CLOSE TO HOME:
Housing First for Youth in the Cowichan Region
Final Report

Prepared by:

Cowichan
Housing Association

May, 2018

Close to Home: Housing First for Youth in the Cowichan Region

Report prepared by:
Cowichan Housing Association
Duncan, BC
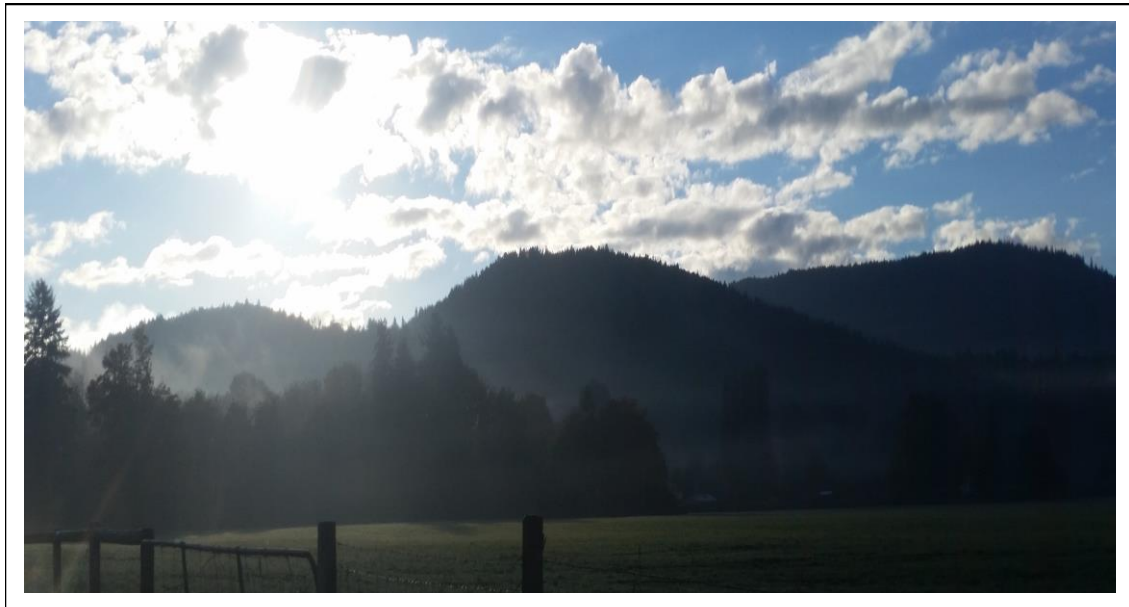May, 2018
www.cowichanhousing.com

Photo courtesy of: Mikaela Whitelaw

Acknowledgements

The development of this project and all of the work associated with it would not have been possible without the starting vision and involvement of a wide array of individuals and organizations.

Thanks to our project partners and committee members:
Our Cowichan Community Health Network
Cowichan Division of Family Practice
Social Planning Cowichan
Mental Health and Substance Use Collective Impact Initiative and Housing First for Youth Committee

Thanks also to the many community organizations who gave of their time and knowledge to develop a better collective understanding of the needs for youth who are experiencing homelessness and housing issues.

Thank you to those who came from other communities to lend their knowledge and experience, and to support us from afar: Katherine McParland, founder and manager of the A Way Home Kamloops movement to end youth homelessness and Co-chair of the BC Network to End Youth Homelessness, Cameron Keller of Kaleidoscope Consulting, Mike Bulthuis of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness's Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, Cory and Chris from RainCity.

Special thanks to our numerous community agencies and members who passionately help those who are struggling and help to build a stronger and healthier Cowichan.

Cowichan Housing Association Close to Home Project Team:
Terri Mattin Dame, MA, Project Manager, ED
Mikaela Whitelaw, BA, Project Coordinator
Christy Villiers, BA, Project Coordinator
Morgan Saddington, Administrative Coordinator

Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy Innovative Solution to Homelessness

Youth Housing First Committee Members and Consultation Participants
Canadian Mental Health Association- Cowichan Valley Branch
Cowichan Basket Society
Cowichan Division of Family Practice
Cowichan Family Life Association
Cowichan Green Community
Cowichan Independent Living Resource Centre
Cowichan Intercultural Society
Cowichan Lake Community Services
Cowichan Neighborhood House Association
Cowichan Tribes
Cowichan Tribes Youth Centre
Cowichan Valley Youth Services
Cowichan Women Against Violence
CVRD Island Savings Centre
Discovery Youth and Family Substance Use Services
Duncan Community Corrections
Duncan Mental Health
Duncan United Church
First Nations Health Authority
Halalt First Nation
Hiiye'yu Lelum Society
H'ulh-etun Health Society
Island Health
Ladysmith Community Justice Program
Ladysmith Community Resources Association
Literacy Now Cowichan
Lyackson First Nation
M'akola Housing
Malahat Nation
Meals on the Ground
Ministry of Child and Family Development
MLA, Sonia Fursteneau
Municipality of North Cowichan
Our Cowichan Communities Health Network
RCMP- North Cowichan/Duncan Detachment
School District 79 Cowichan Valley Open Learning Cooperative
Social Planning Cowichan
Ts'ewulhtun Health Centre
United Way Central & North Vancouver Island

Contents

Executive Summary

Homelessness and lack of safe, adequate, affordable housing are critical issues for young people in the Cowichan Region. Research conducted over the past five years has emphasized growing concern around the increasing numbers of youth experiencing homelessness and lack of affordable housing; concurrently, the past five years has seen significant increases in issues related to poverty, mental health and substance use, particularly for youth.

Many of the youth in our community who experience housing instability are also struggling with one or more pressures including poverty, isolation, discrimination, abuse, harassment, mental health concerns criminal involvement, and sexual exploitation.

The longer a youth lives without stable housing, guidance and supports, the more likely these concerns will increase, potentially having long-term negative consequences. Research and evidence strongly support the premise that addressing homelessness has a demonstrable return on investment in terms of reduced financial cost to society and improved community health and social well-being.

The Close to Home Project was developed in response to concerns that were voiced at many tables over the past few years, and in particular, at the Mental Health and Substance Use Collective Impact Table, where dialogue around these issues led to the conclusion that ***adequate housing is a pre-cursor to moving forward and addressing community health and youth well-being in a meaningful way.***

> *Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.*
>
> *(Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2012)*

The aims of the Close to Home project were to develop a Housing First model for the Cowichan Region, and as a first priority, develop an Implementation Plan for Addressing Youth Homelessness, with a focus on the design, development and implementation of a supported youth housing/shelter facility.

Consultations and research in the Cowichan Region have identified the need for developing a spectrum of housing for youth, and a system of care that supports young people to access and maintain housing, as well as to move forward in life.

Key to this model is the understanding of the geographic and demographic diversity of the Cowichan Region and of the youth who live here, in particular, Indigenous youth, to ensure *nuts'a' maat shqwaluwun* – that we are working with One Heart and One Mind. Our model articulates a multidimensional lens for understanding youth and the context of the Cowichan Region through which youth homelessness and housing needs to be approached, and our commitment to work together.

The Partnership Framework

The Close to Home project was hosted and led by Cowichan Housing Association in partnership with Our Cowichan Health Network and Social Planning Cowichan, and in collaboration with the Mental Health and Substance Use (MHSU) Collective Impact Team.

The power of Collective Impact is being able to gather, reach out, connect with, hear the voices of, and include in many different ways, all of the people who need to be involved. Over the past year, many agencies came together to participate in committee work, Housing First education sessions, to share their knowledge, define the solutions and be part of the work and way forward.

The Importance of Community Context

The context for this project is the Cowichan Region, a geographically, culturally and demographically diverse area, located on Vancouver Island, BC. This region stretches from the Pacific Coast of Vancouver Island to the Strait of Georgia (Salish Sea) and southern Gulf Islands to the east. It reaches north to Ladysmith and south to the Malahat/Mill Bay area.

Cowichan is part of the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples. It is home to eight local First Nations: Cowichan Tribes, Ditidaht First Nation, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Malahat First Nation, Penelakut Tribe and Stz'uminus First Nation.

The process of developing our Housing First Plan for Youth recognized the critical influence of our land and geography, and of all who live and work here. As well, it integrated the sheer volume and complexity of agencies and organizations that are currently involved through different tables, or under umbrellas that are working on these challenges through a particular lens, to coalesce and combine their collective knowledge and efforts.

Understanding the Diverse Needs of Youth in the Cowichan Region

Youth are incredibly diverse. They are male, female, agender, transgender, LGTBQ2S; they are Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, newcomers and life-long residents. They live in both urban and rural settings and in a variety of family circumstances. They are even parents. Many youth are working hard to stay safe, to keep a roof over their heads or to survive on the streets, to support themselves, and to stay in school.

Building on the context of the Cowichan Region, the Housing First for Youth Plan was developed out of research, and region-wide engagement with youth and the organizations who serve them.

