

Presentation to City Council

We represent the Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group, a group arising from the federal Supporting Communities Partnership Outreach Worker Initiative. KHNG was formed in June 2002 and is comprised of representatives from over 50 different community agencies. In Sept 2002, we formed a Homeless Census Subcommittee.

Our first census was conducted by 64 volunteers on the night of March 12, 2003 out of the Kelowna Drop-In and Information Centre.

- A total of 198 people were enumerated: 54 individuals from the street and 144 individuals in shelters.
- The street component examined less than 1% of Kelowna's total area.
- Three over-represented subgroups of concern emerged from the census data: Aboriginal, Women and Youth.
- 23% of homeless individuals are of Aboriginal decent, over 10 times their representation in the general population.
- Teens make up nearly 16% of Kelowna's homeless population, over twice their representation in the general population.
- Women make up a much larger proportion of the homeless population in Kelowna than in other cities- nearly three times that of Calgary.
- Relative to total population, Kelowna's street homeless population is nearly five times that of Calgary.
- These people are not transients; 68.2% of those enumerated have lived in Kelowna for more than three months.

The Census Subcommittee's goal is to conduct bi-annual censuses. The next census is scheduled for November. In this census, we intend to expand the area of the street census.

The Census Subcommittee's goals today are:

- To present the reality of homelessness in Kelowna and to have the city acknowledge that Kelowna is facing a crisis that requires urgent attention and leadership.
- To have the same in-kind City support so generously provided for the March Census for the November Census: high resolution aerial photographs of the areas to be added in the next census, photocopier access for enumeration worksheets, coordination with Bylaw Enforcement, Parking (for access to parkades) & RCMP, including a letter to be carried by the count teams explaining that the count is being conducted with the knowledge and participation of the city.
- To obtain consent to report the results of the next census to Council early 2004.
- To form a Mayor's Task Group consisting of representatives from the city, business community, service providers, local government, relevant federal and provincial agencies or ministries, SD #23, OUC and members of the community at large. The Force's mandate would be to address homelessness in our community by finding creative and concrete ways of implementing the recommendations outlined in the full Census report.

We have been very impressed with the outpour of concern and generosity in response to the Okanagan Mountain Park Fire. We invite the City and all community members to extend their care and concern to the people for whom homelessness is a daily reality.

Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group

Report on the

Census of Homeless Individuals in Kelowna

Spring 2003

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Executive Summary

On March 12 2003, the first in a planned biannual series of censuses of homeless individuals in Kelowna was completed. The census date was selected so as to avoid possible distortion from external factors or seasonal fluctuations in the homeless population. The date chosen was outside of the traditional fruit-picking season, fell midway between BC Benefits payment dates, and was on a mid-week night.

Teams of volunteers canvassed homeless individuals in local shelter facilities, public spaces in the downtown core and selected outlying areas. Information was gathered on individuals' gender, age, ethnicity, observed health issues, family status, sources of income and length of residency in Kelowna. For the purposes of this census, homeless individuals were defined as those who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose. The census does not address the issue of relatively homeless individuals, such as 'couch surfers' (homeless families or individuals staying with friends or family on the night of the census) or those who reside in temporary housing, such as off-season motels.

Due in part to the limited area covered, the census results unavoidably understate the total number of homeless in Kelowna. 198 individuals were enumerated, but usable data was reported for only 160 of these; the remainder were excluded from the analysis. Among other findings, the census showed that:

- Women make up a much larger proportion of the homeless population in Kelowna than in other cities – nearly three times that of Calgary, for example.
- Women living in shelters are significantly less likely to derive income from extra-legal sources, including drugs and prostitution.
- Teens make up nearly 16% of Kelowna's homeless population – over twice their representation in the general population. The majority of teens are homeless alone and have substance abuse problems.
- 75% of homeless teens are female; most reported income from "Other" sources, including such extra-legal sources as the drug and sex trades.
- 23% of homeless individuals are of Aboriginal descent, over 10 times their representation in the general population. Larger percentages of Aboriginal homeless are women or teens, compared to non-Aboriginal homeless.
- 60% of the homeless population has observable substance abuse problems.
- Over two-thirds (68.2%) of those enumerated have lived in Kelowna for more than three months.
- Relative to total population, Kelowna's street homeless population is nearly five times that of Calgary.

