homelessness, then a shelter should be developed in the Tri-Cities. There was agreement that this shelter should be combined with other support services to address the multiple needs of homeless individuals, including education, employment, health and long term housing. Additionally, there was agreement that a directory or survival guide should be developed and distributed to those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. This guide would provide information on available community supports, eligibility criteria and locational information.

As for the longer term, the group felt that more non-market or subsidized housing needed to be developed in the Tri-Cities. Group members stated that this housing should address the needs of the disabled, the elderly, single mothers, youth, etc. There was some discussion as to whether this housing should be clustered or dispersed and it was felt that the latter option would garner the least community opposition. One group member noted that there needed to be second stage housing for women and children fleeing abusive relationships. This group member commented that the absence of such housing means that these women and children must leave their community. Another group member felt that there needed to be municipal bylaws to protect market rental housing from condominium conversion or demolition, as well as safeguarding single room occupancy hotels.

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