

# **At Home in Alberni Valley**

## **Our Plan to End Homelessness**

**Alberni Valley Stakeholders Initiative to End Homelessness  
June 1, 2008**

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>Pg. 3</b>
<b>Underlying Assumptions .....</b>	<b>Pg. 4</b>
<b>Who are the Homeless in Alberni Valley? .....</b>	<b>Pg. 4</b>
<b>Why are people homeless in Alberni Valley? .....</b>	<b>Pg. 6</b>
<b>How many people are homeless in Alberni Valley? .....</b>	<b>Pg. 7</b>
<b>What are we currently doing about homelessness in Alberni Valley? .....</b>	<b>Pg. 7</b>
<b>What are the gaps in infrastructure and services? .....</b>	<b>Pg. 11</b>
<b>What will we do to end homelessness in Alberni Valley? .....</b>	<b>Pg. 11</b>
<b>Annex 1 – References and Resources .....</b>	<b>Pg. 15</b>
<b>Annex 2 - Examples of Indicators of Homelessness .....</b>	<b>Pg. 16</b>

## Introduction

The problem of homelessness in the Alberni Valley has come to the fore in the past year with an increasingly visible number of people who spend their days and nights on the streets or in sub-standard housing, particularly around the core of South Port. This has been the subject of regular news articles and letters in the local media and has generated a high level of public discussion including various proposals on how to deal with the problem. Inevitably those proposals involved requests to local authorities ranging from letters of endorsement to grants of property. In some cases those requests were competing against each other.

In an effort to better understand the problem and find solutions, Port Alberni city council and the office of the MLA convened a stakeholders meeting in March 2007. The first meeting was attended by representatives from all levels of government, government agencies, non-governmental service agencies and churches. After a series of meetings this evolved into an ad hoc group which serves under the name of the Alberni Valley Stakeholders Initiative to End Homelessness (AVCSI). Almost from the beginning it was agreed that highest priority should be placed on developing a plan to end homelessness. VIHA came forward to provide funding to develop that plan and Myron Jespersen, a volunteer member on the committee representing Gateway Community Church was contracted to lead this process.

The process for our plan to end homelessness has developed through a series of inter-connected activities. The consultant reviewed a wide range of available reference material (see summary list and links below) to see how other communities approached and worked on the problem of homelessness. He also met with many of the individuals and agencies that are currently working with the homeless in Alberni Valley to help understand our situation and identify the gaps.

Parallel to that, there were many meetings of the AVCSI over the period from March through November. These were held to address two specific issues that arose during that period. The first was the purchase of the Redford/Sportsman Lodge by BC Housing and the subsequent negative reaction on the part of nearby residents when it was initially reported that it was to be used as a homeless shelter. BC Housing offered this facility to the community for use to address some aspect of the homeless situation and requested AVCSI to define the use and select an implementing agency to manage it. As a result, AVCSI hosted the discussion of how we could utilize that facility, made a call for proposals and selected a managing agency, helped to refine the management proposal and facilitated a number of community events to gain community and City Council support for the project. We are now well on the way to opening that facility with 42 single room occupancy units of transitional housing.

The second more recent issue is a proposal to save the old RCMP building from demolition and utilize it to meet the gap for shelter and housing for the very hard to house in our community. The AVCSI endorsed this concept and supported the appeal to City Council for a stay of the demolition. We now have until June 2008 to develop a detailed utilization plan and identify funding sources and implementing partners. This very busy time of activity for the AVCSI gave all of us time to work together and understand much more about the problem of homelessness in our community and how we might address it. In a very practical way, this activity helped to form our plan to end homelessness.

With assistance from Learning Initiatives for Rural and Northern BC we introduced a draft of this plan at a community workshop on December 7 & 8, 2007. This workshop was well attended by a good representation of our community. The participants had a vigorous discussion of the issue of homelessness and gave a general endorsement to the draft plan. The details of those discussions have been collected and incorporated into this document which is now presented for endorsement by the Stakeholders Initiative and presentation to City Council. We do not expect to write a “final” plan. Rather, we intend this to be a working tool that will change over time as the situation changes and so we have recommended a process whereby there will be a quarterly review of indicators and progress and an annual review of the plan with opportunities for revision as required along the way.

## Underlying Assumptions

The idea that we can “end” homelessness is by any definition a bold ambition. We have all become familiar with the stories and pictures of homelessness in large urban centers in Canada and we have heard about many attempts to address the problem that have been made in other places. Yet homelessness persists. We could feel hopeless or become cynical and decide that there is little that we can do to solve the problem. However we have chosen to act and to act boldly. In order to remind ourselves of why we have come to that conclusion, it is good to remind ourselves of some underlying assumptions on which this decision is based.

1. **We can end homelessness.** It is important to keep that statement front and center in our thinking. The meaning of that statement is developed in detail further in our plan. But there are a number of reasons why we believe that we can make that statement:
  - a. The problem is manageable – We are a relatively small community (AV population approximately 25,000) where people know each other. The number of **absolute** homeless is relatively few (unofficial estimates range from 50 to 150) and in most cases have connections to our community. Even the newcomers soon are recognized and known by the outreach street workers.
  - b. We have relatively low cost housing options – In spite of recent steep increases, our real estate prices are still among the lowest on Vancouver Island. The cost of action now to end homelessness is significantly less than in other island communities.
  - c. The motto of Port Alberni is “The City with a Heart”. Without exaggeration, we state that “*Port Alberni has a phenomenal history of volunteerism and caring for others. If you are from a larger city, you will be surprised by the deep sense of community and belonging found here. With an overflow of volunteers, enthusiasm and goodwill, the people and service clubs of Port Alberni are uniquely generous with their time, energy and funds to support worthy causes and help those in need.*” *AV Chamber of Commerce Website*  
Our commitment to end homelessness is a natural expression of our community character.
2. **We follow the principles of “Housing First”** which recognizes that housing is a basic right for all people and that the most effective way to begin to deal with the multiple problems faced by the homeless is after they are in safe, stable, and ultimately permanent housing. It is well documented that that the chronically homeless place a disproportionate burden on the social service system (e.g. hospital emergency, police); a burden that decreases dramatically when they obtain stable housing. Housing provides the safety and security that make it possible for people to change their lives; a base to form positive relationships and become connected to the community.
3. **We concentrate on efforts that offer measurable results.** For this reason we have chosen specific indicators of homelessness in our community that we can measure over time. The strategies that we have set are aimed at moving those indicators towards our goals. We commit to review those indicators on a regular basis and alter our strategies if they are not effective.