Based on the analysis of the census results, several observations and recommendations for action were made, including the following:

- Government – Federal, Provincial and Municipal – should provide financial support to existing shelter facilities, and should encourage the creation of new low-barrier shelters accommodating all ages and genders. In addition, governments should make the development of affordable housing a priority.

2003 Census of Homeless Individuals in Kelowna

- Improved access to flexible forms of education and job training, more job creation programs, greater incentives for employers, and more extensive employment supports are necessary to help homeless individuals become self-supporting.
- Additional and expanded support services directed specifically at women, teens, and Aboriginal individuals are necessary and should be encouraged.
- Government and community groups should encourage the expansion of existing support services and the establishment of new services as needed.
- Education campaigns should be established to inform the public, business owners and public employees about the extent and realities of homelessness in Kelowna, and to encourage respect for the homeless as individuals.
- The City of Kelowna should establish a Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness to aid in the development of locally based solutions, and to facilitate co-operation between governments, individuals and agencies addressing homelessness.

It must be emphasised that the causes of, and issues surrounding, homelessness are complex and inextricably intertwined – no one recommendation will resolve the problem by itself. Current literature on homelessness emphasises the need for a continuum of support combining affordable housing, adequate income, and support.

The census provides a useful snapshot of our existing homeless population, its size and gross demographic characteristics, and identifies important trends and characteristics. However, a comprehensive picture of the homeless situation in Kelowna cannot be based on a single census covering a limited area. Additional censuses will be necessary if we are to establish credible baseline data, understand how the homeless population changes over time, and determine how effective local services and initiatives are in addressing the issue.

The next census is tentatively scheduled for late October 2003.

Background

The Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group (KHNG) is a large coalition of over 50¹ shelter and housing agencies, outreach groups, advocates, service providers and private individuals interested in addressing homelessness in Kelowna. The group was initially facilitated by Kelowna Community Resources and is currently hosted and facilitated by the Kelowna Drop-In and Information Centre (KDIC). While the group facilitators are funded through the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) program, the KHNG is an autonomous body, and no SCPI funding was provided for this census.

In August 2002 the KHNG identified a need for more accurate information about the homeless population in Kelowna; it was decided that the most effective way of gathering the needed information was through conducting a census of homeless individuals living in Kelowna. To that end, the Kelowna Homelessness Census Subcommittee was struck, with initial representation from KDIC, Outreach Health, the Okanagan Advocacy and Resource Society, Sylvia Bailuk and the City of Kelowna. The subcommittee first met in early December and, as the project developed, grew to include representatives from the Kelowna Gospel Mission, WINGS, Alexandra Gardner Women and Children's Safe Centre, Kelowna Women's Shelter, Okanagan Families, and private individuals.

The subcommittee reviewed similar projects conducted in other cities before attempting to determine the parameters of its own census². Some of the key considerations taken into account in the design and conduct of the census were:

1. **Scope:** The members chose to limit the initial census to the gathering of basic demographic and economic indicators – age, sex, ethnicity, family status, income source(s) and length of residency – that would provide solid baseline data and suggest directions for more extensive future research.
2. **Relevance:** All members were concerned that the data collected be as accurate and complete as possible, and that local realities be taken into consideration when gathering the data. For example, conducting the census over the summer months could call its accuracy into question, due to the popular perception that the region experiences an influx of transients and migrant workers during those months. As a key goal of the KHNG is to raise awareness of the year-round plight of the homeless, an off-season census date was selected.
3. **Safety and security:** In some American cities, homeless censuses have been marred by confrontations and injuries, and the subcommittee members were concerned that that not occur here. Particular attention was paid to the selection of census areas and the training, supervision and equipping of volunteers.
4. **Privacy and property rights:** The subcommittee identified the need to respect the property and personal rights of all Kelowna residents. For example, data about homeless individuals bedding down on private property can only be gathered by accessing the property – gaining permission to access hundreds of private lots is impractical and trespass is unacceptable, so the census is limited to public spaces.

