



**6<sup>th</sup>**

**Annual**

**Report Card on  
Homelessness  
for Nelson, BC**

**JUNE 2014**

**Researched & Prepared by:  
the Nelson Committee  
on Homelessness**





# **6<sup>th</sup> Annual Report Card Homelessness for Nelson BC June 2014**

Using January – December 2013 Statistical Data

## **Acknowledgements:**

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The Annual Report Card is a collaborative project, made possible by many people. Thank you all who contributed to this year's report; to the community members who shared their perspectives and local organizations who contributed their annual statistics.

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We can all be part of  
meaningful actions that create

*change.*

Breaking down barriers,

reducing stigma,

& sharing accurate information

about poverty and homelessness

in our community,

are key components to lasting

**Solutions.**



# introduction

Homelessness is real in Nelson, BC. It is a hidden and often misunderstood reality, a situation that affects local people from all walks of life; including seniors, youth, families and those living with mental illness.

Here in Nelson, as in anywhere else across Canada, homelessness is inextricably tied to poverty, lack of affordable housing and not enough resources, such as mental health services, and other supports for all in need.

Since 2009, the Nelson Committee on Homelessness has researched and prepared the Annual Report Card on Homelessness.

It is a tool to better understand local homelessness and to inform solutions. Each year the report highlights local statistics, voices of lived experience, current community issues and promising approaches.

It is a project made possible by many people. Thank you to all who made this year's report possible and in particular to those who have shared their personal lens on poverty and homelessness in Nelson.

We hope that the information and perspectives captured in this year's edition will both inform and inspire ongoing efforts for positive change in our community.



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# Homelessness (def):

**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 encompasses a range of physical living situations:**

**Absolutely Homeless** or unsheltered and living on the streets or places not meant for human habitation.

**Emergency Sheltered**, including those who are staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence.

**Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary.

**At Risk of Homelessness**, referring to people who are not homeless but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious and/or does not meet public health and safety standards.

## **Homelessness is the result of systemic or societal barriers,**

a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual /household's financial, physical or cognitive challenges and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not chose to be homeless and the experience is generally negative, stressful and distressing.

The problem of homelessness and housing exclusion refers to the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing.

Source: Abbreviated from the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012) Canadian Definition of Homelessness.



Last year I was unable to work for almost a year due to mental health challenges... I didn't qualify for benefits and made no income during that time. We could not pay our rent. Because of the support of family - a loan - we were able to keep our housing and food on our table. That situation also caused us debt though, paying bills on credit card because of having absolutely no other choice. I am better now and working part time - however sustainable, living wage employment for a mom is difficult to find - really limited opportunities in the area. It is stressful trying to make ends meet - uncertainty about paying the rent, bills, groceries. Also the shame - most people would have absolutely no clue that our family is going through this - I hide it. We did recently find out about the RAP program (rent subsidy - BC Housing) and we qualify. This will be a huge help.

-Shared by local parent

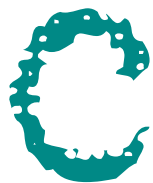
For information on the BC Housing Rental Assistance Program visit [bchousing.org](http://bchousing.org)



# A PLACE TO CALL

# Home

CONTRIBUTED // VANESSA ALEXANDER  
HOMELESSNESS OUTREACH WORKER



"Come see this", he exclaims as he sweeps past me. I anticipate something extraordinary. "Check it out! I can turn the lights on and off whenever I want!". He beams with excitement. This simple luxury is astounding him.

We worked together diligently for months to secure housing, and the day finally arrived last week when he was accepted as a tenant. "I have to sleep with the window open every night, just to feel like I'm still outside, ya know?".

For years, this man has battled with the numbing cold of winter, the relentless rain in spring, blistering hot summer afternoons, and the darkening autumn days. He survived the countless times he had to ward off cougars and wildlife prowling around his campsite where he used to call home.

He continued to live this way, despite the discouraging vandalism of his tent, and the long walk he had to endure to make it back to camp while fighting pneumonia. He has spent an evening or two in the local police cells, countless visits to the hospital, several days in court attempting to win back the tiniest bit of autonomy.