## Who are the Homeless in Alberni Valley?

There are various ways that we could describe or categorize the homeless in Alberni Valley. Typical broad categories that are used include the *chronically* homeless who tend to be homeless for a year or more, or homeless multiple times over a long period, often with complicating addictions or illnesses. These are distinguished from the *episodic or situational* homeless who may have lost their home due to a sudden change in their lives such as fire, flood, loss of job, domestic violence or illness. Other categories might be made by distinguishing the most significant contributing factor such as addiction, poverty, mental or physical illness, unemployment, natural disaster, or domestic violence.

The problem with any categorization is relating it to any particular case of homelessness because each situation is unique and complex. For the purposes of this report with the stated goal of being a plan to *end* homelessness, we have chosen to describe a continuum which will allow us to think about particular cases with regard to where they currently are and how they are progressing from homelessness.

At one end of the continuum are those that we refer to as being *At Home*. This would describe the majority of the population in Alberni Valley and where we would like everyone to be. These are not necessarily homeowners but they are in an adequate and stable home situation which is not likely to change quickly. If there is a natural disaster or other emergency, they have the financial resources, skills, relationships or access to support services necessary to secure alternative housing. They may be poor and/or have addictions or illnesses that typically contribute to homelessness but they have found ways to manage these so that they do not jeopardize their housing stability. The goal of our plan to end homelessness is to enable all of the residents of Alberni Valley to be in this situation. And because prevention is better than cure, our efforts should be focused on assistance to people who are *At Home* including ensuring that there are a wide variety of affordable housing options available, long-term supportive housing for people with special needs, subsidized housing for low income residents, and prevention and treatment services to help people avoid or manage health and addiction problems.

One step removed from being *At Home* are those who are *at risk of homelessness*. These are people who are in relatively adequate and relatively stable home situations but who would likely become homeless if their situation changed suddenly – for example if they lost their job or had significantly reduced income, fled domestic violence, faced a natural disaster, or failed to manage an addiction. A rapid rise in the price of housing or a decrease in the availability of social housing options could significantly increase their vulnerability. People in this situation may not have the skills to cope if they do face a change in their circumstances and will need significant help from the social network to do so. The same preventative efforts are required to increase the stability of people at risk of homelessness.

In the center of the continuum are the *transitional homeless*. These are people who are currently housed in temporary or transitional facilities such as the Port Alberni Transition House, Youth Group Home and rooming houses but are working on the issues that contribute to their homelessness. Support efforts that are required include transitional housing with a wide range of supports such as life skills coaching and mentoring, health and addictions management, job training, housekeeping and literacy. Ideally each person would be supported to develop an action plan with achievable milestones aimed at transition over a period of time back to a stable home situation.

The *sheltered homeless* are people who are living in low barrier or zero barrier social housing such as the Port Alberni Shelter (formerly PA Hostel) with access to support services. They may or may not be working on the issues that have made them homeless but they are in stable and safe housing with support services available as needed.

At the far end of the continuum are the *absolute homeless*. These are people who completely lack access to stable housing, living on the street, in crack houses or abandoned buildings. In most cases they are severely addicted to drugs or alcohol and/or suffering from mental illness and are not taking steps to manage their addictions or illnesses. They are hard to house.

Some AV statistics from a survey of 163 clients in the CMHA outreach program between July 06 and May 07:

- 46% rated as absolute homeless vs. relative homeless (homeless-at-risk)
- 50% were homeless for less than a month
- 39% were homeless for 1-6 months
- 71% were male
- 70% were over 30 years of age
- 28% were of First Nations origin
- 92% completed high school

- 68% were single
- 22% were families with children
- 55% had no income source
- 61% had addiction problems
- 64% had mental health problems
- 33% had general health problems
- 37% had permanent disabilities

Some AV statistics from 2007 Aboriginal Youth Homelessness Report survey of 116 youth on the street at night:

- 80 youth were counted on the street on one Thursday night (Feb. 21)
- 33 self-defined their situation as being homeless
- 85 described their current housing situation as temporary in that they did not know where they would sleep next month
- 52 stated they were only homeless when they came to Port Alberni, usually on the weekends.

## **Why are people homeless in Alberni Valley?**

The causes of homelessness are well documented. At the core of it is poverty. There are many other contributing factors, most prominently mental health and addictions, often in combination. The disturbing thing is that we are living in a time of unprecedented wealth and yet we are experiencing alarming increases in the rates of homelessness across the country. That anomaly is most often traced to two factors. On the one hand, real estate values in most parts of Canada have risen dramatically, far out of relation to the rise of average incomes and therefore pushing the price of both ownership and rental out of the range of affordability (usually referred to as spending less than 30% of household income on shelter). On the other hand, since the 1980's there has been a withdrawal of public investment in social/affordable housing and a reduction of support or tighter restrictions for income assistance recipients. These trends of cuts in funding have been partially reversed in the past few years with additional federal and provincial funding allocated to housing, supports and shelter but we are still living with the long-term effect of those actions.

