

Homeless to Housing 2009 Outreach Report

Summary of Issue

The Banff H2HC (formerly known as the BRRR Committee) was developed in 2006 to address the challenges of those who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, particularly during the cold winter months. Since the Coalition has formed, it has created a fund enabling those who are experiencing homelessness to receive short-term housing. Initially this funding was provided during the winter months to those community members who were long term or chronically homeless. However, the data collected over time indicated a significant need during the summer months. This need is largely related to those experiencing short-term homelessness.

The Coalition was aware early in our meetings that the provision of short-term housing to those experiencing homelessness was just one part of the solution. However, without comprehensive data regarding the extent of the issue, the way forward was not clear. Data collection can be challenging in a rural context as in the absence of shelters, homeless individuals are more likely to live outside or in their cars, tents, campers or in substandard housing.

In March 2008, the Province of Alberta, Housing and Urban Affairs provided the H2HC with two year funding to hire an Outreach/Tenant Support Worker in order to collect data to inform the next steps of the H2HC.

There were 4 short-term outcomes identified for the Outreach Project. They were:

1. To increase the H2HCs' understanding of the needs and challenges of the homeless in Banff.
2. To increase homeless individuals access to available health and social resources and services.
3. To increase awareness and access to housing services and resources by those at risk.
4. To increase the Banff community's, Bow Valley Regional Housing and Town Council's understanding of homelessness and social housing issues in Banff.

The following outlines the actions and activities that have been initiated to date with respect to each of the 4 outcomes.

Outcome 1

To increase the H2HC's understanding of the needs and challenges of the homeless in Banff.

- "Homelessness" in the context of the Banff community was defined, prior to being able to measure the extent of the issue.
- A data collection system and data collection tool were developed in order to be able to report in a comprehensive way on those challenges and needs.

Please note that the data collected provides a "snapshot" of what was occurring in relation to homelessness in Banff in 2009 based on "best practices" related to homelessness counts in rural communities.

Between January 1 and December 31, 2009, 128 surveys were collected from agencies. This indicates 128 individuals or families that were self-reported as experiencing a “housing issue.” Of those completing the survey:

- 36% were between the ages of 20 and 29.
- 74% were male.
- 67% were single.
- 62% had no dependents.
- 78% were of Canadian Citizenship.
- 79% spoke English as their first language.
- 21% arrived in Alberta less than 1 month ago, 22% more than 1 month- less than 1 year.
- 70% experienced three or more coinciding issues i.e. lack of food, employment
- The top 4 common presenting issues were: employment, income, finances and food.
- Other presenting issues included: thoughts of suicide, physical disability, lack of transportation, not enough work, theft, lost wallet and poor physical health.
- 36% had no source of income, 23% were employed
- 55% had accommodation at YWCA while 48% reported other types of “housing” including friend/family and couch surfing, substandard housing, outdoors, street, illegal camping, living in vehicle.
- 25% had an income level of \$0-10,000, 18%- \$10-20,000
- Some of the key services accessed were: Outreach Worker, Community Resource Centre, Job Resource Centre, BRRR Fund, Soup and Bread, Community Services, BanffLIFE, Community Bus

Outcome 2

To increase homeless individuals access to available health and social resources and services.

The key strategy for increasing access to services and resources was through the creation of supportive relationships with vulnerable individuals and engaging them with the agencies that can support them within the community.

- “Walkabouts” were initially identified as an Outreach activity to develop relationships with those who are experiencing homelessness however, the homeless population of Banff, as in many rural communities is hidden.

- The development of a Soup and Bread program provided a venue for those experiencing housing or financial challenges to come to a central location for lunch and connect with the Outreach worker as well as other community members.
- 1313 meals were served at the Community Soup and Bread in 2009. Due to the ongoing support of local businesses and volunteers, this program will continue in 2010.

Through the development of relationships, the Outreach worker supported 55 clients in 2009. 11 of these clients received ongoing support defined as 5 or more visits. Of the 55 clients:

- 38 were determined seasonally homeless,
- 12 transitionally homeless,
- 5 were chronically homeless.