¹ See attached membership list

² The City of Calgary's Biannual Homeless Count was particularly helpful, as were the advice and sample documents graciously provided by its organisers.

5. **Future censuses:** A comprehensive census covering Kelowna's entire 260 square kilometre area is beyond the capabilities of any community group. The subcommittee instead identified core areas needing to be included in all censuses, and developed a list of other areas for inclusion in future iterations.

The census was conducted on March 12, 2003. In the three months between the initial meeting and that date, the subcommittee:

- created census goals and terms of reference;
- designed methodologies, census content, question structure and forms;
- defined enumeration areas and generated necessary maps;
- co-ordinated with City Bylaw officers and Kelowna RCMP;
- solicited the participation of local shelter and service providers;
- recruited and trained volunteers; and,
- created a framework for the collection, analysis and publication of results.

City of Kelowna staff were instrumental in organising and completing the census, and the KHNG gratefully acknowledges their support and participation.

Methodology

Definition of Homeless

The subcommittee adopted a definition of homelessness consistent with those used by Statistics Canada, the National Homelessness Initiative and other authoritative sources, and which has been used by other Canadian cities in similar projects. **For the purpose of this census, homeless persons are defined as those who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose.**

Survey Design

Two separate methodologies were used to obtain the data. The first was a survey of shelters and services, the data being gathered by shelter operators. Twelve organisations³, including men's hostels, women's shelters, youth shelters and emergency services were asked to record the total number of homeless persons spending the night in their facility. Information was gathered on clients' gender, age, ethnicity and observed health issues, family status, sources of income and length of residency in Kelowna. Agencies were also asked to note their maximum capacity, the number of persons to whom shelter was refused that evening, the reason for shelter refusal, and any unusual events or circumstances that may have affected the count. The shelter portion included a voluntary qualitative questionnaire⁴ for residents, inviting them to share their personal homeless experience in Kelowna.

The second component was a census of individuals spending the night outdoors or on the streets by teams of volunteer enumerators. 64 volunteers gathered at the KDIC on Leon Avenue, and were divided into twenty gender-balanced teams, each under the guidance of an individual experienced in working with homeless individuals. Each team was assigned a specific geographic area of the city and instructed to enumerate those persons whom they observed spending the night on the streets. To ensure consistency, each team carried a binder containing:

- high resolution aerial photographs of the individual blocks to be covered;
- enumeration worksheets;
- a script to be followed when addressing homeless individuals;
- copies of the Street Survival Guide (for distribution); and
- a letter showing that the teams were conducting the census with the knowledge and co-operation of the City of Kelowna and the RCMP.

The teams observed and recorded the same information as did the shelter service providers. Street teams asked people they encountered if they had a place to stay for the night. If people indicated they were going to a shelter or had already been recorded that evening, they were not enumerated; individuals were told that they could complete a qualitative survey the following day at the KDIC, if they wished.

To ensure the accuracy of the data collected, neither component of the census was publicized in advance.

³ See attached list

⁴ Sample appended

Census Areas

The street portion of the census covered the downtown core – the area bounded by Lake Okanagan, Knox Mountain, Gordon Drive and Harvey Avenue, excluding major residential areas – and selected ‘hot spots’ where homeless individuals were expected to be found. While the areas chosen were those expected to have the highest concentration of homeless, in all less than 1% of Kelowna’s total area was examined, and homeless individuals staying in the remaining 99% were not enumerated. It is expected that, as additional enumeration areas are added to future censuses, a more complete picture of the homeless situation will emerge and the total number of homeless found will increase.