Rising homelessness is a wide-spread trend across our continent so it is not surprising that we are seeing it in Alberni Valley. We are not unique but we were somewhat shielded from it by our relatively high income status from a robust resource economy and the low cost of housing compared to other parts of the island and the province. Over the past few years that situation has changed as the resource economy has plummeted with the collapse of fishing and forestry. We have changed from having the highest household income in Canada to 4<sup>th</sup> lowest in a list of 23 BC towns and cities. We have changed from having full employment to high rates of dependency on IA and EI (5.1% of adults under 65 vs. 3.3% for all BC). (BC Stats) Other economic and social indicators are equally discouraging. For the past two years in a row a survey of the main cities across Canada ranked Port Alberni last in the category of Best Places to Live. (MoneySense – April 2007, April 2008) Though the cost of housing in Alberni Valley is still among the lowest on the island the average price of houses sold has more than doubled since 2001, buoyed up by the much higher prices of housing in surrounding communities. (VIREB) This dramatic change of circumstances has removed whatever shield we might have had in the past with the result that we see evidence of homelessness similar to larger urban areas in BC.

A disproportionate number of the homeless in Alberni Valley are of First Nations background. This trend is similar to the situation in other parts of the province and Canada and is attributed to the loss of cultural identity, breakdown of traditional family support systems, prejudice and racism in addition to the above noted factors that contribute to homelessness in general. The number of homeless of First Nations background is of greater significance in Alberni Valley because of the relatively high percentage of the total population that is First Nations. The unique factors that contribute to homelessness among First Nations people require that this be considered in any response initiatives. In addition, the First Nations governments must be partners in the process to ensure that First Nations peoples are *At Home* wherever they live in Alberni Valley.

## How many people are homeless in Alberni Valley?

When we first met to discuss the problem of homelessness in Alberni Valley, we struggled with the question of what was the size of the problem. In order to get a better idea of this, we started to plan for a street count. After some research into ways of doing street counts and discussions with others (e.g. Nanaimo's Working Group On Homelessness Issues) who had experience with this, it was decided not to pursue a count. Street counts are problematic in that they are difficult to arrange, the results are not reliable and subject to easy criticism of over-counting or under-counting. As a consequence they can have the effect of reducing rather than enabling action to address homelessness. *"One day counts have very little practical or policy relevance – once we already know there is a problem and that its magnitude is significant. The number provided by a point-in-time count ... is simply a very crude snapshot. Almost any well-designed research project on the problem will produce greater policy and program relevant insights than a point-in-time enumeration."* David Hulchanski, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, December 2000

Instead we have chosen to focus on indicators of homelessness in our community with the idea that if we track those indicators over time they will tell us whether we are succeeding or failing in our efforts to end homelessness. We have chosen the following indicators of homelessness (see examples in charts attached below):

### Homeless at Risk:

- Cost of housing in Alberni Valley with data from the Vancouver Island Real Estate Board
- Number of units available for rent below a designated cost level with data from the Pennyworth newspaper
- Number of families ranking above a designated rating on a scale of need on the waiting list for social housing units with data from M'akola Housing and the BC Housing registry
- Number of people ranking above a designated rating on a scale of need on the waiting list for supportive housing units

### Transitional Homeless:

- Number of residents in Transition House and Roger St. Apartments (when it opens)
- Length of stay of residents

### Sheltered Homeless:

- Number of residents in PA Shelter (Hostel)
- Length of stay of residents

### Absolute Homeless:

- Numbers of people utilizing Bread of Life services
- Housing related calls to Kuu-us Crisis line
- Kuu-us and CMHA outreach worker records

## What are we currently doing about homelessness in Alberni Valley?

There is a very committed group of individuals and agencies that is working hard to address the problem of homelessness in Alberni Valley at all points of the continuum. Some of this work has been going on for many years with new initiatives recently started in response to the increase of homelessness. This same group will be the core of the force that will drive our plan to end homelessness as they have been in the process of developing the plan. In order to effectively implement this plan, agencies will have to find ways to work in cooperation at all levels including developing proposals, sharing resources, sharing best practices, partnering to implement projects and partnering to create new implementing agencies. This has its complications in a relatively small community where everyone knows everyone else. And it is not easy in an environment where agencies are competing for the same pot of funding. But we must find ways to avoid the situation in 2006 in which multiple agencies responded to a call for proposals and none were selected, in part because of the competing applications.

Following is a list of the agencies in our community with a major focus of working with the homeless and a brief description of the services offered. This is not an exhaustive list and does not include many individuals and agencies whose work (paid and unpaid) is indirectly essential to the goal of ending homelessness.

### **Alberni Community and Women's Services Society**

Alberni Community and Women's Services Society provides emergency shelter, counselling, outreach, victim supports, referrals, resources, and crisis supports to women, children, youth, men and families struggling with issues related to family violence. Some of our programs that directly assist with homelessness, and the risk of homelessness include:

- Our Emergency Shelter which provides a temporary home for women and children made homeless by violence
- Our Outreach Program which supports women facing a variety of issues including homelessness or risk of homelessness, through assistance with life skills, emotional support, resources, referrals, advocacy and accompaniment to appointments.
- Our Community Resource Worker who provides similar assistance to individuals and families struggling with issues such as poverty, family violence, homelessness and risk of homelessness, etc.
- Our Youth Resiliency Program which connects with at-risk street-involved youth to support them to stay safe.
- Our counselling programs which offer one-on-one and group supports to women and children living with violence.