Paramount to this process was to go far beyond counting, research and consultation, to reach out, invite voices, build trust and relationships, engage in authentic conversations and accommodate participation in many different ways.

Understanding the diverse needs of youth in the Cowichan Region came from a range of processes: data from a Point in Time Count in summer of 2017, the Close to Home Project Needs and Gaps analysis involving formal interviews, focus groups and a survey of at risk youth. It also came from listening to both youth and adults through numerous community conversations, and through focused conversations with our Youth Housing First and Youth committees.

Examining the Research and Best Practices

In our work to develop a framework and plan for the unique context and needs of the Cowichan Region, we also reached out to other individuals and communities for their experience and were able to draw and weave from these examples for strategic, operational and inspirational information. Our thanks to all who have come before us, whose knowledge and experience helped us to develop our own framework and action plan.

Our Land, Our Cultures, Our Youth: Integrating a Cowichan Youth Lens

First and foremost, the Cowichan Region Housing First Plan recognizes the diverse and complex situations of youth from around the region. Our model is based on a recognition of this diversity and was informed by youth and organizations that serve them.

|	
Indigenous Youth	Cowichan is part of the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples. It is home to eight local First Nations: Cowichan Tribes, Ditidaht First Nation, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Malahat First Nation, Penelakut Tribe and Stz'uminus First Nation. Housing and supports that serve Indigenous youth must recognize their culture and history and must be part of the journey to help begin to heal, build community, and reconnect with culture and family. This would happen through cultural teachings, lessons, and traditional practices guided by elders from their home community.
LGBTQ2S+ Youth	LGBTQ2S+ youth face challenges and barriers ranging from homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. LGBTQ2S+ youth need an option that provides a safe place where their sexual orientation and gender identity is respected and celebrated.
Young Families with Children	Youth with Children need specific supports around child care and parental education, as well as separate housing with enough space for their families.
Newcomers	Newcomers would need specific supports around the English language, cultural education, and community connection.
Rural/Urban	Rural youth would specifically need transportation support, as well as mobile wrap-around services.
Developmental	Developmental growth is different for each individual; specific life skills will vary depending on the youth, but might look like cooking, cleaning, work ethic, education, etc.

The Cowichan Region Housing First for Youth Plan
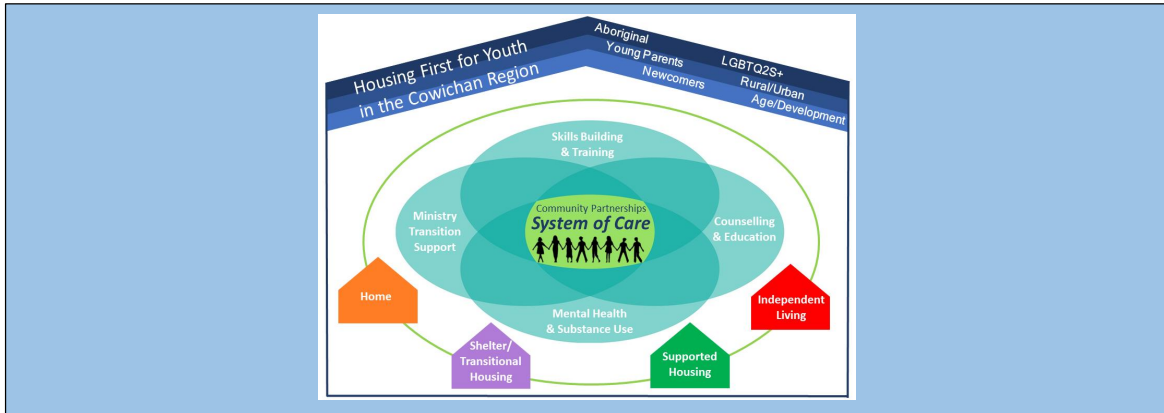
The Cowichan Region Housing First Plan aims to build an integrated system of care that puts our young people at the centre, and places a focus on housing and preventing youth homelessness.

Recognizing the sheer lack of housing options for young people, the Plan's most pressing and immediate objectives are to address respite, shelter and transitional housing while fostering long term, permanent housing opportunities.

Our model is built upon a knowledge of the geography and people of the Cowichan Region that inform the two foundations of housing and a system of care. We depend on collaborative, community-wide involvement with continuous communications, and the voices of our youth.
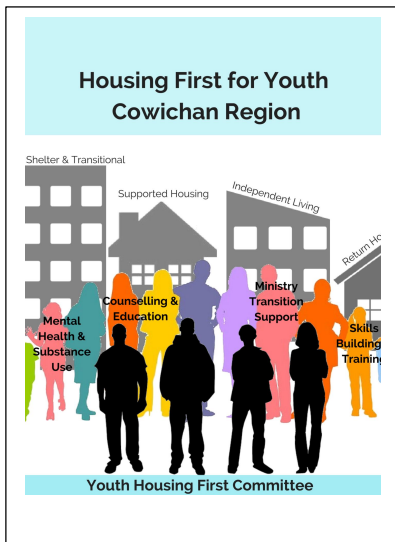
Plan Objectives

I. Shelter, Transitional and Permanent Housing that meets the needs of all youth

II. A System of Care that provides for the range of supports needed to ensure youth are appropriately sheltered or housed and that youth well-being is central

III. Leadership, participation and involvement strategies that recognize and provide for differing needs and that highlight the voices of youth

IV. A process for sharing information and keeping everyone connected

Priority Actions

Firstly, in recognition of the sheer lack of housing options and services in the Cowichan Region for youth, the initial and primary objective is to create a range of housing opportunities from which to begin. The second objective is to gather, develop and cultivate the range of service partnerships needed to support youth in a Housing First approach.

At the time of this report, collaborative work has begun on all fronts and the passion and efforts of the community are shining a light on action.

1. Respite Housing:

Social Planning Cowichan will host a project to develop a Youth Host Homes Program.

2. Youth Home (13 – 19 age group):

Cowichan Valley Open Learning Cooperative (CVOLC) Leadership Class are leading the development of a youth home concept to support youth aged 13-18 in need of emergency assistance and support.

3. Transitional Housing:

Canadian Mental Health Association (Cowichan Branch) is exploring expanding their capacity and adding housing site options to accommodate youth transitional housing. A current opportunity to house young mothers with children is in discussion.

4. Scattered Site Housing:

CMHA is exploring expanding their capacity to provide scattered site housing to accommodate youth. They have a small number of youth aged 19 - 24 in scattered site housing and develop a Moving Forward Plan with each individual.

5. Permanent Supported Housing:

Hiiye'yu Lelum Society has launched a project that will design and develop permanent, supported housing geared to young mothers and their babies and youth in general.

Photo Courtesy of Social Planning Cowichan

1. Introduction

Homelessness and lack of safe, adequate, affordable housing are critical issues for young people in the Cowichan Region. Research conducted over the past five years has emphasized growing concern around the increasing numbers of youth experiencing homelessness and lack of affordable housing; concurrently, the past five years has seen significant increases in issues related to poverty, mental health and substance use, particularly for youth.

Many of the youth in our community who experience housing instability are also struggling with one or more pressures including substance use, mental health concerns, isolation, discrimination, abuse, harassment, criminal involvement, poverty and sexual exploitation.

The longer a youth lives without stable housing, guidance and supports, the more likely these concerns will increase, potentially having long-term negative consequences. Research and evidence strongly support the premise that addressing homelessness has a demonstrable return on investment in terms of reduced financial cost to society and improved community health and social well-being.

Housing First offers a model of best practice for addressing youth homelessness and housing issues. This approach prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can be supported to be well and flourish. To achieve this, we need a collective effort on the part of many agencies and organizations at all levels.

The Close to Home Project was developed in response to concerns that were voiced at many tables over the past few years, and in particular the Mental Health and Substance Use Collective Impact Table, where dialogue around these issues has led to the conclusion that adequate housing is a pre-cursor to moving forward and addressing community health and youth well-being in a meaningful way.

This project recognized the sheer volume and complexity of agencies and organizations who are currently involved through different tables, or under umbrellas that are working on these challenges through a particular lens, and who would like to coalesce and combine their collective knowledge.

The aims of the Close to Home project were to develop a Housing First model for the Cowichan Region, and as a first priority, develop an Implementation Plan for Addressing Youth Homelessness, with a focus on the design, development and implementation of a supported youth housing/shelter facility.

For the purposes of this project, youth are loosely defined as between the ages of 15 to 25 years of age, and who are considered to be at risk or experiencing homelessness and/or housing adequacy issues.