Through the development of relationships with these individuals and local agencies, the Outreach Worker was able to secure access to:

- Short term accommodation- 13 individuals
- Long term accommodation- 4 individuals
- Food- 24 individuals
- Clothing- 5 individuals
- Alberta Employment and Immigration- 9 individuals
- Information and Referral- 30 individuals

A host of other supports were provided including accessing resources external to the community including:

- the Distress Centre Housing support,
- Direct Rent Supplement,
- Aboriginal Funding,
- Detox/Addiction Treatment.

Based on the identified needs of those experiencing housing challenges other actions were taken by the Outreach Worker including:

- the development of an information sheet that outlines social/health services that are available after hours and on weekends. This information sheet has been distributed to Banff businesses so that they can direct people in need of support during the evening hours and on weekends.
- The creation of an information card that identifies key resources for free/low cost food, clothing and shelter.

Outcome 3

To increase awareness and access to housing services and resources by those at risk.

Through the Outreach project, partnerships have been created within the Banff community and beyond to support clients who require housing. Based on these connections:

- a document has been drafted for use by agencies that outlines housing resources that are available throughout Alberta for those who may not be able to find suitable housing in Banff due to physical or mental health challenges.

- A “Housing Hub” is currently being created in Banff that would include on-line access to information related to securing housing in Banff, as well as an information centre in a central Banff location for use by those who may not have computer access.
- A Contingency Fund has been developed to support those who have a realistic long term plan that will move them forward in some way i.e. toward employment, housing, or a new community. Depending on the situation this can take the form of a small grant or loan.

Outcome 4

Increase the Banff Community, Bow Valley Regional Housing and Town Council’s understanding of homelessness and social housing issues in Banff.

Since the project began:

- Several articles have appeared in the Crag and Canyon related to homelessness and the Soup and Bread Program.
- A presentation was given to the Rotary Club outlining the 6 month preliminary data.

Now that the data has been completed, presentations will be provided to all key interest groups.

Highlights of Agency Data

In order to ensure the most comprehensive data possible, and to create a complete picture of the challenges facing individuals struggling with housing issues, the most recent data available was collected from other agencies.

This information has been compiled in the following categories: 1) Employment 2) Income 3) Rental 4) Social Supports.

Employment

- 886 job postings were received at the Job Resource Centre between February and July 2009, down 37% from 1 year ago. In the spring of 2009 Banff’s unemployment rate was 3.2% and rose to 5.9% six months later.
- The average wage of jobs advertised on the Job Board, regressed between 2008 and 2009 for the first time since 2004.

Income

- The total reported median income in Banff in 2006 was \$29,000- lower than Alberta’s (\$31,400)
- 836 people or 13.8% of Banff’s residents (in private households) were living below the low income cut-off level in 2005.
- In 2006, 22% of tax filers earned less than \$15,000, 20% earned \$15,000-\$24,000, 40% earned between \$25,000 and \$49,000, 18% earned \$50,000 or more.

Rental Data

- There is 100% occupancy in the YWCA (and was throughout 2009)- housing 128 people with 90 people currently on the waiting list.

- From the winter of 2009 onward, an extra 16 beds (3 dorm rooms) have been added to house individuals on the wait list for permanent housing, at a subsidized rate.
- All people on the YWCA wait list must have employment verification to be able to obtain housing.
- Rental rates at the Y- \$85 per week- \$340 per month for Gingerbread (older housing, single room with shared bathroom and kitchen), \$115 per week- \$460 per month for new accommodation (single room with own bathroom, shared kitchen.)
- Average monthly rental rates between August 08-January 09: 1 bedroom- \$1057, 2 bedroom- \$1400, 3 bedroom-\$2350. Between August 09-January 10: 1 bedroom-\$966, 2 bedroom-\$1,582, 3 bedroom-\$2,065. Over this 6 month period 2,934 properties were advertised, a 50% increase over the same time period last year.