Withstanding pain of all sorts; skin infections, broken ribs...a battered and bruised body following a car accident when he was thrown from his bicycle, he has finally succeeded in finding a permanent home.





So how is it, that someone can be homeless for three years in Nelson? How is it so difficult to be accepted as a tenant, despite one's desperation and best efforts in seeking suitable housing?

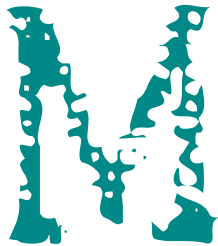
How is it that people become so accustomed to being turned down to live in a safe and stable home, that they give up the housing search, and simply find it easier to camp out?

Perhaps, one major contribution to the rising numbers of local homelessness is the sheer lack of understanding surrounding the issue. The number of times, people have exercised a double take when I tell them I work with the homeless population both on the street, and at the emergency homeless shelter is disheartening. I can count on both hands, the times people have challenged me, as they slowly question the shelter's existence. "We don't need that here. Do we?".

But homelessness is an ever-present issue in our small town, and the population of those with no place to go, seems to be swelling. The number of feasible options is decreasing for those struggling, and the supports in place, are simply not meeting the need. It seems many of those without a safe place to go, face a constant and bitter struggle with mental health issues.



## A PLACE TO CALL HOME...



Members of the homeless population spend a great deal of time in hospitals, homeless shelters, the court system, prisons, and various other services paid for by branches of the Canadian government. In fact, it was recently calculated that \$1.4 billion is spent annually in Canada for people to continue living on the street, consistently cycling through these services.

So what do we do? By approaching homelessness from a barrier free lens, successful tenancy in safe housing can lower both the risks and stigma associated with homelessness. By addressing and learning about effective strategies to support those struggling with barriers, the population of homelessness and money spent on keeping individuals on the street can be decreased.

As tears congregate in the corners of his eyes, he says, "I even have a mailbox now, ain't that somethin'?". It truly is quite something. For the first time in three years, this man has not been judged by his landlord for being homeless, unemployed and mistaken for someone who is hopeless. It is just a shame it has taken so long for his barriers to be overlooked. Not only that, he now has supports to assist his transition from homelessness into stable accommodation.

"Hey," he whispers as we walk down the hall, "I might even get a job now that I have a home. Bet ya would be really blown away if I went ahead and did somethin' like that!".





**1 in 5**  
Canadians  
will face a  
mental health  
challenge this  
year

**1 in 2 people who were homeless & stayed at Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter in 2013 identified as having a mental illness.**

“For people living with mental illness who are homeless, recovery can’t happen without adequate housing. Not only do people experiencing homelessness face significant physical health risks—existing mental health problems can also be exacerbated. Without a home to provide an element of stability and control—a safe place to call their own—facing the daily challenges of life is nearly impossible”.—Mental Health Commission of

Canada



# Community Indicator snapshot

Community indicators are a standardized method to document the context of local homelessness and monitor changes over time. This year's snapshot demonstrates 3 year trends.

## Homelessness & Poverty

	2011	2012	2013
# of Emergency Shelter Stays	414	396	355
# of Unique Individuals Who Stayed at Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter	207	201	202
Average Length of Stay at the Shelter	9.5 days	12 days	16 days
# of Food Bank Visits*	18306	19762	20596
Meals Served At Our Daily Bread	11700	12268	14534

## Housing

	2011	2012	2013
# of Affordable Housing Units**	443	476	476
Average Advertised Rate for a 1 Bedroom Rental	\$776	\$760	\$772
Average Advertised Rate for a 2 Bedroom	\$1038	\$1026	\$1033
Average Advertised Rate for a 3 Bedroom	\$1320	\$1302	\$1308
Rental Vacancy Rate	1.9%	2.6%	1.9%
RAP Recipients (BC Housing Rental Assistance Program)	54	68	67
SAFER Recipients (Shelter Aid For Elderly Renters)	54	61	54

## Income

	2011	2012	2013
BC Income Assistance Rate for a Single Person	\$610	\$610	\$610
BC Disability Assistance Rate for a Single Person (PWD)	\$906	\$906	\$906
Minimum Wage	\$9.50	\$10.25	\$10.25
Increase in the Consumer Price Index	2.4%	1.1%	-0.1%