The street portion of the census included only public spaces, and volunteers did not examine vacant buildings, rooftops, vehicles, or private property. Persons experienced in working with local homeless have ample anecdotal evidence of individuals consistently sleeping in areas excluded from this census, suggesting that the census understates the actual number of street homeless in the downtown core. No attempt has been made to estimate the number of individuals missed, however, or to include in the census data those who might have been staying in excluded locations.

It is important to note that the census does not address the issue of ‘couch surfers’ (homeless families or individuals staying with friends or family on the night of the census) or those who reside in expensive but often inadequate temporary housing, such as off-season motels. Such individuals do not have true security of tenure and are experiencing a form of relative homelessness; however, as there is no generally accepted means of estimating this population, it has been excluded from this report.

Census Date

The census was conducted between the hours of 8:30 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 12th, 2003. This date was selected for several reasons.

First, it was outside of the traditional fruit-picking season. Some hold that Kelowna’s homelessness problem is seasonal in nature, the result of an influx of transient workers during the summer months that dissipates after the fall harvest. While not disputing that there is an increase in the homeless population during those months, the purpose of this census was to establish baseline data about the underlying homeless population, particularly those who remain in Kelowna during its coldest and wettest months, and are thus arguably in greater need of support services.

Second, it fell midway between BC Benefits payment dates. Other municipalities have found that the homeless population ebbs and flows around the receipt of benefit payments. The population is at its lowest in the week immediately following payment (when people have money for shelter) and at its highest in the week preceding the next payment (when funds are low). By choosing a date midway between payment times, it was hoped that this “trough and peak” effect would be avoided, and that the homeless population would be closest to its median level.

Third, it fell on a mid-week night, thus avoiding the possibly distorting effects of heavier downtown weekend traffic. Homeless individuals tend not to bed down for the evening until activity in the downtown core has ebbed, so as to avoid possible confrontations with

business owners or passers-by. As the downtown core is comparatively quiet in the earlier part of the week, it is easier to identify and enumerate homeless individuals at that time.

Conditions

The weather that day was generally overcast and cool, with daytime highs of 5° C and lows dropping to -3° C in the evening. The “Inn From the Cold” program, which offers homeless individuals sanctuary in churches on cold nights, was not in operation. The ground was damp from the previous days’ rain and snow. An unexpected challenge emerged due to the presence downtown of several thousand hockey fans for a game between Kelowna and Kamloops - the activity and noise from the game prevented homeless individuals from bedding down as early as they otherwise might have done; several bedroll stashes were located near Skyreach Place, for example, but volunteers could not locate their owners.

Census Results

“I came here from [another BC town] where I had lived with my wife for four years. My wife had succumbed to the various problems associated with childhood sexual abuse. It became so stressful on me that I ended up very ill myself and tried to commit suicide. I left my wife and came to Kelowna to try to repair my mind and soul. I had been in the Okanagan in 1980 and always wanted to come back to it. I had worked at [name of employer deleted] for 21/2 years when I experienced another breakdown because I was unaware that I was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ... My teeth are creating serious problems. There are enough services that people don't have to go hungry, the main thing street people need is to be warm when it's cold out” - Anonymous

The following three tables show the gross results of the census. Table 1 contains the data from the shelter portion of the census; Table 2 shows the data of the street portion. Table 3 displays the combined totals of both the shelter and street portions. As mentioned above, qualitative questionnaires were distributed to shelter residents and made available to street homeless – while 38 qualitative responses were received, the vast majority came from a single shelter and should not be taken as a fair cross-sample of opinion. Nonetheless, the responses do speak to the realities of homelessness in Kelowna, and some have been included verbatim in this report for emphasis.

The following notes should be read in conjunction with the tables.

1. As some individuals refused to answer certain questions, the numbers in any given category do not necessarily equal the total number enumerated. Where percentages are shown they are calculated based on the actual number of respondents to the specific question, rather than on the total enumerated.
2. Family status refers to whether the respondent is on the street alone, or as part of a family. In order to keep the census as simple as possible, the definition of family adopted was based on that used by the City of Calgary and is consistent with the definitions of Census Family and Economic Family used by Statistics Canada. For the purpose of this census, a family is:
 - a married or common-law couple;
 - a couple with a child or children; or
 - a single adult with a child or children.