Social Supports

YWCA

- At the Y, individuals are housed under a 6 month residency program and provided with supports through the Community Resource Centre. In 2009:
 - 26-30 individuals were housed in these units
 - 1-3 were dealing with a mental illness
 - 3-4 were receiving assistance from Alberta Employment and Immigration
 - 2 were dealing with a chronic illness
 - Between 20-32 were on the waitlist with up to 9 individuals couch surfing or staying with family and friends and up to 4 chronically homeless- sleeping in woods or other location.
- Within the Community Resource Centre- 10 chronically homeless Banff residents were provided with support and 25 chronically homeless “passing through” on their way to other destinations.

BRRR Fund

- 2007-2008- 150 individuals accessed the fund with a total of 258 nights provided. The average number of nights provided were 1.7. 23 individuals accessed the fund 2 or more times.
- 2008-2009- 133 individuals accessed the fund with a total of 254 nights provided. The average number of nights provided were 1.9. 19 individuals accessed the fund 2 or more times.

Contingency Fund

- 2009- 8 individuals accessed the fund. It allowed 4 individuals to maintain or secure housing and 4 individuals to relocate to an alternate community or home.

Santa’s Anonymous

- In 2009, 230 hampers were distributed for a total of 411 adults and 129 children compared to 176 hampers distributed in 2008 for a total of 271 adults and 77 kids.

Food Bank

- In 2008, there were 8 families and 11 family hampers provided, in 2009, there were 30 families and 56 family hampers provided.
- In 2008, there were 14 children supported, in 2009 there were 63- a 450% increase
- In 2008, there were 350 individual drop-in hampers, in 2009 there were 660- an 88% increase.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Project Effectiveness

- The Outreach project has been effective at engaging the homeless population and improving access to other agencies and supports within the community and beyond. These supports include financial assistance, short-term housing, health and life skill services. The Outreach Worker has been effective at building good relationships with service providers and with the homeless population. Through this work several tools have been developed to further assist those who are experiencing homelessness and the agencies that support them.
- The Outreach worker has fulfilled a need in the Banff community by providing support to families and individuals in crisis and ensuring they do not fall through the cracks.
- There is now specific data, which will help us to better respond to actual needs of this population as opposed to “assumed” needs.

The Way Forward

Based on what we now know, specific actions have been identified by H2HC and the Bow Valley Interagency group to address key areas:

Short-Term Homelessness

Given the large numbers of individuals experiencing short term homelessness, some of the actions that are being taken include:

- Maintaining the BRRR fund for emergency support.
- Maintaining the Contingency fund.
- Identifying transportation options for workers so that they may commute if more suitable accommodation is found in an alternate community.
- Identifying businesses that offer accommodation with weekly or monthly rates.
- Investigating potential of utilizing vacant spaces in commercial hotels/motels.
- Creating a “Housing Hub” that will provide current rental data and things to be aware of before moving to the Bow Valley.

Chronic Homelessness

While fewer in number, the data collected from the YWCA and Outreach indicates that in 2009 there were 13 individuals- 10 males and 3 females, challenged by chronic homelessness. These individuals often require greater agency support than those experiencing short-term homelessness. Based on this, the way forward includes:

- Maintaining the BRRR fund for support.
- Maintaining the Contingency fund.
- Circulating to all agencies information related to housing supports throughout the province and keeping this resource updated.
- Creating a long-term strategy to support this population. This will include further discussions with Housing and Urban Affairs related to the funding of housing units and the maintenance of the Outreach Worker position.

Given what we now know regarding the number of transitional and chronically homeless in our community, we believe that it is essential to develop supportive housing units. Long term solutions require long term funding. With funding for supportive housing and the ongoing funding for an Outreach Worker from Housing and Urban Affairs, we believe, we can provide the necessary supports to assist those in the Banff community in need of this form of housing. This is particularly crucial at a time when the ability of urban centres to support the needs of rural clients is limited.

This long-term solution is in keeping with the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness – Strategy #11 which looks to increase the availability of permanent housing with support. The Ten Year Plan also places considerable emphasis on a Housing First philosophy and the belief **that every homeless individual requires permanent housing with supports.**