The Project

The Close to Home Project was developed during fall of 2016, launched in June of 2017. Working within the unique regional context of the Cowichan area, the objectives of the project were to:

i.   Engage community local governments, service providers, umbrella organizations, businesses and housing providers to build knowledge and capacity for addressing youth homelessness and housing issues through the Housing First approach.

ii. Understanding the unique context and circumstances of the Cowichan Region, design, develop and adopt a locally relevant and appropriate approach to youth homelessness based on Housing First principles.

iii. Work collaboratively with community partners to design, develop and begin implementation of a youth housing project.

iv. Document and evaluate the process and achievements toward an understanding of what works and lessons learned for going forward.

Over the year, it reached out to communities around the region to dialogue, build a Youth Housing First committee to guide the process, and to gather input into needs, gaps and solutions. Over time, the MHSU Youth Housing First Committee evolved into a broad-based, Collective Impact group.

The following sections will outline:

- The national picture of youth homelessness
- Learnings from other communities
- The context of the Cowichan region
- The process of community engagement and results of the needs and gaps analysis
- Formation of the Housing First for Youth Plan and actions underway
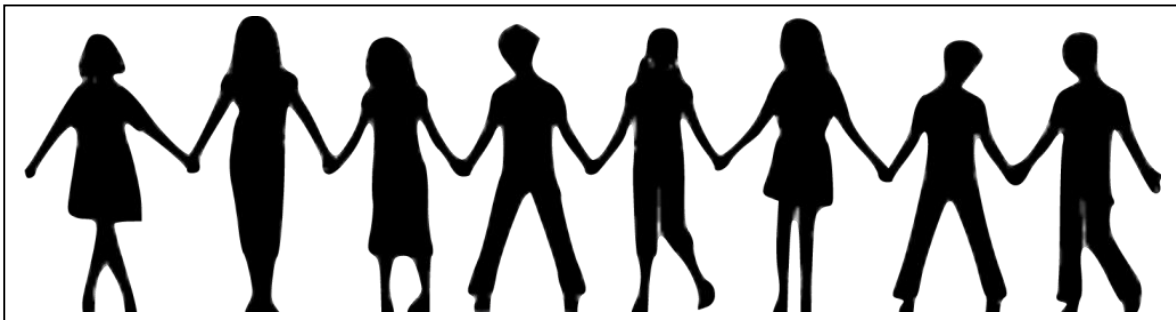
2. National Picture of Youth Homelessness and Housing

Defining Youth[1] Homelessness

"Youth homelessness" refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.
(Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016)

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue involving young people who need adequate supports to help them move forward in their lives. From a Human Rights perspective: All young people have the right to the essentials of life, including adequate housing, food, safety, education and justice.
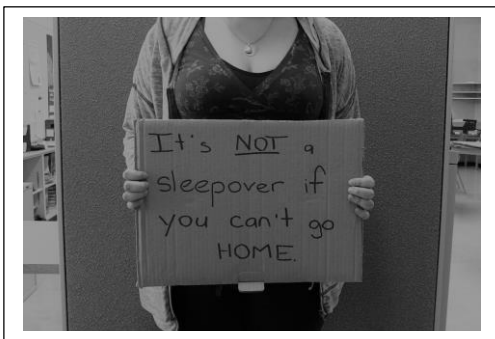

"By failing to implement more effective strategies to address youth homelessness, we are undermining the human rights of these youth."

(Gaetz et al.:2016)

Photo courtesy of: Social Planning Cowichan

Youth homelessness and precarious housing is a serious issue across Canada. Over the course of the year, there are between 35–40,000 young people who experience homelessness, and on any given night between 6–7,000 (Gaetz et al., 2016). The issue of hidden homelessness and inadequately housed youth is more difficult to quantify.

Pathways and Systemic Factors

The pathway to youth homelessness is neither linear nor experienced as a single event. Many youth experience multiple family ruptures and multiple episodes of living outside of the home (episodic homelessness). Youth facing homelessness or housing instability are highly vulnerable and therefore more likely to encounter further abuse, trauma, violence, exploitation and prostitution while on their journey to stable housing. Not surprising, many of these youth present

---

[1] Various age ranges are used to define youth. Some agencies and programs in the Cowichan Region have services for youth as young as 12 or 13 years old, while some include youth up to age 30. Local service providers in the Cowichan Region have pointed out that when youth are defined or categorized with a wide age range (e.g., 13 to 24 years) it is important to consider there will be significant differences with the needs, circumstances and development between pre-teens, teens, adolescents and young adults.

with complex physical and mental health concerns as well as high levels of substance use, often beginning at an early age.

The systemic factors that make youth vulnerable to sexual exploitation is involvement in the child welfare and/or correctional systems, poverty, and racism/oppression; individual factors include a history of physical/sexual abuse, limited education, learning disabilities (including Fetal Alcohol Effects), dysfunctional family of origin, and little or no access to family and friends.

According to the National Youth Homelessness Survey (2016), those who leave home at an early age (16 or younger) are more likely to:

- Experience multiple episodes of homelessness
- Be involved with child protection
- Be victims of crime once homeless, including sexual assault
- Have greater mental health and addictions symptoms
- Experience poorer quality of life
- Attempt suicide
- Become chronically homeless

The Case for Stable Housing and Supports

Studies have shown that investing in prevention costs much less than it does to keep someone on the streets. By focusing on prevention and housing (with supports, if necessary), we would not only be responding appropriately and compassionately to a problem that harms individuals, families and communities, but we would also be saving money (Gaetz, 2013).

3. Housing First for Youth

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) adapts the successful Housing First model to meet the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. As a program intervention, it means moving youth out of homelessness as quickly as possible with no preconditions. Young people are provided with a range of housing options, including returning home (with supports), supportive housing, transitional housing, and scattered site independent living.

Key to this approach is that young people are provided with a range of supports that will help them maintain housing, learn life skills, have positive relationships with peers and adults, and re-engage with school, employment training, and/or employment. Shifting to HF4Y means providing homeless youth with the same housing and wrap-around supports that would help any young person make a successful transition to adulthood.

(Gaetz et al., 2016: 13)

From Philosophy to Programming to Systems Approach

Housing First for Youth has been articulated as a philosophy, systems approach and a program. Gaetz et al (2017) provide some distinctions to be aware of:

❖ HF4Y programs must demonstrate fidelity to the Housing First model, values and core principles as described while taking into account of the local context, including the range of existing services and supports.

❖ As a philosophy however, the core principles of HF4Y can provide a community or an organization with a foundational set of values to guide goals, outcomes, collaboration and practice. Programs and services can exist within and support a broader systems strategy that follows the core principles without actually being considered as HF4Y programs.

❖ And in terms of a systems approach "… within a "system of care" approach, all services and program elements within the youth housing/homelessness sector work towards supporting young people to access housing (or avoid homelessness) and to get the supports they need. This includes not only dedicated HF4Y programs with a mandate to provide the intervention, but also allied services including outreach, emergency shelters and other youth-serving organizations." (Gaetz et al, 2017)

Housing First for youth recognizes a spectrum of housing needs that communities may have in place to support youth at various stages of their journey need to including:

- in place crisis housing
- returning home
- supportive housing
- transitional housing
- independent living

What is Housing First?

Housing First is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or addressing substance use issues.

It is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life.

National Alliance to End Homelessness (2016). Housing First. Retrieved from: https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) Core Principles

1. A right to housing with no preconditions

2. Youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination

3. Positive youth development and wellness orientation

4. Individualized, client-driven supports with no time limits

5. Social Inclusion and community integration

Benefits of Housing First [1]

Increases Housing Stability

- For people who struggle with homelessness, the opportunity through a housing first approach offers a stable housing situation

Improves Quality of Life

- A person will have basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter. Quality of life also increases through services, which might address: mental health, substance addictions, employment, and life skills.

Reduces Use of the Justice System

- By housing individuals who were previously on the streets, this reduces the usage and cost of police and RCMP, as well as the justice system.

Reduces Use of Emergency Services

- With less people on the streets, costs and numbers of clients will decrease in hospital emergencies, emergency shelters, and fire department calls, etc.

AT Home/Chez Soi Housing First Trial Key Findings [2]

- Housing First can be effectively implemented in Canadian cities across all different regional sizes and ethno-racial and cultural compositions

- Rapidly ends homelessness

- Is a sound investment; every $10 invested resulted in an average savings ranging from $3.42-$9.60

- Leads to other positive outcomes (for example: quality of life, and community functioning)

1. Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. (p.2)
2. Paula Goering, Scott Veldhuizen, Aimee Watson, Carol Adair, Brianna Kopp, Eric Latimer, Geoff Nelson, Eric MacNaughton, David Streiner & Tim Aubry (2014). National At Home/Chez Soi Final Report. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada. Retrieved from: http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca

Cowichan Housing Association — Housing First for Youth — Spring 2018

Housing First is...

A Program

Housing First can be considered more specifically as a program when it is operationalized as a service delivery model or set of activities provided by an agency or government body.

A Philosophy

Housing First can act as a guiding principle for an organization or community that prioritizes getting people into permanent housing with supports to follow.