3. Health issues were identified based on observation only, in order to respect individual privacy and safeguard the enumerators. Enumerators were instructed to report health issues only if they were obvious, and could be agreed to by all members of the team; given that the volunteers were not healthcare professionals, the data gathered under this category should not be taken as authoritative. Information about serious health issues such as HIV, Hepatitis and mental illness was not gathered.
4. Individuals who were clearly under the influence of alcohol or drugs were deemed to have substance abuse problems, based on the assumption that the enumerators were observing typical behaviour.
5. "Employment" includes 'traditional' forms of employment, recycling, squeegeeing, 'binning' or dumpster diving, busking, and panhandling.
6. "Other income" includes those who have no source of income, as well as those whose main source of income is from extra-legal activities.

Shelter Census Results

Of the 12 shelters surveyed, ten reported usable data, while two provided incomplete data - 36 homeless individuals were identified by the latter two agencies, but no accurate demographic information is available and these individuals have been excluded from the following tables and analyses. **The total number of homeless in shelters is, therefore, unavoidably under-represented in this report.**

Table 1 - Shelter Census Results

Characteristic	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Enumerated	52	49.1	54	50.9	106	100
Ethnicity						
Aboriginal	7	13.5	9	16.7	16	15.1
Non-Aboriginal	45	86.5	45	83.3	90	84.9
Age Cohort						
Child (<13)	0	0	6	11.1	6	5.7
Teen (13-19)	5	9.6	13	24.1	18	17.0
Adult (>19)	47	90.4	35	64.8	82	77.3
Family Status						
Single	51	100	43	79.6	94	89.5
Family	0	0	11	20.4	11	10.5
Observed Health Issues						
Substance Abuse	24	46.2	40	74.1	64	60.4
Mental or Physical Disability	7	13.5	9	16.7	16	15.1
Income Source						
Employment	6	12.2	6	11.1	12	16.0
Benefits	25	51.0	10	18.5	35	46.7
Other	18	36.7	10	18.5	28	37.3
Resident in Kelowna for:						
Less Than 3 Months	24	46.2	8	14.8	32	30.2
More Than 3 Months	28	53.8	46	85.2	74	69.8

Street Census Results

As discussed above, the street portion of the census covered only a limited area of the city, and excludes certain homeless population subgroups. **The total number of street homeless is, therefore, unavoidably under-represented in this report.**

Table 2 - Street Census Results

Characteristic	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Enumerated	31	57.4	23	42.6	54	100
Ethnicity						
Aboriginal	10	32.3	7	30.4	17	31.5
Non-Aboriginal	21	67.8	16	69.6	37	68.5
Age Cohort						
Child (<13)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teen (13-19)	2	6.5	7	30.4	9	16.7
Adult (>19)	29	93.5	16	69.6	45	83.3
Family Status						
Single	24	77.4	13	56.5	37	68.5
Family	7	22.6	10	43.5	17	31.7
Observed Health Issues						
Substance Abuse	20	64.5	12	52.2	32	59.3
Mental or Physical Disability	3	9.7	2	8.7	5	9.3
Income Source						
Employment	3	13.7	2	10.0	5	11.9
Benefits	2	9.1	4	20.0	6	14.3
Other	17	77.2	14	70.0	31	73.8
Resident in Kelowna for:						
Less Than 3 Months	9	30.0	9	42.9	18	35.3
More Than 3 Months	21	70.0	12	57.1	33	64.7

Combined Shelter/Street Census Results

This table combines the numbers displayed in Tables 1 & 2, and gives a more general view of the homeless situation in Kelowna.