We also offer a drop-in space open Monday through Friday, 9:00 to noon, and 1:00 to 4:30, where people can access a free local phone, copies of local newspapers with classified ads, and other resource information that can help them to stay safe and to find safe, affordable housing.

For more information, or to speak to a staff member, contact us at: 3082 - 3rd Avenue, Port Alberni Ph. (250) 724.7111, Port Alberni Transition House (250) 724-2223  
<http://www.acaws.ca/>

### **Bread of Life**

Bread of Life is the local soup kitchen. We are a non-profit society, supported locally by the good people and businesses of Port Alberni, receiving no federal or provincial government funding.

We serve meals 5 days per week, 4 lunches, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, served at 11:30 am. One dinner is served Tuesday evenings at 5:00pm. As well as meals we provide emergency service such as tents, bedding, clothing and household necessities free to the homeless or those in desperate need. We have a network of help at our finger tips keeping in touch with others who are like minded. The local Health Unit has use of one of our rooms with a permanent, equipped clinic open Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Contact: 3130 3rd Ave, Port Alberni B.C V9Y 4C8 Ph. (250) 723-4049

### **Canadian Mental Health Association**

CMHA - Port Alberni Branch was incorporated in 1992 by people with serious and persistent mental illness, their families and friends. The current location for Clubhouse, community services and administration - the New Horizon's Centre was purchased and renovated in 1996.

Current services for people who are homeless include:

- Crisis, transitional and supportive housing with 2 beds for crisis, 2 beds for transitional and 15 supportive housing units. An additional 42 beds of transitional housing is in process of development.



- Outreach services for people who are homeless and without income, currently assisting about 25 clients each month.
- Advocacy services available for all people in the community
- Peer support for anyone in the community experiencing a mental illness. The peer support and advocacy program are accessed by approximately 250 clients per year.
- Public education to increase awareness about the issues of homelessness
- The Clubhouse assists all members with housing, vocational and health concerns. There are 150 active members with a daily average of 22 visiting the clubhouse.

Contact: Clubhouse, community service and administration, 3178 2nd Ave. Port Alberni. Phones Administration and housing 250-724 – 7199, Outreach 250-720-6544, Clubhouse 250-724 – 3663, Peer support 724- 7176, Advocacy 723 - 7137

<http://www.cmhapa.ca/>

### **Habitat for Humanity**

A local chapter is in the process of forming as an affiliate of the Mid-Vancouver Island Society in Nanaimo with a goal to begin construction of an affordable duplex house in 2008.

We are a non-profit, non-government, charitable organization that builds or renovates homes and, based on Christian principles, we sell them at no profit and no interest to low-income families. We work in partnership with volunteers, donors, sponsors, and the homeowners themselves to build these homes. In the process we build new found hope and a stronger sense of community for people of all religious and philosophical beliefs.

Every man, woman, and child should have a simple, decent, affordable place to live, where they can dwell in dignity and safety. Our mission is to eliminate poverty housing in our community.

Contact Donna Brett (250) 724-4073

<http://habitatmvi.org/>

### **Kuu-us Crisis Line**

Homelessness is a predominant issue that the KUU-US Crisis Line addresses through a continuum of services. There is a 24hr access intake process for those that are homeless. This is done immediately either by phone or through street outreach workers. Clients that require shelter are accommodated through an agreement between the society and the local hostel. At the initial point of contact crisis workers identify the immediate needs of clients and provide resources through a criteria and needs assessment process. Those clients that are “at risk” are monitored and tracked to reduce the likelihood of crisis’ reoccurring.

After initial phone contact and support, clients are then linked to an advocate worker. The advocate worker assists clients with financial, landlord and housing issues as well as working with the clients in establishing care-plans which address underlying root causes for homelessness. KUU-US services are active in the reduction of homelessness through intervention, education and prevention programs. The program is free of charge and is aimed at serving the aboriginal population although it does not turn away any homeless individuals that access our service.

Contact (250) 723-4050 (24hrs a day)

<http://www.alberni.ca/directory/kuu-us/>

### **M'Akola Housing Society**

The Society was originally established to provide safe, affordable housing for families of First Nations ancestry who were in core need of housing in urban centres on Vancouver Island. Since that time the

Society and its mandate have expanded into what is now the M'akola Group of Societies which provide a range of services related to housing and development.

In Alberni Valley M'akola Housing Society manages 42 family units (2-5 bedroom) owned by the society. Tenants are selected from a waiting list maintained by the society and vacancies are filled in order of ranking on a scale of needs. At the end of May 2008, there were 35 applicants on the waiting list for Port Alberni units who ranked above 65 (out of 100) on the scale of need.

In addition to the 42 units which are reserved for applicants of aboriginal ancestry, the society also is contracted by BC Housing to manage 65 family units (mostly 3 bedroom) which are open to the general population. Tenants are selected from a waiting list maintained by the Housing Registry and vacancies are filled in order of a ranking set by the registry.

Contact: Tenant Relations Liason, 3277 Argyle Way, Port Alberni. Ph. 250-723-9855  
<http://www.makola.bc.ca/>

### **Ooh-ah-tiuk-kuu-wil Society**

We are a licensed Youth Group Home mandated to provide long or short term care for youth ages 15-19 that are in the care of the Ministry of Child and Family Development. We currently provide long-term care for up to 5 youth in our facility provided by the Hupacasath First Nations. Our goal is to secure additional funding to make available at least two emergency shelter beds to homeless youth within our current residence as well as to purchase a site in the downtown core that can provide six emergency shelter beds as well as day/evening drop-in program that assists youth in permanency planning (housing, education, career, health).