### Indicator Sources:

Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter Annual Statistics Summary 2013, Nelson Food Cupboard Society 2013 Annual Report, Our Daily Bread 2013 Annual Statistics Summary, Salvation Army 2013 Food Bank Annual Statistics, St. Saviour's Food Pantry 2013 Annual Food Bank Statistics, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Vacancy Rates Report, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, Nelson Committee on Homelessness Rental Snapshot and Affordable Housing Unit Inventory 2013, BC Housing Rental Assistance Program & SAFER Annual Statistics Report.

\*Food bank visits in Nelson 2013. This number represents each visit plus family members helped at home. It is a combined total from Nelson's 3 food banks: Nelson Food Cupboard, Salvation Army & St. Saviour's Food Pantry.

\*\*Affordable Housing Units: Geared to income rental units that are subsidized and government or non-profit supported to ensure adequate living standards and rates that allow low income households to meet their basic needs. Does not include any private market housing.



## **Poverty & Lack Of Affordable Housing Are The Leading Causes Of Homelessness In Canada.**

The accepted measure of housing affordability is housing which does not exceed 30% of a household's income. When households pay a disproportionate amount of income on shelter there is less left over for all costs of living including food, child care and transportation.

**1 in 3** Nelson households pay 30% or more of income on shelter

**46.8%** of renter households pay 30% or more of income on shelter

**20.8%** of owner households pay 30% or more of income on shelter

**1 in 5** Nelson households live below the Low Income Measure Threshold (LIM-AT).

\$29,621: median after tax income for lone parent families in Nelson.

In comparison the median after tax income for lone parents in all BC is \$40,646.

## **20,596** food bank visits in Nelson 2013.

This number represents each visit plus family members helped at home. It is a combined total from Nelson's 3 food banks: Nelson Food Cupboard, Salvation Army & St. Saviour's Food Pantry.

**Food bank use has increased steadily in our community since 2007.**

**1 in 5** people helped by local food banks in 2013 were children.

**1 in 10** people supported by the Nelson Food Cupboard in 2013 were seniors.

**2 in 10** people served at Our Daily Bread lunch program in 2013 were seniors.

**BC, Provincial income assistance and persons with disability benefit (PWD) rates have not increased since 2007.**

**\$610:** Total per month that those on income assistance will receive for all costs of living including rent, utilities and food.

**\$906:** Total per month that those on persons with disability benefits will receive for all costs of living including rent, utilities and food.

**62%** of those helped by Salvation Army Food Bank in 2013 were in receipt of income assistance or disability benefits.

**66%** of those who were homeless and stayed at Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter were in receipt of income assistance or disability benefits.



# NELSON BC YOUTH RELATIVE HOMELESSNESS SNAPSHOT

For this snapshot, 290 youth aged 13-19 were asked a set of questions regarding youth housing and homelessness. The majority of the surveys were completed at LVR, but several were completed by youth attending the local alternative school program as well as some youth who were currently not attending school.

**1 in 10** (10%) local youth responded that in the past 12 months they had couch surfed once or twice because they felt they could not go home or it was not a safe place to stay

**1 in 4** (25%) youth responded that in the past 12 months, they let a friend who had nowhere safe to stay/didn't feel they could go home, sleep at their own home at least once or twice.

**1 in 15** (7%) youth responded that in the past 12 months they let a friend who had nowhere safe to stay/ felt they could not go home, sleep at their own home for 7 days or more (often not consistently).

**1 in 32** (3%) youth responded that they had been in contact with either the Ministry of Children and Family Development or Cicada Place Youth Services and Housing to try and arrange alternative housing for themselves.

\*Currently, NCSC's Cicada Place Youth Services and Housing has a record high waitlist of 38 youth. With having only 10 units and relatively low turnover, many of these youth will not be able to access or benefit from this service.

Research prepared and contributed by Nelson Community Services Centre, Youth Outreach Program, June 2014





## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN NELSON



outh Outreach is identified as a key means of supporting youth who are homeless or at risk.