A Systems Approach

When the foundational philosophy and core principles of Housing First are applied across and infused throughout integrated systems models of service delivery, you have a systems approach to housing.

Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. (p.2)

Supports After Housing...

Housing Supports

Key housing supports include:

- Finding appropriate housing
- Supporting relations with landlords
- Applying for and managing rent subsidies
- Assistance in setting up apartments.

Complementary Supports

These supports help individuals and families improve their quality of life, integrate into the community and potentially achieve self-sufficiency. They may include: life skills, engagement in meaningful activities, income supports, assistance with employment, training and education, and social engagement.

Clinical Supports

These include a range of supports designed to enhance the health, mental health and social care of the client.
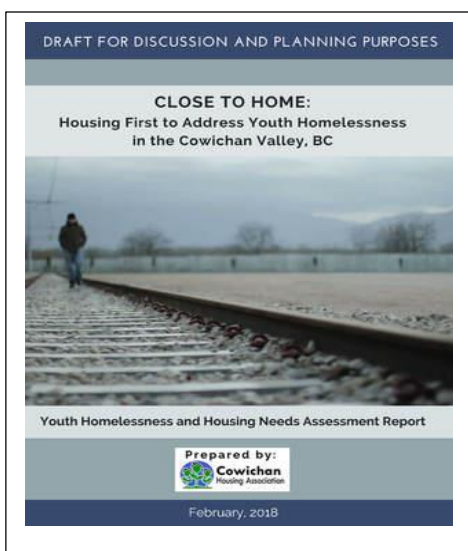
Retrieved from:
http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/housing-first

Cowichan Social Planning · Our Cowichan Communities Health Network · Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice A GPSC Initiative · Canada

4. How are Other Communities Responding?

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION AND PLANNING PURPOSES

CLOSE TO HOME:
Housing First to Address Youth Homelessness
in the Cowichan Valley, BC

Youth Homelessness and Housing Needs Assessment Report

Prepared by:
Cowichan
Housing Association

February, 2018

Across Canada, many communities are working to develop preventative and responsive programming to address youth homelessness.

The Close to Home Project gathered research about how other communities are addressing youth homelessness; three sample community programs were selected to inform the needs assessment and provide insight into what works and the challenges experienced in other communities in BC and Alberta.

We reached out directly to youth housing programs in Victoria, Nanaimo and Kamloops and Calgary. Our comprehensive gaps and needs report provides an overview of these Best Practices.

Ten key lessons learned:

1. Youth needs differ from adult needs; and there are further differences between youth who are male, female, or transgender, Indigenous youth, Urban and Rural youth, and youth who are parents themselves.

2. Lack of housing is a key barrier and increasing housing stock is critical for the long term.

3. Shelter, transitional housing and scattered site housing form a spectrum of housing that serve different youth needs.

4. Choice is a critical aspect for empowering youth.

5. Wrap-around services are integral. There is a need for intensive case management for youth with mental health and/or other challenges and there can be a lack of treatment options.

6. 24/7 staffing for youth shelters is important and no hard line for length of stay.

7. Youth engagement and youth voices are critical to ensuring that their perspectives are heard.

8. There will be a need for reducing barriers to youth for education, training, employment, financial and skill development opportunities.

9. In rural areas, work to find ways to bridge the transportation gap.

10. Start simply but simply start. One unit or many, they key is to start.

5. About the Cowichan Region

The Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) on Vancouver Island is part of the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples. This region stretches from the Pacific Coast of Vancouver Island to the Strait of Georgia (Salish Sea) and southern Gulf Islands to the east. It reaches north to Ladysmith and south to the Malahat/Mill Bay area. Over 83,000 people live in the region with the majority of the population along the eastern side of the island. 11,615 or 14% are youth aged 15 – 29 years.

4500 are youth (2275 males, 2225 female) aged 15 – 19 years
3515 are youth (1855 male, 1665 female) aged 20 – 24 years
3600 are youth (1800 male, 1795 female) aged 25 – 29 years
(Statistics Canada, 2016)

There are four municipalities – City of Duncan, Town of Lake Cowichan, District of North Cowichan and the Town of Ladysmith, as well as numerous unincorporated communities, a number of Gulf Islands and many First Nations reserves. The eight local First Nations are: Cowichan Tribes, Ditidaht First Nation, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Malahat First Nation, Penelakut Tribe and Stz'uminus First Nation.
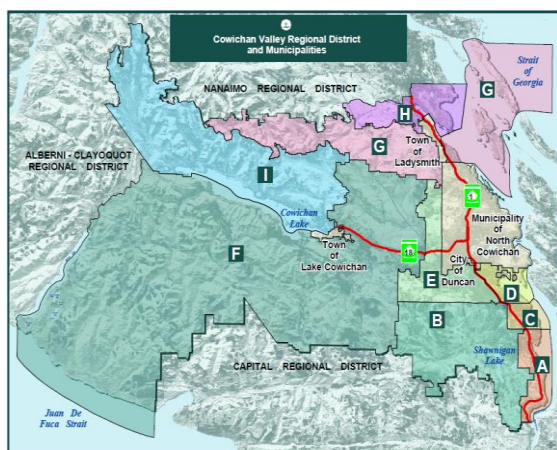

Photo retrieved from:
http://www.onecowichan.ca/2014_municipal_candidates

Photo retrieved from:
https://www.mapsofworld.com/canada/provinces/british-columbia-county-map.html

6. The Close to Home Project

The Collaborative Framework

After four years of dialogue to try to better understand how to address complex issues surrounding mental health, substance use, poverty and discrimination, the Cowichan Region Mental Health and Substance Use (MHSU) Collective Impact Initiative identified the need to start by addressing key social determinants to create a pathway to health and wellness for our most vulnerable citizens.

The MHSU identified housing as a primary and lacking key determinant and Housing First as a philosophy and approach that was needed for the Cowichan Region. The Close to Home Project emerged out of this dialogue as a first step to gather, organize and develop strategic pathways toward this goal.

The Close to Home project was hosted and led by Cowichan Housing Association in partnership with Our Cowichan Health Network and Social Planning Cowichan, and in collaboration with the Mental Health and Substance Use (MHSU) Collective Impact Initiative.

Initial members of the MHSU included Cowichan Tribes, Island Health Authority, Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice, First Nations Health Authority, H'ulh-etun Health Society, Halalt First Nations, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Canadian Mental Health Association, Our Cowichan Health Network, Cowichan Housing Association and Social Planning Cowichan.

Youth Engagement

Our approach to youth engagement also followed a Collective Impact philosophy and was based on the following principles adapted from NSW[2]:

- Youth have a right to participate programs and services that impact upon them
- Youth need to participate in ways that they are comfortable and to level of their interest and ability, and be supported to participate through financial or other means
- Youth need respect by listening to young people's views and taking them seriously
- Participation is built upon strong relationships
- Participation should build on young people's knowledge and skills
- It is essential to recognise young people's different situations and backgrounds, particularly those:
    - from Aboriginal backgrounds
    - from culturally diverse backgrounds
    - with disabilities
    - in out-of-home care
    - from vulnerable or marginalized groups
- Participation processes should invite young people to provide feedback on the effectiveness of participation

Therefore, the project took a multi-pronged approach to youth engagement that began with a partnership with a group of youth - Safe Youth Cowichan (Social Planning Cowichan). This dynamic group of young people are known for engaging at risk youth in innovative community initiatives. Working through Social Planning Cowichan, this youth engaging other youth approach enabled the project to link with and tap into the voices of youth from around the region through some creative processes.

---

[2] NSW premier and Cabinet Best Practice Principles for Youth Participation. Available at: http://youth.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/070607_Best_Practice_Principals_for_Youth_Participation.pdf (Accessed July 12, 2017)

Educating Ourselves and Others

Two Housing First for Youth community training events were attended by community organizations and youth, to both present and gather information and feedback to inform the Housing First for Youth Plan.

Our September 2017, a Housing First 101 Event featured the expertise of Kaleidoscope Consulting's Cameron Keller who is a Housing First expert and is acknowledged nationally and internationally for leading the world's largest randomized controlled trial in mental health and homelessness, and Mike Bulthuis of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness's Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab.

Our Spring 2018 event focussed on building our pathway and gaining knowledge through the experiences of other communities and through learning from our First Nations community partners. The Cowichan Community welcomed Katherine McParland, founder and manager of the A Way Home Kamloops movement to end youth homelessness and Co-chair of the BC Network to End Youth Homelessness and representatives of Rain City Housing who shared their work with us.

Needs and Gaps Analysis

Throughout the fall of 2017, the project continued research and completed a comprehensive Needs and Gaps Analysis in February of 2018 (see the full report at www.cowichanhousing.com). Appendix A lists the many agencies, organizations and representatives who have been involved in either or both committee work and consultations.