Contact: Ph. (250) 723-8409

### **Port Alberni Shelter**

The Shelter is run by The Port Alberni Shelter Society (formerly Port Alberni Hostel Society), a local non-profit organization that was first established in 1972 as the Friendship Lodge and has provided hostel accommodation, room and boarding and emergency shelter since that date. Currently the Shelter has a total of 35 beds with 13 reserved for emergency shelter. Every effort is made to accommodate emergency housing needs while maintaining a secure and stable environment for the longer term room and board clients. The Shelter is open 24 hours each day and provides a complete meal service for residents. In addition to providing accommodation, staff also serve as outreach workers to assist residents to access support services and gain employment.

Contact: 3978, 8th Ave, Port Alberni Ph. 723-6511  
<http://www.alberni.net/albernihostel/>

### **Port Alberni Non-Profit Housing Association (PANPHA)**

PANPHA was formed in 1995 by a coalition of the Port Alberni Friendship Centre, Family Guidance, Port Alberni Women's Resource Centre, Citizen's Advocacy, Mental Health Services and Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security. The first step was to hold a housing conference to identify needs and assess the community capacity. Out of that conference came a plan to obtain funding and construct an apartment complex for a diverse mix of lower income singles called Cool Waters.

In June 1998, construction began and in April 1999 the first tenants moved in. The project includes 20 one-bedroom units in a two-story "U" shaped structure. Unit sizes range from 550 to 635 square feet: two units are fully wheelchair accessible and two more are designed to be adapted to accessible units when necessary. The exterior is clad in high quality cedar siding, which was provided by MacMillan Blodel at a low cost.

The design is intended to foster tenant interaction, encourage neighbours to look out for each other, and to enhance security. The units face a Mediterranean-style courtyard with a wheelchair accessible herb garden. A separate building contains a common room, a laundry room, and a kitchen. The City provided technical support for landscaping and the development of a community garden. This

PANPHA is committed to fostering ongoing tenant involvement. The Cool Waters Tenant Council established in September 1999, has carried out a wide variety of activities, including setting up an emergency fund/lending circle, organising community dinners, co-ordinating crime prevention education, and developing an Emergency Response Committee.

Contact: Administrator, 111 - 4777 Southgate Road, Port Alberni Ph. (250) 720-2136  
<http://www.island.net/~panpha/>

## What are the gaps in infrastructure and services?

While recognizing the hard work that is being done with regard to homelessness in our community, we acknowledge that we are facing a growing problem. In the process of our review of homelessness in Alberni Valley, we have identified the following gaps.

### At Home and Homeless at Risk

1. **Commercial home ownership options:** With recent increases in the price of houses in Alberni Valley, there are decreasing purchase options for low income earners and those on income assistance. A real estate web-search for houses for sale under \$100,000 lists 11 units in Port Alberni. Most of these are mobile homes or condos which have additional monthly fees of up to \$250 per month. If the price trend continues it will make ownership impossible for the poor in Port Alberni.
2. **Commercial rental options:** Rising property values inevitably drive up the price of rental properties and there appears to be a decreasing number of rental options for low income earners and those on income assistance.
3. **Subsidized housing options:** There are zero vacancies and very low turn-over of subsidized housing units in Alberni Valley (e.g. Cool Waters, M'Akola/BC Housing) and long waiting lists for those facilities (as of October 31, 2007, M' Akola Housing had 24 requests for housing that rank 65 or higher on a scale of need out of 100). There are at present no plans for additional subsidized housing.
4. **Supportive housing options:** There are very few non-commercial supportive housing units in Alberni Valley (e.g. Kendall House) and there are zero vacancies and very low turn-over rates.
5. **Tenant/landlord support options:** There are few programs to provide support to hard-to-house tenants to access and retain commercial rental accommodation. There are no programs that are geared to provide assistance to landlords.

### Transition Homeless

1. **Single Adult Transition options:** This has been a major gap in our community but when the Roger St. apartment is renovated and contracted by BC Housing, it should effectively fill this gap with the possible exception of some special needs like women coming out of abusive situations.

### Sheltered/Absolute Homeless

1. **Zero-barrier, no- eviction option:** at present we have no housing option for the very hard-to-house who would pose a risk to residents in existing shelters or transition houses.
2. **Safe-sobering/Social detox center:** at present we have no options for safe-sobering or social detox in our community. This is a facility where someone who is intoxicated can be sheltered and sober in safety with the opportunity to provide assistance to break the cycle of addiction and begin the process of recovery.

3. **Youth Emergency Shelter:** At present we have no facility to take in youth under the age of 18 who may be homeless in our community.

## **What will we do to end homelessness in Alberni Valley?**

As noted above, homelessness is a widespread and persistent problem that has been growing in most urban areas in Canada for the past decades. In light of that, it is hard to imagine how we can claim to be ending it. So perhaps we should define what we mean when we speak of ending homelessness. What is our goal? What are the broad objectives?

Our goal has already been stated. We want to see everyone in Alberni Valley *At Home* – in safe, stable, affordable, permanent housing. Realistically we know that for many reasons people will be at risk of homelessness and need a continuum of supports. So an end to homelessness will not mean an end to providing that range of support services. In that sense we might more accurately speak of our task as *addressing* homelessness rather than *ending* homelessness. However there are good reasons to continue to speak about *ending* homelessness; the primary one being that it will force us to keep focused on working towards specific objectives compared with a less demanding goal statement. This is sometimes referred to as the difference between managing a homelessness problem and finding solutions to homelessness.