The Nelson Youth Outreach program assists local at-risk youth to reconnect with school, housing, family, supports and community. It is a program of the Nelson Community Services Centre and is funded by School District #8. The need for youth outreach had been a long standing issue identified by multiple service providers.

What originally began as a 6 month pilot program in July 2013 has now been renewed through to December 2014 based on its success.

Kerry Donnelly, Nelson Community Services Youth Outreach Worker, shares her take on these successes and the needs the program meets in our community, in an interview with Katie Tabor, NCOH Community Coordinator.

Q. What is your role in the community?

Kerry: "I serve as a bridge between youth, age 11 to 19, and services and resources in the community. I work directly with youth using a non-judgemental approach to help them connect to resources that can include education, housing, health services, employment, family and community. I meet youth where they are at, so I connect with groups at LVR, Trafalgar, Reach alternative school program, and the Nelson and District Youth Centre. The Youth Outreach program was created to assist Nelson's young people to be more connected to their community. I can provide snacks and supplies to youth to meet their basic daily needs; offer emotional support and crisis intervention; and accompany them to appointments or services that they might not be comfortable accessing on their own. Youth can be referred by educators, other service providers or self-referred. My role also serves as a resource of information and referrals for educators, and on a broader scale I support community collaboration and information sharing to meet the needs of local youth".

Interview continues page 16 ...





"As far as shelter goes there currently is not a local youth emergency shelter nor a safe home program. Youth do end up homeless or relatively homeless roaming the streets, couch surfing or in situations where they are exploited. This is real a issue in our community—it is a reality that many are unaware of".



“There is support out there. Check out our website [nelsoncommunityservices.ca](http://nelsoncommunityservices.ca) or [kootenayyouth.ca](http://kootenayyouth.ca) to find out more about local resources and how to get connected”.



### Q. What are some of the main issues or themes that you are seeing?

Kerry: “The effects of imbalanced mental health and substance misuse are a major theme I often encounter— both for youth and parents. There seems to be an increase in stress and anxiety amongst young people, parents are often overworked and under supported, and I believe the community as a whole could benefit from more education and better resources to help people learn to heal and cope with these issues.

Lack of awareness and difficulty accessing resources is another big one. Often parents and youth that would most benefit from support are not connected to community services, and in certain cases these resources are overwhelmed by current client loads or can be difficult to navigate on ones own.

Youth Homelessness - As far as shelter goes, there currently is not a local youth emergency shelter nor a safe home program. Youth do end up homeless or relatively homeless; roaming the streets, couch surfing or in situations where they are exploited. This is real issue in our community—it is a reality that many are unaware of”.

### Q. What would you say are some of the successes achieved as a result of your program?

Kerry: “To date the youth outreach program has directly assisted 10 youth to reintegrate back into the school system; 8 are still attending and doing well. Outreach assisted 2 youth with gaining acceptance into the Skills Link program and they subsequently secured employment. 5 youth were able to secure safe and affordable housing with the help of Youth Outreach, and 3 youth were assisted with gaining employment in the community. Youth Outreach has accompanied 15 different youth to various community social and health services”.

### Q. Final thoughts?

Kerry: “There is support out there. Check out our website [www.nelsoncommunityservices.ca](http://www.nelsoncommunityservices.ca) or [www.kootenayyouth.ca](http://www.kootenayyouth.ca) to find out more about local resources and how to get connected, or contact me at [kdonnelly@nelsoncommunityservices.ca](mailto:kdonnelly@nelsoncommunityservices.ca) or by calling 250-352-9595 ext. 201 for information, referrals or support”.



art + community engagement.



## design to inform: a diy t-shirt

Art and creativity are powerful tools that can open hearts and minds on social issues and help create positive change.

It is estimated that one third of Canada's homeless population are between the ages of 16 and 24. Youth homelessness exists in Nelson and it is most often a hidden reality. This past October local youth created original t-shirts, designed to inform on local youth homelessness.





## project on youth homelessness

33 young artists contributed to the project; including those who had experienced homelessness themselves or had a personal connection to the issue, as well as those allied in making change.