Briefly, the needs and gaps analysis involved:

- Immersing ourselves in the research on youth homelessness and Best Practices
- Investigating the current situation of housing and services available for youth in the Cowichan Region and creating a service inventory
- Engaging with youth and those who provide services and with youth around the region to hear different perspectives and insights on gaps and needs
- A survey of youth connected to community service organizations.

The results of the needs and gaps analysis articulated the complex issues, gaps and needs for addressing youth homelessness in the Cowichan Region and informed the development of the Housing First for Youth Plan.

5. Understanding the Complex Needs of Youth in the Cowichan Region

The Process

Building on the context of the Cowichan Region, the Needs and Gaps analysis conducted research, and region-wide engagement with youth and the organizations who serve them. Paramount to this process was to go beyond counting, research and consultation, to reach out, invite voices, build trust and relationships, engage in authentic conversations and accommodate participation in many different ways.

Our process drew upon local research, community engagement reports and Point in Time counts; conducted outreach and dialogues with sixty service providers from twenty-six organizations, partnered with regional youth initiatives to join up conversations about youth well-being to housing, and conducted specific focus groups and a survey of 107 higher risk youth.

Youth Engagement

A partnership with Social Planning Cowichan and Safe Youth Cowichan linked the aims of the project to a range of initiatives that helped to gather insight into youth needs.

A Youth Mental Health and Homelessness Survey explored youth mental health issues that included questions about housing via online distribution and direct collection at a Youth dance event hosted by Cowichan Tribes and put on by Discovery Youth & Family Substance Use Services that was held in October and November, 2017.

A Community Outreach and Awareness Building Campaign by youth to engage other youth as well as the general public about youth homelessness during Homelessness Action week in October 2017. The youth put up displays at two local Starbucks and the local library and took an afternoon to hand out postcard infographics in busy local areas.

A Neighbourhood Engagement Event put on by Social Planning Cowichan with partners from Warmland House and fourteen other local organisations was a kick off to a series of neighbourhood development initiatives that took place over the year and planned into the future. The session provided an opportunity for the project to engage with young people in a neighbourhood located in a key area of the community near the Warmland Shelter, at the neighbourhood level.

Connecting Youth Dialogue Sessions through the fall of 2017 engaged and consulted with approximately 90 youth to inform

strategies designed to address issues around youth mental health, substance use and assess personal/neighbourhood safety. Project partners for Connecting Youth include the Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative, School District 79, Cowichan Housing Association, Canadian Mental Health Association, Cowichan Intercultural Society, the Inclusive Leadership Collaborative, Warmland Shelter, RCMP, Cowichan Women Against Violence Society and the Community Safety Advisory Commission of the CVRD.

The Youth Placemaking Initiative engaged youth from all areas of the region through inviting students from several high schools to engage in a design charrette. Each participating group of students selected a site to design within their local area and were supported to develop a design giving consideration to: youth needs, accessibility, climate change, community safety, social cohesion, transportation, recreation, housing and economy.

Through this initiative, a group of students from the Cowichan Valley Open Learning Centre (CVOLC) identified youth homelessness as their primary concern, and developed their project around addressing this issue.

As the Close to Home project had a key priority to develop youth shelter and transitional housing, a partnership was developed with the CVOLC Youth to design and develop a formal youth shelter plan, described in Section 7. Students from CVOLC have since led the drive for a shelter to serve youth aged 13 - 19, taking their message and concept to the School District, consulting with other youth around the design, and with the help of the Close to Home Project, developing partnerships and a Business Plan.
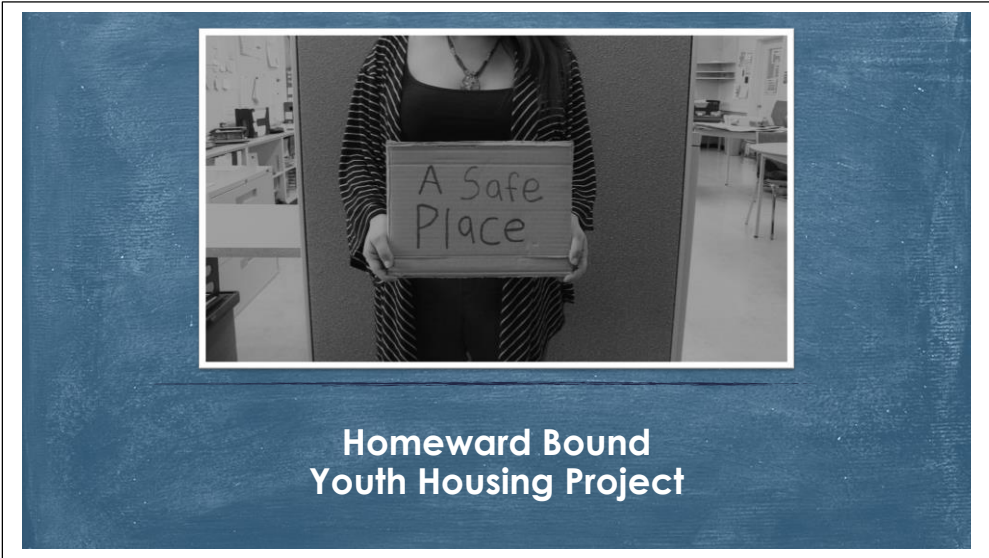
Gaps and Needs Analysis

Conducting a Gaps and Needs analysis was an important step toward understanding the range of needs and formulating a coordinated community plan to address, prevent and ultimately end youth homelessness.

The Needs Assessment involved:

- Immersing ourselves in the research on youth homelessness and Best Practices
- Investigating the current situation of housing and services available for youth in the Cowichan Region
- Engaging with those who provide services and with youth around the region to hear different perspectives and insights on gaps and needs
- Conducting a focussed survey with youth connected to service organizations.

The following are highlights of the Needs Assessment findings. The full report can be found at www.cowichanhousing.com.

Key Learnings

Youth, and particularly Indigenous Youth, are an increasingly noticeable group among those experiencing housing challenges. Absolute homelessness appears to be the tip of the iceberg.
In the most recent Point in Time Count (Emmanuel, 2017), 24 youth were surveyed, representing 12% of those counted and almost 9% of those who were absolutely homeless. Of the 24 youth, 46% were male, 54% were female, 62.5% identified as First Nations, Metis or Non-Status Aboriginal, and the majority had lived in the Cowichan Region for over a year.

During 2017, community organizations reported providing services to between 70 – 100 youth who were somewhere in the spectrum of homeless to precariously housed, to at risk, or in transitional housing, and expressed a range of concerns and needs.

Youth in the Cowichan Region are incredibly diverse and the housing options, responses and supports designed for them need to reflect this diversity.
They are male, female, agender, transgender, LGTBQ2S; they are Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, newcomers and life-long residents. They live in both urban and rural settings and in a variety of family circumstances. They are sometimes parents. Many youth are working to support themselves and are working hard to stay in school.

Youth and the community organizations that serve them identified a range of interconnected needs and solutions that need to address the diversity of youth affected.

Gaps and Concerns
1. Increasing youth homelessness and lack of housing stock
2. Need for better community coordination and planning for youth housing and support services
3. Issues faced by Indigenous youth, LGTBQ2S and transgender youth
4. Issues faced by youth in care and youth transitioning out of care
5. Issues faced by youth with children
6. Increase in issues relating to mental health, substance use/misuse
7. Need for better information, engagement and connection.

Needs Identified

1. Shelter, transitional and permanent housing that meets the needs of a spectrum of youth
2. A 'System of Care' that provides for the range of supports needed to ensure youth are appropriately sheltered or housed and that youth perspectives and well-being is at the centre
3. Community responses and services supported by an overarching coordination structure with a central intake function
4. Participation and involvement strategies that recognize and provide for differing needs and that highlight the voices of youth.
5. A process for sharing information and keeping everyone connected

Cowichan Housing Association

Close to Home Youth Housing Needs Assessment

Substance Use · **Mental Health** · **Abuse** · **Poverty** · **Discrimination**

Many youth who experience housing instability also struggle with one or more of the above pressures.

- Homelessness, and a lack of safe, affordable housing are critical issues for young people in the Cowichan Region.

- Research over the past 5 years has emphasized a growing concern around the numbers of youth experiencing homelessness and lack of affordable housing.

- The past 5 years have also seen a significant increase in issues related to poverty, mental health and substance use, particularly for youth.

- The longer a youth lives without stable housing and support systems, the more likely these concerns will increase, with potential long-term consequences.

Cowichan Housing Association has conducted a needs assessment for youth housing in the Cowichan Region. In November of 2017, 107 youth were surveyed from around the Cowichan Region to understand their housing situations and needs for housing.

Housing Situation of Youth Surveyed

%	Situation
2.8 %	Live in transitional or supportive housing
5.6 %	Live on the streets
6.5 %	Live in a foster care home or youth home
7.5 %	Needed to stay at a shelter but were too young to access it
13.1 %	Have had problems with affording rent
15.9 %	Have had problems with finding a place to stay
23.3 %	Live with Relatives or Friends
33.6 %	Have been worried about having a place to stay

What Would Help?