Table 3 - Combined (Shelter & Street) Census Results

Characteristic	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Enumerated	83	51.9	77	48.1	160	100
Ethnicity						
Aboriginal	17	20.5	16	20.1	33	20.6
Non-Aboriginal	66	79.5	61	79.9	127	79.4
Age Cohort						
Child (<13)	0	0	6	7.8	6	3.8
Teen (13-19)	7	8.4	20	26.0	27	16.9
Adult (>19)	76	91.6	51	66.2	127	79.4
Family Status						
Single	75	91.5	56	72.7	131	82.4
Family	7	8.5	21	27.3	28	17.6
Observed Health Issues						
Substance Abuse	44	53.0	52	67.5	96	60.0
Mental or Physical Disability	10	12.1	11	14.3	21	13.1
Income Source						
Employment	9	12.7	8	17.4	17	14.5
Benefits	27	38.0	14	30.4	41	29.3
Other	35	49.3	24	52.2	59	42.1
Resident in Kelowna for:						
Less Than 3 Months	33	40.2	17	30.9	50	31.8
More Than 3 Months	49	59.8	58	69.1	107	68.2

Analysis

Seven themes were selected for more detailed analysis – gender, age, ethnicity, income, health, length of residency and location – and the findings are discussed below. While all segments of the homeless population in Kelowna require urgent attention, certain sub groups appear to be particularly in need; these are discussed below.

Gender and Homelessness

Women make up nearly half (48.1%) of Kelowna's homeless, a somewhat surprising statistic. In most other cities, the overwhelming majority of homeless are males – in the most recent Calgary count, for example, only 16.5% of the over 1700 homeless individuals counted were females, meaning that, expressed as a percentage of total population, Kelowna's female homeless population is almost three times as large as Calgary's. This means that the homeless population in Kelowna is significantly different from that in other centres, and indicates that gender issues surrounding homelessness will clearly require more attention here than in other cities.

"Six months ago I went to the streets of Kelowna where I've become sexually involved, had drug related friends that took it all. I have slept in sheds, cars and beach, or just sliding a friends window open when I knew they weren't home... I feel in danger when going to work on the streets a 4 a.m to 6 a.m." - Anonymous

In part this is because homelessness is a significantly different experience for women than it is for men. Compared to men, women are far less likely to become homeless as individuals, and far more likely to retain responsibility for raising children while being homeless. Women head all of the families identified in the shelter portion of the census, and every family identified in the street census portion is either headed by or includes a female; no families headed by single males are identified in this census. In part, this reflects the shelter structure in Kelowna – the only men's shelter is for single adults only, while those shelters that accommodate families are generally closed to men. Families headed by lone males or couples must either live on the street or in separate shelters.

"I was on the streets when I was 15 years old, I ran away from home because it turned out that my father was a pedophile, now I came from Calgary and cam back to Kelowna unfortatly there was no place for me to go that was 15 years ago. Since then I've used drugs on and off was a hooker for 8 years of my life ect." - Anonymous

70% of homeless women in Kelowna live in shelters, an encouraging statistic. While women in shelters do not appear more likely to receive benefits or to be employed, they are far less likely to be reliant on extra-legal sources of income. Only 18.5% of women in shelters identified their primary source of income as "other", compared to 70% of homeless women living on the streets. As a main source of extra-legal income is prostitution, increasing the number of low- or no-barrier shelter beds for women is a necessary

first step in establishing a continuum of support that would begin to address the sex trade in Kelowna. Since over one-third of homeless women are younger than 19, added shelter spaces could help reduce sexual exploitation of youth through child prostitution.

It is also likely that, should a lack of funds force local women's shelters to reduce operations or to close, one result could be increased activity in the burgeoning Kelowna sex trade. Governments (Federal, Provincial and Municipal) face a fairly simple choice –

provide short-term financial support to women's shelters facing financial difficulties, or be forced to absorb higher social and law enforcement costs over the long term.

The census did not specifically identify pregnant women, despite the additional responsibilities they bear and the increased health risks to the foetus posed by homelessness. This was driven home when volunteers met a homeless single woman due to give birth the following day – accommodations were found at a women's shelter.