A public exhibit took place downtown Nelson at the Trading Company and showcased these designs along with local statistics on youth homelessness and information on resources for youth.



## SUPPORTING LOCAL SENIORS: NELSON & DISTRICT SENIOR'S COORDINATING SOCIETY

{Contributed // Joan Reichardt, Board President, Nelson & District Senior's Coordinating Society}

Nelson and District Seniors Coordinating Society is the only non-profit in the area focussed primarily on services to Seniors. We are a resource centre where people can come looking for information, help with Government forms, including Income tax, and for someone to listen to their concerns and issues and then look for solutions. Several of our volunteers are Certified Senior Advocates.

Probably most of our clients live in their own homes, and struggle with both financial and physical challenges relating to maintaining the property. We can help them with Home Help - a basic cleaning service - and we can connect them with trades people and tell them, for example, that they can defer property taxes. For those in rental accommodation we can assist with applications for SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters), to determine eligibility for a rent subsidy.

When our volunteers prepare income tax filings for Seniors we do sometimes find people who are eligible for more money that they are receiving, and we can sort that out. Sometimes a seniors does not realise they must file income tax returns every year, or lose their GIS (Guaranteed Income Supplement). We had one example of a man who was foraging for food because he was not receiving his GIS and did not know why. He was, however, paying his rent. It is not unusual for a senior to pay rent or other bills and go hungry!

We helped a senior pay for much needed dentures when we helped him apply for SAFER thus freeing up enough money to cover the cost on an installment plan. We are aware of seniors living in substandard conditions, sometimes with family or other shared accommodation, and, sadly sometimes being taken advantage of.



There are also all too frequent instances of seniors - sometimes with a Mental Health issue - who are at risk of losing their housing because of poor housekeeping ability. We had one situation where a very lenient landlord finally called our office. Not only was his tenant seriously behind in the rent, but was living in absolute squalor. We found this to be a case of financial abuse by a relative, we put that right, got the senior into hospital for a check-up, and went in and cleaned up the place.

Generally, people pay for Home Help, but we do have some subsidy money (donated) which makes it possible for the service to be more affordable. We also offer some transportation - using volunteers, and our weekly Shoppers Bus, which enables seniors do their own shopping by helping with the loading and unloading of the groceries.

We know that there are seniors out there who need help, but don't know how - or don't want - to find it. We have just received funding from Columbia Basin Trust which will enable us to hire a staff person to do Outreach, and connect with seniors, other services and groups to better assess the needs and how best to meet those needs.

Apart from our Home Help workers, we have one part-time person in our office - soon to be joined by the Outreach Worker, everything else is done by volunteers. We are supported by the City of Nelson, who provide us with office and meeting space, including utilities, at no charge. We are always on the scrounge for money and are generously helped by the Credit Union, the Lions, IODE, Friends of Nelson Elders, and many others. We also get an annual grant from the Gaming Commission.

Our dream is - with the help of this new outreach position - to establish the need and logic of stable funding for our programmes!

**To connect with the Senior's Coordinating  
Society visit 719 Vernon Street or call  
250.352.6008**



"The underlying principle of Housing First is that people are more successful in moving forward with their lives if they are first housed. This is as true for homeless people and those with mental health & addiction issues as it is for anyone".

Canadian Homelessness Research Network,  
Housing First In Canada (2013).



## Housing First = Permanent Housing + Supports

Housing First is an approach that supports people who are homeless by combining the rapid provision of permanent housing with wrap around services.

In recent years Housing First has emerged as a key response to homelessness. As the popularity and evidence to support housing first grows there is increasing interest in understanding how it works and how it can be implemented in communities.

### What is Housing First?

Housing First is an approach where housing is provided as a first step, in combination with supportive services, to people who are homeless. Supports are offered via a case management team and/ or case manager that serves as the main point of contact. Housing is based on individual choice, mostly accessed in the private sector, with the assistance of rent subsidies. Individuals are not required to demonstrate that they are 'ready' for housing. It is not conditional on sobriety, abstinence or engagement in treatment (beyond once a week visits by support team or case manager). There is a commitment to support people to be re-housed if needed. The approach emphasizes consumer choice and self determination in housing and support. Treatment and support services are individualized, culturally appropriate and portable. In addition to these core principles, examples of successful housing first programs emphasize collaborative community partnerships as well as resources and support for landlords as key components of their programs.