- Affordable Housing
- Youth Housing Options
- Youth Shelter
- Youth Drop-in Centre
- Help Finding Housing
- Emotional Support
- Social/Recreational Activities
- Employment/Training

![Cowichan Housing Association logo]

Close to Home Youth Housing Needs Assessment

Demographics

Age
15 years or younger	22%
16-18 years old	38%
19 to 24 years old	29%
25 + years old	11%

Survey Locations
Duncan	43%
North Cowichan	8%
South Cowichan	8%
Cowichan Lake Area	24%
Southern Gulf Islands	8%

Identity
45% of youth surveyed identify as Aboriginal

Male	53%
Female	42%
Transgender	1%
Agender	1%
LGBTQ2+	13%

Young Parents
- **14%** of youth surveyed are parents
- **93%** of youth with children are Aboriginal
- **40%** have children in the foster system
- **13%** have children living with friends or family

Education & Employment
- **21%** Do not go to school
- **10%** Graduated high school
- **36%** Work part or full time
- **61%** Work and go to school

55% have struggled with mental health; 25% with substance abuse

Housing First

View the Plan at www.cowichanhousing.com

The Close to Home Housing First for Youth Plan was developed with input from youth and service providers in the Cowichan Region. It lays out a model framework for a Housing First Approach to addressing youth housing in the Cowichan Region. The Plan will include:

1. Shelter, Transitional and Permanent Housing that meets the needs of all youth including supported and independent housing options.

2. A System of Care that provides for the range of supports needed to ensure youth are appropriately sheltered or housed and that youth well-being is central.

Vision Cowichan Social Planning · Our Cowichan Communities Health Network · Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice A GPSC Initiative · Canada
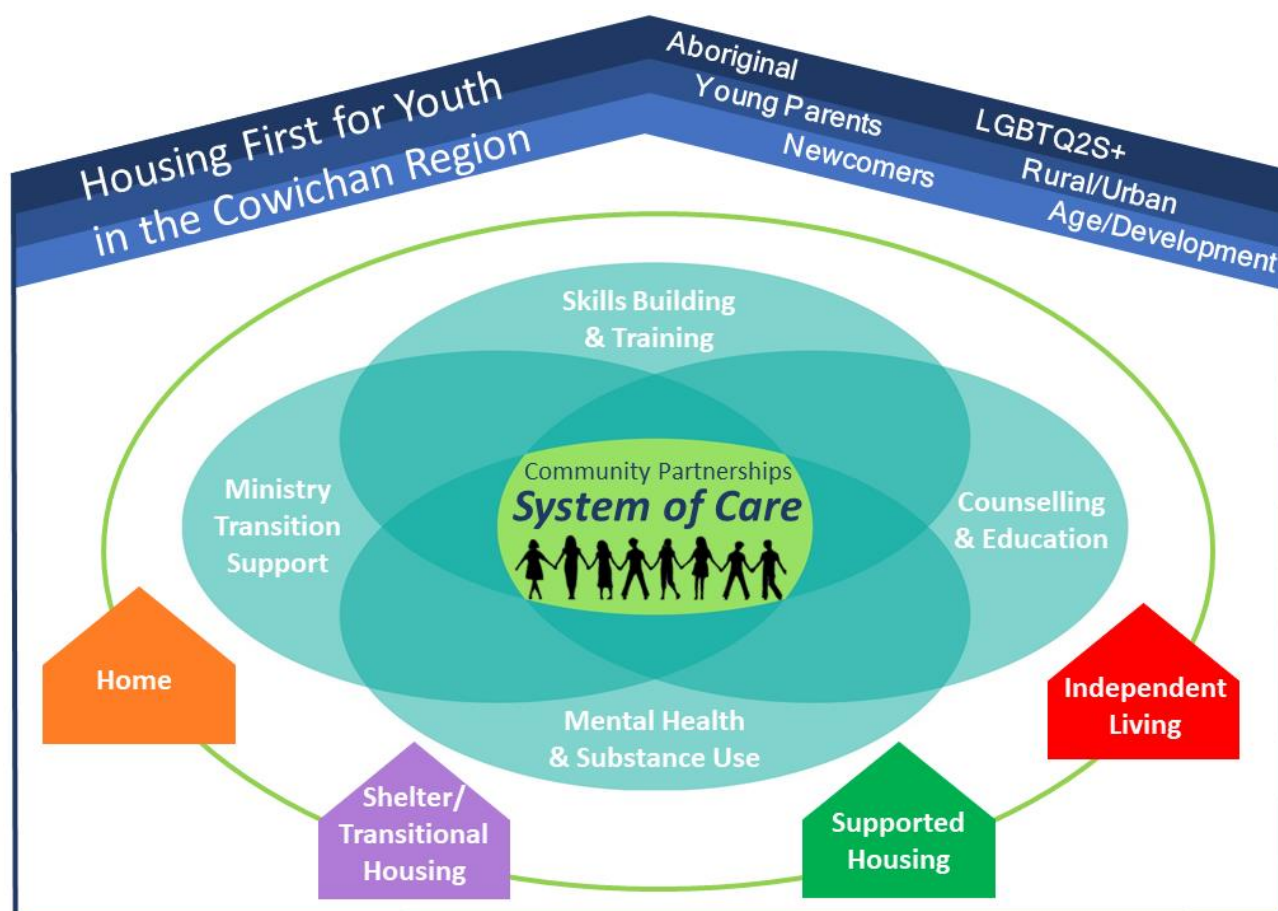
6. The Cowichan Region Housing First for Youth Plan

Like many communities across BC, the Cowichan Region has identified a serious and pressing need to address youth well-being through ensuring that youth have safe, adequate and affordable housing, and adequate support systems and resources.

Research and consultations undertaken have demonstrated the need for housing and supportive services for youth, using a Housing First approach. Of note is the clear agreement between what both youth and service providers have said are the issues and needs, and further, that these needs are closely aligned with Housing First for Youth models and experiences.

The Close to Home Housing First for Youth Plan lays out a model framework for a Housing First Approach to addressing youth homelessness and affordable housing in the Cowichan Region.

The development of the Cowichan Region Housing First for Youth Plan gathered and learned from the experiences, research and models of other communities and experts in the field to adapt the aim of Housing First to the unique circumstances of the Cowichan Region.

Strategic Framework [3]

Housing First for Youth in the Cowichan Region is situated within a Strategic Framework that recognizes that youth need both housing and supportive services, and that the ultimate goal is to prevent youth from becoming homeless.

Strategy	Objectives
PREVENTION	• Foster youth resilience and meaningful community engagement • Work with schools to educate youth about homelessness and available supports • Promote family mediation and support • Ensure effective support for youth aging out of government care • Ensure youth are not discharged into homelessness • Coordinate the activities of youth-serving organizations to best serve youth • Develop a spectrum of housing for youth including shelter, transitional, supported scattered site). Connect this housing to transportation.
HOUSING	• Develop a spectrum of housing for youth including shelter, transitional, supported scattered site) • Adopt a community-wide Housing First Approach • Develop a Housing First Program
SUPPORT	• Promote relationship-based approaches to supporting youth • Provide outreach services to connect youth with housing and support • Ensure adequate services for youth with mental health issues • Enhance services for LGBTQ youth and foster public awareness • Enhance services for Aboriginal youth and foster public awareness • Ensure that education, training, and job skill development are accessible to youth