There are a number of specific targets that we are setting in our quest to end homelessness. One basic target is to have secure shelter for everyone in our community. The very visual test of this is whether we have people sleeping on our streets or living rough in our community and a more objective test of this is the case-load and observations of our outreach workers. A second basic target is to provide affordable housing for every family on the housing registry ranking above an agreed rating on the need-scale. These are two initial targets that we set as our definition of *ending* homelessness. Over time as we meet those objectives, we can set other higher targets that reduce the risk of homelessness or improve the transition of people from homelessness to being *At Home*.

The problem of homelessness is complex and consequently there is no single, simple solution. Ending it even by our restricted definition will require action across the whole continuum of the problem. In order to achieve our goal of ending homelessness, we recommend the following specific strategies and actions:

### **General strategies:**

**Develop the Community Stakeholders Initiative to End Homelessness** into a formal entity with an executive to arrange, lead and record the activities of the group, a membership made up of representative agencies that are working to address homelessness and a clear mandate and responsibilities for participation. This could be a stand-alone community based entity or it could be a formal committee under city hall or the regional district. Potentially, if we develop a social planning council in our city or district, this initiative could be a sub-committee of that council. There are advantages and disadvantages to both options. If CSI is a stand-alone entity, it could more directly participate in initiatives by obtaining funding, managing projects, creating or joining consortiums, and holding and managing property and other assets. As a committee, CSI could play a more objective, arms-length role of facilitator to implementing partners and advisor to city and regional governments.

In any case, the CSI will have the following mandate:

1. Maintain the database of indicators and conduct a quarterly review of the indicator trends to determine the progress towards ending homelessness.
2. Conduct a quarterly review of the progress of the strategies to end homelessness.
3. Conduct an annual review of the plan to end homelessness with a goal to identify new and more effective indicators and strategies in response to the changing reality of homelessness in our community.
4. Take steps to see that the priority strategies are implemented. This could include:
  - a. Creating awareness within our community and externally about the gaps that are not being filled as well as success stories towards the goal of ending homelessness,
  - b. Finding and supporting implementing agencies or creating new ones if gaps are not being filled,
  - c. Advocating for funding from donor agencies,

- d. Conducting community consultations for new initiatives,
  - e. Advising elected officials on policy issues.
5. Serve as a coordinating body for implementing agencies. This could include;
    - a. Facilitating joint project and proposal development
    - b. Developing and sharing best practices
    - c. Mediating in situations of competition and conflict.
  6. Monitor other social indicators that may contribute to homelessness. This could include a wide range of things like unemployment levels, availability of child care and senior's care, youth and adult literacy, levels of drug and alcohol addictions, and such.

**Strategies for those *At Home* or *At Risk*:**

1. **Promote affordable home ownership.** We recommend a review and revision of planning, zoning and building bylaws with the objective of:
  - a. Making changes that will **encourage** development of affordable housing. For example, the building bylaws could include additional density bonuses or a waiver of some part of the development costs in exchange for higher ratios of affordable housing.
  - b. Making changes that will **require** development of affordable housing. For example, development permits could be issued with a requirement that a specified number of affordable units is included in every 10 units permitted. Another example would be to require that a specified number of houses in each development area are designed so that they can readily adapt to special needs (e.g. for the elderly or disabled) or convert into multiple smaller units over time (flexi-housing).
2. **Promote affordable rent options.** We recommend a review and revision of planning, zoning and building bylaws with the objective of encouraging the development of new rental units. For example, modified building codes and broader zoning that would allow for the creation of secondary suites, garage suites, and mixed use (residential/commercial) facilities.
3. **Create additional social housing units.** We recommend that a non-profit housing agency take on responsibility to add and manage at least 10 housing units (3 bedroom equivalent) per year for the next 5 years to increase the stock of social housing units with the goal to reduce the waiting list to the point where there are zero applicants on the waitlist ranking above 65 on the need-scale.
4. **Develop tenant/landlord support services.** We recommend that one or more service agencies take initiative to develop and provide a service to support both tenants and landlords in situations where a tenant with a history of homelessness may pose a high risk to the landlord. Services could include: providing basic life skills, bridging to other available support services, mediating conflicts and guaranteeing first and last rent.

**Strategies for the *Transitional Homeless*:**

**Create transitional housing** to provide a range of housing and support services to enable clients to transition from a situation of homelessness to stable housing. We recommend:

1. Support for the development and operation of the Roger St. Apartments facility (formerly Redford/Sportsmen Lodge).
2. Support for the development of second stage transitional housing for women fleeing abuse – currently being considered by AVCAWS.

**Strategies for the *Sheltered Homeless* and the *Absolute Homeless***

1. **Develop housing for the very hard-to-house.** We recommend that an agency take initiative to develop and manage a zero-barrier/no-eviction housing facility targeting the absolute homeless with a goal to see that we do not have anyone sleeping on our streets. Specifically we recommend that the proposal to consider the former RCMP building for this purpose be supported.
2. **Develop a safe-sobering and assessment service.** We recommend that an agency take initiative to develop and manage a facility that will provide this service in our community.

- 3. Create space for emergency youth shelter:** We recommend support for the initiative currently being considered by Ooh-ah-tiuk-kuu-wil Society to add 2 emergency youth shelter beds to their current Youth Group Home.

This is our initial list of strategies to end homelessness. It is not a final list but it is a list of the things that we consider as first priority and that we are committed to implementing or advocating for. As we achieve our objectives or as the problem of homelessness in our valley presents new challenges we will respond with new strategies and initiatives to meet our goal to see everyone *At Home in Alberni Valley*.

## **Thank You**

This plan is presented with the acknowledgement of the input of many people in Alberni Valley. It is not fair to single out any one but it is important to acknowledge the wide range of contributions. First of all, we need to recognise and celebrate the hard work of a committed group of individuals and agencies who work every day in our community directly and indirectly with and for the homeless. Much of that work is volunteer and depends on the generous donations of valley residents. You are the people who are going to lead the process to end homelessness. And in that process, if we are successful, your work will change from providing basic emergency services to focusing on prevention. Thank you for what you are doing.