### Does Housing First Work?

On a national level, "At Home / Chez Soi", a Canadian study of Housing First (the largest study of its kind in the world) has demonstrated compelling results. The Mental Health Commission of Canada led the study Between 2008 and 2013, enrolling 2148 homeless people with mental health issues in 5 Canadian cities. Around half, 1158 people were enrolled in Housing First, and the balance received treatment as usual. After 2 years, 72 per cent of those in the Housing First group had stable housing, compared to 34 percent of the treatment as usual group. At Home Chez Soi demonstrated that Housing First can: increase long-term housing stability; improve quality of life, recovery and wellness; reduce costs associated with healthcare and justice systems, for example emergency visits and hospitalization. At Home Chez Soi demonstrates that Housing First is an effective approach to support those who are chronically homeless and living with mental illness.

### The Local Context:

In Nelson, while there is not a formalized housing first program in operation, there are local organizations and housing providers using the philosophy to successfully guide their work.

In June 2014 Nelson Committee on Homelessness will host Housing First: A Community Conference on Homelessness Solutions. This event will be a first opportunity to engage community knowledge and dialogue on the approach. It will also be an opportunity to determine Nelson's local priorities for Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding.

#### Core Principles:

Rapid Access to Permanent Housing With No Housing Readiness Conditions

Consumer Choice & Self Determination

Individualized & Person-Driven Supports

Recovery Orientation

Social & Community Integration

#### Sources:

Mental health Commission of Canada (2014): National Final Report: Cross Site At Home/Chez Soi Project.  
Gaetz, Scoot & Gulliver (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities To End Homelessness. Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press



Homelessness solutions are made possible through a commitment to evidence based practices and strong partnerships. In our community, many dedicated local people & organizations work hard to alleviate the effects of homelessness & poverty here.

"With funding from the Federal Homelessness-Partnering Strategy funding, the Residential Transitional Support Worker (outreach) was able to work with a total of 96 people in need and was able to place 60 people in some type of housing, from transitional to supported housing, emergency to typical housing. In addition to housing with her support and assistance there were changes in people's income, and job status, people started going to school, volunteering, connecting with Doctors, dentists, counsellors, developing stronger social support networks, addressing their addictions and even connecting with family members - after many years of being estranged. Her work has not only aided people in acquiring stable housing it has also helped to increase their quality of life" - Klee Hunter Nelson CARES Manager of Affordable & Emergency Housing

"Our Daily Bread expanded its facility this year moving location to 520 Falls Street, thus maximizing our capacity to help those who are homeless or at-risk-of-homelessness in Nelson". Rachael Anderson, ODB Administrator

"ANKORS gave out 100 wellness care packages to community members on Connect Day thanks in part to a generous donation from Ming-Kit Kwan of the Kootenay Qi Gong Wellness Centre." - Laura Kearnes Hepatitis C Project, ANKORS



These are selection of 2013 successes as shared by some of these community partners.

"We (through the City of Nelson) have received funding from both the BC Healthy Communities and Osprey Foundation to conduct an Asset Mapping and Needs & Gaps Analysis of Food Security in Nelson. We hope to have it completed by November of this year, and the recommendations that come out of it will be used to determine local priorities and inform strategic planning, resource allocation and policy development at both the municipal and local organization level".

—Kim Charlesworth, Nelson Food Cupboard

"In 2013, the Age Friendly Community Initiative continued working to improve the lives of seniors in Nelson and area by addressing service gaps and barriers. The initiative brings together senior serving organizations and representatives of local and regional government to work collaboratively to meet the needs of a growing senior population. Together the group has developed projects that will improve senior's access to services, tackle transportation barriers and reach out to isolated rural seniors. All of these projects are launching in 2014. To find out more contact us at [seniorsproject@nelsoncares.ca](mailto:seniorsproject@nelsoncares.ca) or 250.352.2708"

- Corrine Younie, Coordinator Age Friendly Community Initiative Nelson Cares Society