---

[3] Adapted from: A Way Home Kamloops (2014) A Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Kamloops Available at: http://homelesshub.ca/resource/way-home-plan-end-youth-homelessness-kamloops (Accessed: November, 2017)
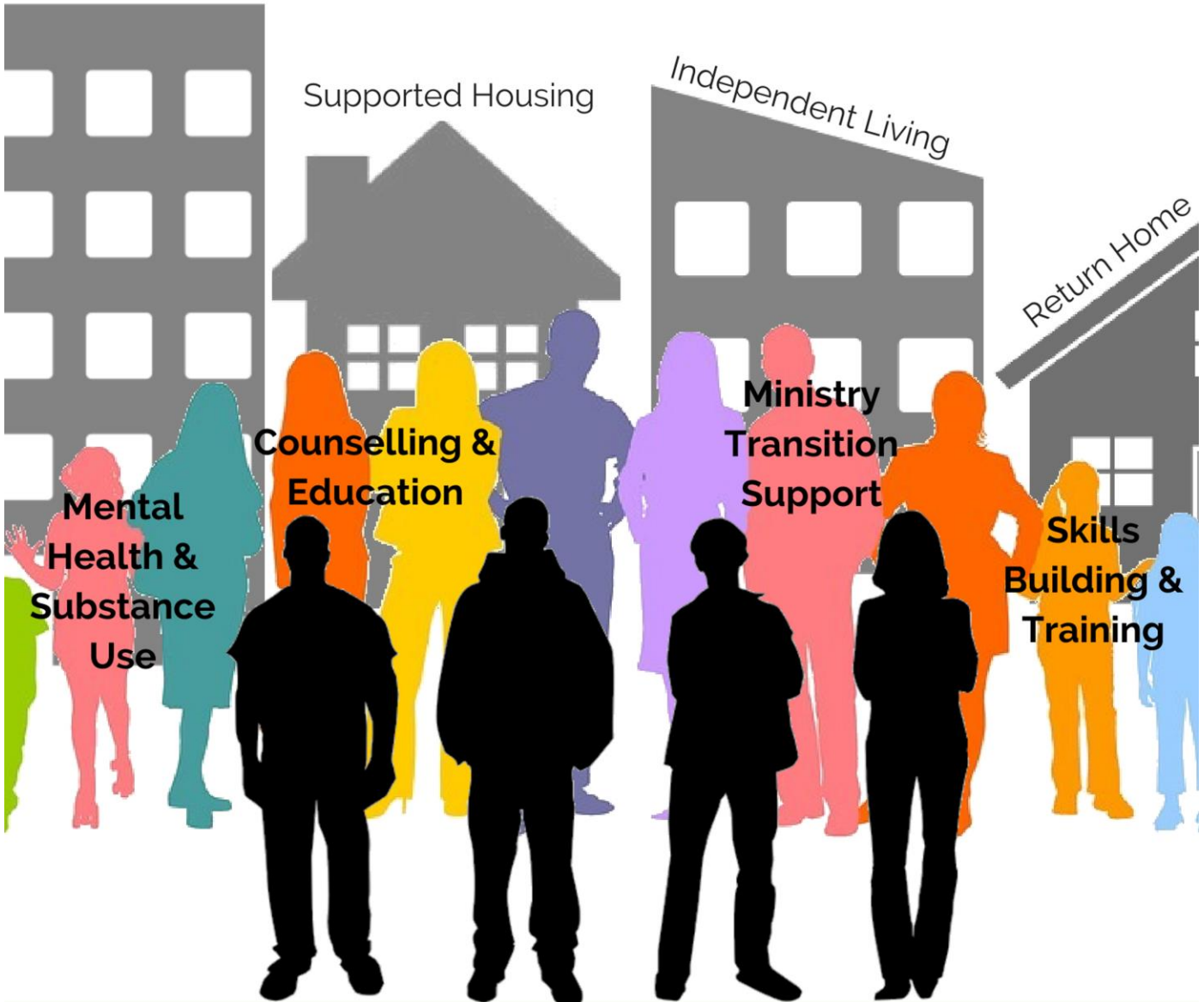
Housing First for Youth Cowichan Region

Youth Housing First Committee

Integrating Needs of Diverse Youth

Adapting the Housing First for Youth philosophy to the Cowichan Region calls for integrating the needs and situations of diverse youth in our regional context.

Indigenous Youth	Cowichan is part of the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples. It is home to eight local First Nations: Cowichan Tribes, Ditidaht First Nation, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Malahat First Nation, Penelakut Tribe and Stz'uminus First Nation. Housing and supports that serve Indigenous youth must recognize their culture and history and must be part of the journey to help begin to heal, build community, and reconnect with culture and family. This would happen through cultural teachings, lessons, and traditional practices guided by elders from their home community.
LGBTQ2S+ Youth	LGBTQ2S+ youth face challenges and barriers ranging from homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. LGBTQ2S+ youth would need an option that provides a safe place where their sexual orientation and gender identity is respected and celebrated.
Young Families with Children	Youth with Children would need specific supports around child care and parental education, as well as separate housing with enough space for their families.
Newcomers	Newcomers would need specific supports around the English language, cultural education, and community connection.
Rural/Urban	Rural youth would specifically need transportation support, as well as mobile wrap-around services.
Developmental	Developmental growth is different for each individual; specific life skills will vary depending on the youth, but might look like cooking, cleaning, work ethic, education, etc.

Overarching Aims

The Cowichan Region Housing First Plan aims to build an integrated system of care that puts our young people at the centre and places a focus on housing and preventing youth homelessness.

Our model is built upon a knowledge of the geography and people of the Cowichan Region that inform the two foundations of housing and a system of care. We depend on collaborative, community-wide involvement with continuous communications, and the voices of our youth.

Plan Components

I. Shelter, Transitional and Permanent Housing that meets the needs of all youth

i. Youth Respite/Shelter/Safe House/Transitional Housing
- Low/no barrier, to meet youth "where they are at"
- Open and staffed 24/7
- Trauma-informed practice

ii. Youth-appropriate Supported and Independent Housing Options
- Low/no barrier supported housing options for youth with different needs (Housing First Model)
- Affordable rental housing (build, renovate, repurpose)
- Wrap around services without preconditions
- Tenant advocacy, mediation and education to prevent evictions

II. A System of Care that provides for the range of supports needed to ensure youth are appropriately sheltered or housed and that youth well-being is central

i. System of Care
- Multitier system that attends to the spectrum of youth needs from prevention, to shelter and housing, to mental health and well being

ii. Youth Housing First Service Philosophies and Interventions and that align with trauma-informed harm reduction, client-centered, strengths-based approaches to service

iii. Centralized intake and Case Management Capacity
- Coordination between agencies and outreach
- Adequate Case Management for each youth to connect them to the right community resources
- Involve Youth ACT and ICM teams

iv. Support to Transition Out of Care
- Community-based support to help youth to prepare for aging out of care

v. Skills Building and Training
- Life skills training (e.g., cooking, budgeting/finance, laundry)
- Housing readiness training (e.g., Ready to Rent courses)
- Educational options (e.g., upgrading high school or post-secondary preparation, literacy skills)
- Communications and conflict resolution
- Employment readiness training (resume writing, interviewing)
- Computer literacy and access to computers and internet
- First Aid, Food Safe and other certificates

vi. Mental Health and Substance Use Supports (including prevention, treatment and Interventions)
- Outreach and Supports (24/7) for youth dealing with mental health and addictions (either themselves or those they live with)
- Low/no barrier access to treatment options (e.g., safe injection sites, sobering/detox center, treatment centers, harm reduction)
- Prevention education and supports

vii. Counselling and Education Supports
- Access to counselling services
- Liaison and partnerships with schools to identify and support youth who are experiencing challenges
- Increase community education on mental health and substance use to dispel myths and reduce stigma
- Community Outreach, Education and Awareness for Youth on Domestic Violence and Sexual Exploitation
- Relationship supports for parents and youth, foster parents, group home providers and/or social workers

viii. Healthy Activities
- Options for drop-in for youth (including evenings and weekends)
- Promotion of local activities for youth (using appropriate technologies/social media)
- Age-appropriate programming and appropriate age groupings (e.g., with sports, games, activities)

III. Leadership, participation and involvement strategies that recognize and provide for differing needs and that highlight the voices of youth

i. Community Organizations Options for Participation and Involvement
- Identify different options and tiers for involvement in planning

ii. Youth Leadership is Key

iii. Youth Leadership and Engagement with/by Youth
- Create opportunities for youth to engage with vulnerable youth
- May increase youth comfort in asking for help
- Need youth voice on youth services

iv. Interim Action Plan
Identify immediate actions that can be taken to address youth homelessness

i. Youth Resources Online
- Current and future youth-oriented services/activities/events are promoted online via social media, preferably updated by youth

ii. Youth Hub or Neighborhood House in Central Area
- Safe place for youth to learn about services and resources (e.g., counselling, treatment, housing, finances)
- Place for youth and workers to build relationships & connections

Plan Priorities

Recognizing the sheer lack of housing options for young people, the Plan's most pressing and immediate objectives are to address respite, shelter and transitional housing while fostering long term, permanent housing opportunities.

7. Collaborative Community Action

The Cowichan Region Housing First Plan aims to build an integrated system of care that puts our young people at the centre and places a focus on housing and preventing youth homelessness.

Moving from Planning to Mobilization, the model is built upon a knowledge of the geography and people of the Cowichan Region that inform the two foundations of housing and a system of care.

We depend on collaborative, community-wide involvement with continuous communications, and the voices of our youth Community consultations and research have identified the Plan.

The Cowichan Community has begun to work on each one of these areas to identify and facilitate actions and partnership, and update status of each as progress occurs.

The following is a summary of work and progress to May 2018.