Age and Homelessness

Some of the most disturbing statistics gathered concern homeless youth, particularly teenagers. According to Statistics Canada's 2001 Census, teenagers make up 6.5%⁵ of Kelowna's total population, yet they account for 15.8% of the homeless, over twice the expected proportion. Analysis revealed other disturbing trends as well:

"I left my grandma and went to the street with a lot of my friends. My shelter was at parks like city park and friends' house. I sleep a lot at parks. I never feel danger in Kelowna. There are some Bad people when I was on the street... I was taking insulin on the street to keep my helth right. I would get question by cops about my diabetic because I was taking shoots with my insulin. I wish that the corner would stayed open. That was a good place for kid's to go two. I use to get food there it was a safe place to go two. I use to go to mission Gospel for food two every day. I would have Brafest at Gospel and Dinner. I use to pan hadle a lot for money to get food two. It was cold so e night's on the street. Then my Gradma went to the mister for help. I end up two a lot of Grop homes. I started get charged a lot and to to court. Then I had a PO that would keep me out of trouble, but my self I think that grop home sould chan'e in the ruls and kids sould have more riat's to do stuff. My self I think it was difficult to live in grop home. More kid's are getting in more troble in grop home. They sould make more long term grop home for teens. They sould be aloud in grop homes intill 19. Thn they sould help them find a job and a house. They do help kid's out a lot. Some staff are relly kind. Some just want money and a there thing more foster homes. I like the idea for those help vans going around and give coffee and blanks. I think the mister needs more money for the kid. They have be throw ruff times." – Anonymous

- 96% of homeless teens are alone, without familial support.
- 95.2% of homeless teens have lived in Kelowna for more than three months.
- 77% of homeless teens have substance abuse problems.
- 75% of homeless teens are female, the majority of whom report their main source of income as "Other", including sex trade involvement.
- 41% of all Alexandra Gardener Women & Children's Safe Centre residents are teens.
- While 22.8% of homeless teens are employed, 68.2% report their main income source as "Other", suggesting extra-legal activity
- Only 9% of homeless teens receive benefit payments.

There are too few resources available for homeless teens in Kelowna – the only men's shelter does not admit persons under the age of 19, local women's shelters will admit males (under 16) only if they are part of a female-led family, and the few co-ed shelter facilities are comparatively small, and have lengthy waitlists. Teen drop-in centres are generally not open late in the evening or on weekends, and many outreach programs lack the funding and personnel necessary to reach and support youth in need. The loss

⁵ Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

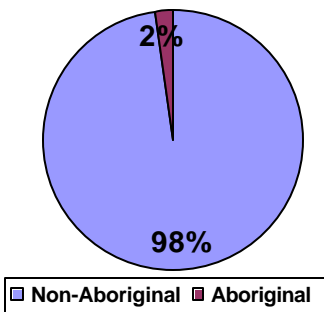
of The Corner (a downtown teen drop-in centre that closed recently) is mentioned in several of the qualitative responses, which also speak of the need for a variety of short- and long-term initiatives, including more shelters and affordable housing, access to food and clothing, and flexible alternative education and employment training options. Qualitative responses show that street youth want non-judgemental support and services that reflect their reality – one shelter agency noted that its street-involved teen clients do not use existing drop-in centres due to the presence of non-street youth.

In addition, it is difficult to assist homeless teens who are involved in the sex trade – recent events in Kelowna (including the abduction of a teen by Lower Mainland pimps) are reminders of the violence employed in the exploitation of youth, and how dangerous it can be for both teens and those who would assist them. Clearly, more resources for homeless teens are needed if the problems they face are to be addressed.

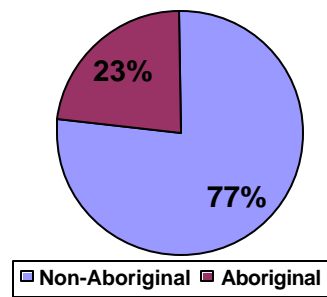
Ethnicity and Homelessness

While still a numerical minority, Aboriginals make up a disproportionately high percentage of Kelowna’s homeless. Persons of Aboriginal descent are approximately 2% of the total population of Kelowna⁶, but account for fully 23% of the homeless population. This percentage remains fairly constant across the main census categories, including observed disabilities and/or substance abuse issues, family status, and income source. In most categories, the incidence of specific characteristics among Aboriginal homeless closely resembles that of non-Aboriginals.