" St. Saviour's Anglican Church Food Pantry continues to provide food for all who ask every Friday morning. We have lately had a lot of support from the community, including the Kootenay Coop during Homelessness Awareness Week and Remedys RX Pharmacy, which donated a dollar from every prescription to the Food Pantry during a week at the end of April, and would like to make this an annual donation" . Sandra Hartline—For the Food Pantry





## Nelson Committee on Homelessness

Cheryl Dowden and Phyllis Nash  
Co-chairs, NCOH

Email: [panash@telus.net](mailto:panash@telus.net) or [cheryl@ankors.bc.ca](mailto:cheryl@ankors.bc.ca)

Dear Citizens of Nelson,

The Nelson Committee on Homelessness (NCOH) continues to be committed to the elimination of homelessness in our community. The Report Card on Homelessness (6<sup>th</sup> edition) is highlighting two specific populations, Youth and Seniors, as well as reporting on the facts for all of those experiencing absolute homelessness and those who are at risk of experiencing it in the immediate future. Youth and Seniors are often amongst the hidden homeless in our community. The hidden homeless people exist out of sight in squats, on the floors or sofas of friends and families, pay well over 30 % of their income on rent and have no resources to meet their other needs or sleep rough. This means that they are all too often invisible to the public and so, despite meeting the legal definition of homelessness, are often not noticed in our community.

We live in a beautiful, apparently wealthy province yet for the 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive year we continue to have the highest poverty rates in Canada. British Columbia is one of only two provinces in Canada that does not have a policy commitment to poverty reduction. This letter is a challenge to you to take affirmative action by requesting our governments to address homelessness specifically by reconsidering the social policies that could impact youth and seniors in a positive way. Write letters to your MLA, your MP, and other municipal officials about youth and seniors issues. Handwritten letters get the most attention, but any letters you write or sign should include a request for a response.

What needs to change for youth? Youth that are vulnerable to homelessness have few options available to them. This segment of the population represents 20% of all the homeless in Canada. The problem needs to be addressed by developing first and foremost prevention programs, that include skill building for both youth and families, improving and increasing realistic resources for youth and improving the child welfare system's capacity for early effective intervention into homes that experience parent-child conflict and to support youth who end up in care through to maturity. This will require a committed effort and significant resources over a long period of time. It is important to help your elected representatives to understand its responsibility to youth.

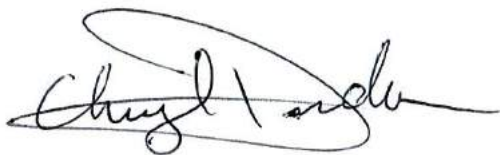


There is an increasing use of the Food Cupboard, Our Daily Bread, Stepping Stones and the Salvation Army programs by seniors who are long term residents of Nelson. The poverty rate amongst seniors is growing in spite of a universal Old Age Security pension (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) program. The current federal government has announced no increase in funding but passed legislation that changed eligibility for these programs from age 65 to age 67 in 2023 with those who need support prior to that age using provincial social assistance programs. The reality is that those who do not have private pension plans and/savings find the \$1,272 a month is not enough to both pay rent and provide for the other basics of living in our current economic climate.

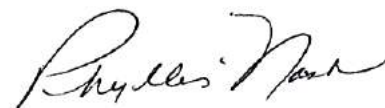
Our challenge to you, our readers is to write letters to your elected officials in the federal, provincial and municipal governments requesting the following:  
Develop clear plans to address poverty reduction and homelessness.  
Work together with other levels of government to increase affordable Housing.  
Work together with other levels of government to ensure that the needs of youth to safe, affordable housing and secure families is available for those becoming independent and transitioning into adulthood  
Work together to ensure that OAS and GIS is available to all seniors at the age of 65 and is adequate for a safe, healthy life style.

Progress has been made in terms of increasing the availability of affordable and supported housing in Nelson for very vulnerable individuals however there is a long way to meeting the needs of all of these individuals in our community. Help us to end homelessness.

Thank you for your efforts,



Cheryl Dowden



Phyllis Nash





This report is available for download at  
[www.nelsoncares.ca](http://www.nelsoncares.ca)

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