COWICHAN REGION HOUSING FIRST PLAN ACTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION TO MAY 2018	
Objectives and Partnerships To Date	**Lead and Projected Timeline**
Objective I: Shelter, Transitional and Permanent Housing that meets the needs of all youth	
1. Youth Host Homes Pilot Project: Social Planning Cowichan will host a project to develop a Youth Host Homes Program. Host Homes are a form of respite accommodation to provide young people with emergency supports as an alternative to the shelter system. Host Homes Programs are considered to be safe, high quality accommodation for a short period of time to give youth and their families a 'breather', and provide a supportive environment for all parties to rebuild their emotional resilience and renegotiate relationships. Work is underway to conduct fundraising for this project; anticipated start date is 2018.	*Social Planning Cowichan 2018*
2. Youth Home (13-18): Cowichan Valley Open Learning Cooperative (CVOLC) Leadership Class are leading the development of a youth home concept to support youth aged 13-18 in need of emergency assistance and support. CVOLC Students have produced a video illustrating the issue of hidden homelessness among young people in the Cowichan Region. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4u2rIYlk9gg&feature=youtu.be The project is currently exploring two potential sites and developing a business plan in partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Social Planning Cowichan and CHA.	*CVOLC, Canadian Mental Health Association, Social Planning Cowichan: 2018*
3. Youth Transitional Housing: CMHA currently serves a small number of youth aged 19 - 24 in transitional housing and has begun to explore expansion of those services to include youth under the age of 19. Currently some of the youth they serve are under Youth Agreements and many of these youth go into existing transitional housing or go directly into scattered site housing depending on the need. CMHA is interested in expanding their capacity and is exploring housing site options to accommodate youth	*Canadian Mental Health Association: 2018 and beyond*

transitional housing. A current opportunity to house young mothers with children is in exploration.	
4. **Scattered Site Housing:**	
CMHA subleases units in the region and acts as a liaison between individuals and landlord as well as providing support services to individuals. CMHA is interested in expanding their capacity to provide scattered site housing to accommodate youth. They have a small number of youth aged 19 - 24 in scattered site housing and develop a Moving Forward Plan with each individual. Where appropriate this plan helps youth transition to a position where they have direct relationships with landlords. This can allow CMHA to move away from a liaison role to one of providing external support where necessary.	*Canadian Mental Health Association: ONGOING*
5. **Permanent Supported Housing:**	
Hiiye'yu Lelum Society House of Friendship promotes wellness and unity and addresses the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people by providing holistic programs and services in Cowichan. Hiiye'yu Lelum Society has launched a project that will design and develop permanent, supported housing geared to young mothers and their babies and youth in general.	*Hiiye'yu Lelum Society: 2018 and beyond*
Objective II. A System of Care that provides for the range of supports needed to ensure youth are appropriately sheltered or housed and that youth well-being is central	*MHSU Housing First for Youth Committee: Ongoing*
1. **Partnership Building** The following agencies have indicated their willingness to partner in Housing First programming to provide the necessary supportive services. Support Services: Skills Building and Training • Canadian Mental Health Association- Cowichan Valley Branch • Cowichan Independent Living • Cowichan Intercultural Society • Cowichan Women Against Violence • Cowichan Valley Youth Services (formerly COS) • Global Vocational • Hiiye'yu Lelum, House of Friendship	

Support Services: Mental Health and Substance Use
- Canadian Mental Health Association- Cowichan Valley Branch
- Discovery Youth and Family Services
- Duncan Mental Health
- Public Health

Support Services: Counselling and Education Supports
- Canadian Mental Health Association- Cowichan Valley Branch
- Cowichan Family Life Association
- Cowichan Women Against Violence
- Cowichan Valley Youth Services (formerly COS)
- Discovery Youth and Family Services
- Hiiye'yu Lelum, House of Friendship
- Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services
- Literacy Now Cowichan

Support Services: Support to Transition out of Care
- Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services

2. Prevention Programming

i. Upstream Project: Upstream Projects focus on helping young people at risk of homelessness through partnering with schools to identify and provide supports to youth and their families as a means to prevent homelessness. Potential lead: Social Planning Cowichan.

Social Planning Cowichan: 2019

8. Conclusion

This project was not the first step along the journey to end youth homelessness in the Cowichan Region, nor will it be the last. It was however, a collective first step in coming together and working with one heart and one mind, to find a way to begin the work together.

The work to understand the issues, and the work to find and implement solutions, is complex and multifaceted. It requires a process that makes room for many and diverse voices in many different ways. It requires relationships, trust, constant communication, and for each person to contribute their unique strengths and find their place in the process.

The project evaluation process identified some key challenges:

- Finding the time in busy schedules for meetings amidst many competing priorities and service provision
- Balancing the need for process and information with the need to achieve actions

It also stressed a number of important elements that helped to weave the community effort together including:

- Having a backbone organization
- Connecting and aligning with other stakeholders and community partners related to youth homelessness
- Keeping stakeholders and community partners informed and engaged in the project and *listening* to feedback

Achieving this level of stakeholder engagement and having a Plan were identified as key outcomes.

At the heart of the Close to Home Project were the voices and teachings from youth, many of whom asked for a way to help them be safe, sheltered, loved, and to have a better pathway toward health and well-being. The Cowichan Community is now on a path of action toward creating the changes and taking actions to realize their vision.

WHAT WE HEARD ALONG THE WAY...

We have been trying to do this for years off the side of our desks. Nothing was getting done.

Some community partners don't want to come to more meetings. They want to get the work done.
(Community agency evaluation participants)

Youth Survey Participants:

What would have helped?

To have a family, or move out on my own. I wish I could've had a family who loved me and cared.

Caring family and support.

A group that is accessible and welcoming

Information on available housing

A way to get to work, and someone who would rent to me (too young and First Nations).

What is needed?

More youth off the street and safe in homes

Affordable housing and to stay in the community

No one left behind

A safe supportive family and home

Substance education
More opportunities for social connection

References

A Way Home Kamloops (2014) A Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Kamloops Available at: http://homelesshub.ca/resource/way-home-plan-end-youth-homelessness-kamloops (Accessed: November, 2017)

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness; A Way Home Canada (2016) *Canada Without Poverty.*

Emmanuel, Joy. (2017) *Cowichan Valley Regional District Summer Point-in-Time Homeless Count & Housing Needs Survey- Community Report.*

Gaetz, Stephen et al. (2013) *Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness.* Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Gaetz, Stephen et al. (2013) *The State of Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Gaetz, Stephen. (2017). *THIS is Housing First for Youth: A Program Model Guide*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press

Gaetz, Stephen. (2012) *The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can We Save Money by Doing the Right Thing*? Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Press.

Gaetz, Dej, Richter and Redman (2016) *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Gaetz, Stephen, O'Grady, Bill, Kidd, Sean & Schwan, Kaitlin. (2016). *Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Goering, P. et al. (2012) *At Home/Chez Soi Interim Report*. Ottawa: Mental Health Commission of Canada.

NSW premier and Cabinet Best Practice Principles for Youth Participation. Available at: http://youth.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/070607_ Best_Practice_Principals_for_Youth_Participation.pdf (Accessed July 12, 2017)

Statistics Canada (2016) *Census Profile Cowichan Valley Regional District.* Available at: http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Tab=1&Geo1=CD&Code1=5919&Geo2=PR&Code2=47&Data=Count&SearchText=Cowichan&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1

Statistics Canada (2014) *Hidden Homelessness in Canada*. Available at: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2016001/article/14678-eng.pdf

Youth Rights! Right Now! (2016) *Ending Youth Homelessness: A Human Rights Guide.* Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness.

APPENDIX A: Housing First for Youth Organizations Involvement

Committee Members and Consultation Participants

1. Canadian Mental Health Association- Cowichan Valley Branch
2. Cowichan Basket Society
3. Cowichan Division of Family Practice
4. Cowichan Family Life Association
5. Cowichan Green Community
6. Cowichan Independent Living Resource Centre
7. Cowichan Intercultural Society
8. Cowichan Lake Community Services
9. Cowichan Neighborhood House Association
10. Cowichan Tribes
11. Cowichan Tribes Youth Centre
12. Cowichan Valley Youth Services
13. Cowichan Women Against Violence
14. CVRD Island Savings Centre
15. Discovery Youth and Family Substance Use Services
16. Duncan Community Corrections
17. Duncan Mental Health
18. Duncan United Church
19. First Nations Health Authority
20. Halalt First Nation
21. Hiiye'yu Lelum Society
22. H'ulh-etun Health Society
23. Island Health
24. Island Savings Centre - Youth Drop in Centre
25. Ladysmith Community Justice Program
26. Ladysmith Community Resources Association
27. Literacy Now Cowichan
28. Lyackson First Nation
29. M'akola Housing
30. Malahat Nation
31. Meals on the Ground
32. Ministry of Child and Family Development
33. MLA, Sonia Fursteneau
34. Municipality of North Cowichan
35. Our Cowichan Communities Health Network
36. RCMP- North Cowichan/Duncan Detachment
37. School District 79 Cowichan Open Learning Cooperative
38. Social Planning Cowichan
39. Ts'ewulhtun Health Centre
40. United Way Central & North Vancouver Island

The opinion of and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.