Thank you to each of you who gave of your time to work on the CSI committee over the past year. You have attended many meetings and patiently participated as we together worked out the role of CSI and engaged in specific projects. In the process you did much to shape this plan and no doubt will continue to in the future.

Thank you to each of you who provided time in meetings, conversations, emails and phone calls with the consultant, answering questions, providing data and information, sharing your experiences, contributing your ideas and critiquing the plan as it developed.

And finally, thank you to those who attended the various community meetings that we have had over the past year related to homelessness and proposed solutions. Your level of interest and your input on all sides of the issue are important to finding appropriate solutions. Thanks especially to the dedicated group who came out to the workshop on a weekend in December and pored over the draft plan and added your insights. Hopefully we will be faithful in responding to your call to **ACT NOW** to end homelessness.

Thank you all.

## Annex 1 – References and Resources

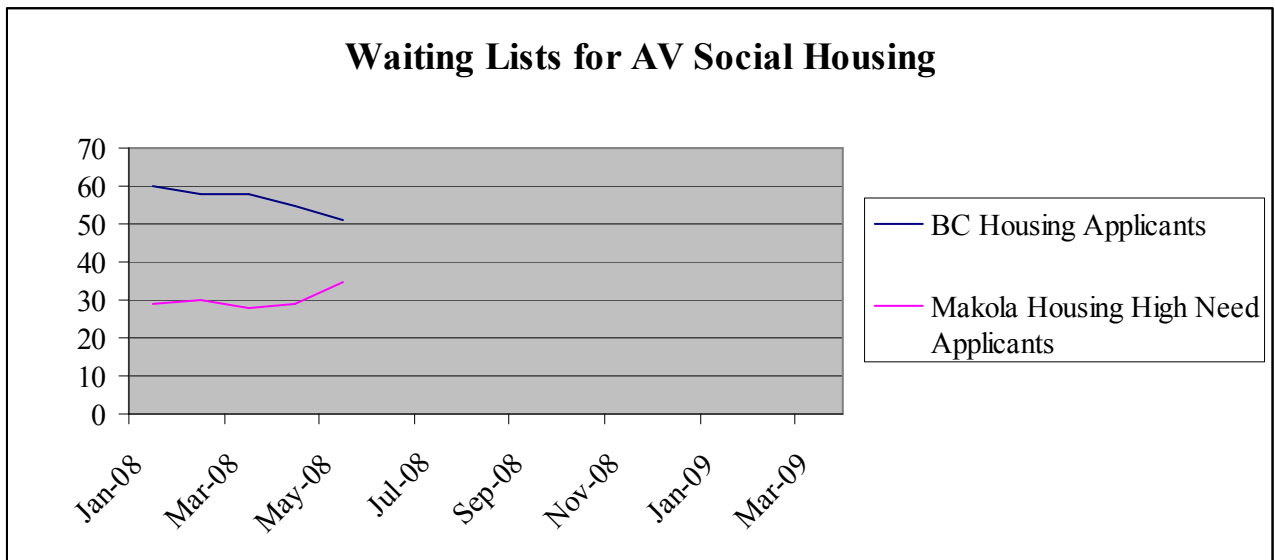
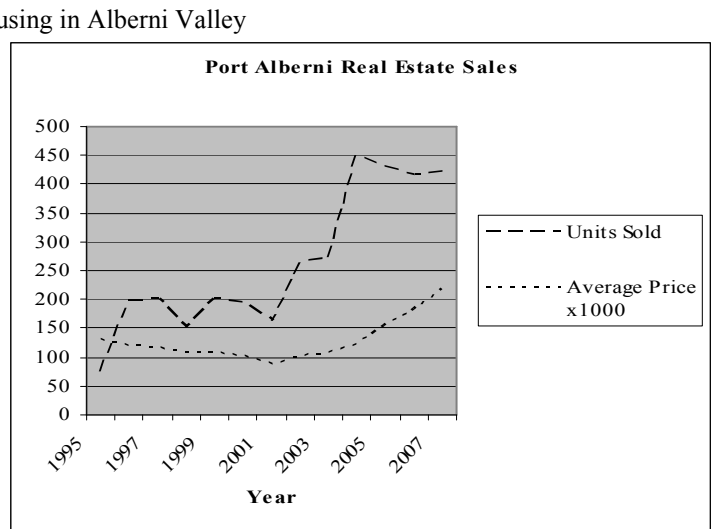
Following is a selective list of references and resources that have been particularly helpful in the development of this plan or are useful references for further information on this issue and a source of models for implementation.

1. **BC Housing:** This is the agency with primary responsibility for to fulfill the provincial government's commitment to the development, management and administration of subsidized housing. Their website has good descriptions of programs and services. The current strategy document is *Housing Matters BC* available from the website. This strategy includes the Provincial Homelessness initiative to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness move beyond temporary shelter to more secure housing, gain greater self-reliance, and achieve appropriate employment. <http://www.bchousing.org/>
2. **BC Non-Profit Housing Association:** The work of the Association is to lead and support its members who are non profit housing providers through services, educational opportunities, and advocacy. The website includes some resources for non-members. <http://www.bcnpha.ca/>
3. **BC Stats:** A source of a wide variety of statistics for the province of BC including a breakdown many of those to the municipal or district level. <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/>
4. **Bringing Lethbridge Home:** The plan of the city of Lethbridge, Alberta to end homelessness. This is a model of a very recently developed plan (September 2007) with objectives and approach similar to that of our plan but on a larger scale appropriate to that size of city. <http://www.bringinglethbridgehome.ca/>
5. **Home Again:** The Portland Oregon 10 year plan to end homelessness developed in 2004. A model of a larger scale initiative based on principles similar to those adopted in our plan. As of 2006 there were indications (from street counts, subject to question) that the plan was having an effect (30% reduction in counts). The website includes links to quarterly updates on progress towards their goal. <http://www.portlandonline.com/bhcd/>
6. **Homecoming Community Choice Coalition:** This group upholds the right of people with mental illness and anyone else who faces "NIMBY" discrimination to live where they choose. Their motto is "You're welcome in my community" and they have developed the "Yes In My Backyard" toolkit for developers of supportive housing. <http://www.homecomingcoalition.ca/>
7. **Our Way Home:** The Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness website contains helpful factsheets on homelessness and advocacy for creating solutions. <http://ourwayhome.ca/>
8. **Raising the Roof:** This agency is focused on youth homelessness and their website includes resources and links related to that. <http://www.raisingtheroof.org/>
9. **Reducing Homelessness:** The Nanaimo 2003 community plan is a model of what is being done closer to us. The information is a bit dated and it is not clear if it is currently being followed (meeting minutes are not posted after March 2005). There is an interesting description of the process of merging two parallel processes to integrate an earlier planning process and an Urban Aboriginal Strategy. <http://www.nanaimo.ca/residents/> and follow the links to Planning and Social planning
10. **SPARC BC:** The Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia an independent charitable organization that conducts public education and research on key social issues. The website provides access to a good variety of resources including a very recent research paper on homelessness *In the Proper Hands* (November 2007). A representative of SPARC is participating in our review of our draft plan. <http://www.sparc.bc.ca/>
11. **VIREB:** The Vancouver Island Real Estate Board website includes some publicly accessible data helpful for tracking the trends in the Alberni Valley. More detailed information is available by subscription. <http://www.vireb.com/>

## Annex 2 - Examples of Indicators of Homelessness

### Indicators of Homeless At Risk

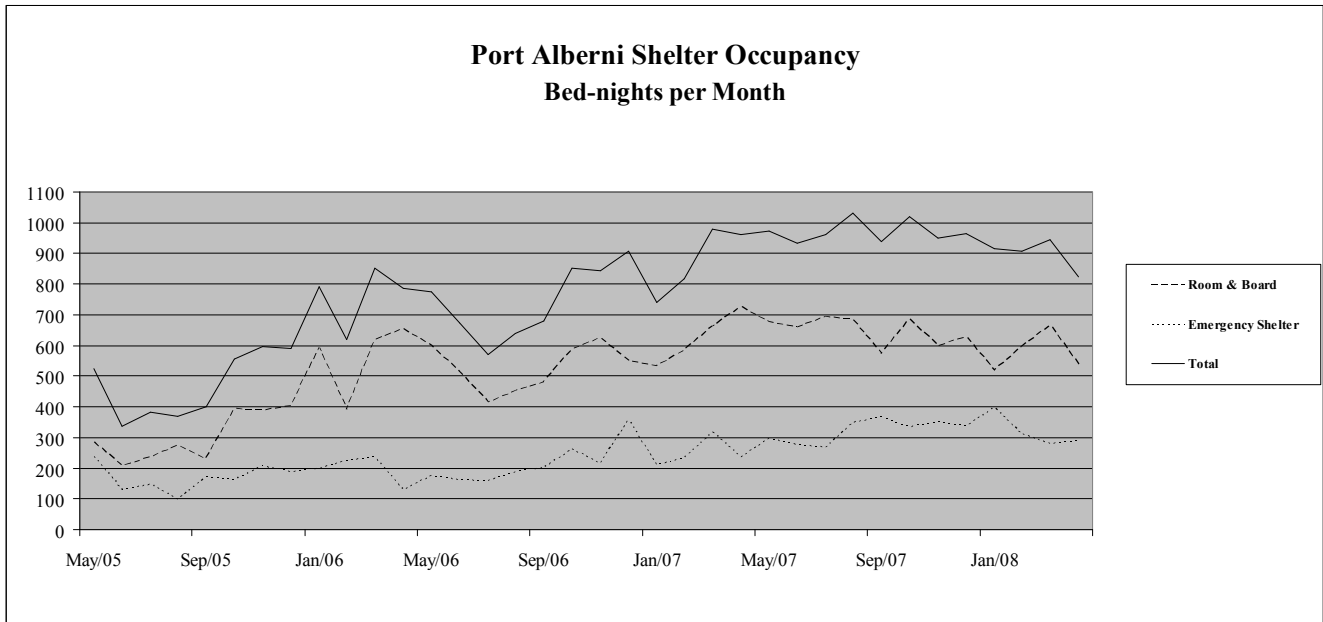
Year	No. Units	Ave. Price	% Change	Average Cost of Housing in Alberni Valley Median Price
1995	76	130,768		
1996	199	119,450	-8.7	116,000
1997	202	116,501	-2.5	112,000
1998	152	107,239	-8.0	108,000
1999	200	107,512	0.3	97,000
2000	195	101,423	-5.7	96,500
2001	162	87,836	-13.4	80,000
2002	264	102,084	16.2	86,500
2003	269	108,763	6.5	95,000
2004	450	121,361	11.6	112,000
2005	457	146,376	20.6	137,000
2006	415	183,963	25.7	171,000
2007	421	218,650	18.9	199,500





# Indicators of Sheltered Homeless

## Port Alberni Hostel



# Indicators of Absolute Homeless

## Kuu-us Crisis Line