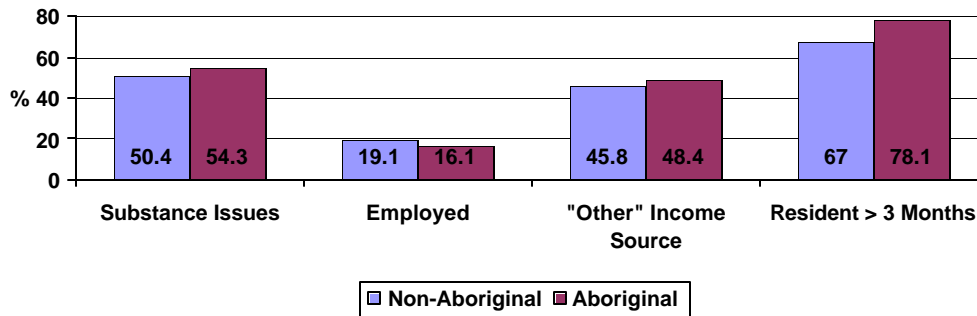
Kelowna - Total Population



Kelowna - Homeless Population



Health, Income & Residency by Ethnicity



⁶ Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

In several categories, however, there are significant differences. For example, a much higher percentage of the Aboriginal homeless population is female – 51.4% compared to 40% among non-Aboriginals. Moreover, a disproportionately high percentage of homeless teens (over 33%) are of Aboriginal descent, and 22.8% of all Aboriginal homeless are teenagers, compared to 13.9% of non-Aboriginals. While further study is required, it appears that persons of Aboriginal descent are at much higher risk of becoming homeless than non-Aboriginals, particularly youth and women.

Income and Homelessness

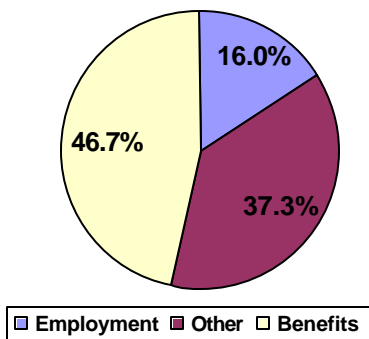
“I survive day to day knowing that I am strong enough to change my surroundings and better my quality of life through my education and work ethic. And the “street people” need more programs to provide the option to work, keeping up parks and public areas for cash daily which would help build their confidence and financial status.” - Anonymous

How homeless individuals derive their income depends on whether they live on the street or in shelters. Shelter residents are more likely to be employed than are street homeless (16% compared to 11.9%), suggesting that an increase in the number of available shelter spaces could be a valuable first step toward allowing more homeless to re-enter the labour force, and eventually become self-supporting.

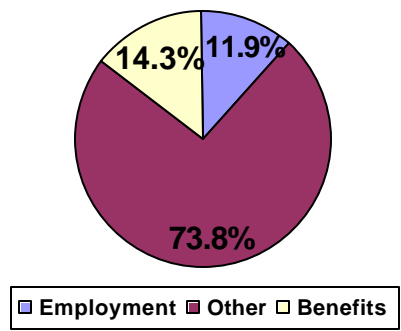
The results show that shelter clients are more likely to receive needed benefits than are homeless individuals living on the street – nearly half (46.7%) of shelter clients identified benefit payments as their main source of income, over three times the rate of those living on the street (14.3%) – presumably because they have a street address and more immediate access to support and advocacy services. This is important because, in the absence of legitimate and sufficient sources of income, people may resort to extra-legal activities (e.g. shoplifting for food or involvement in the drug or sex trades) to survive.

Reinforcing this assessment is the fact that street homeless are almost twice as likely to report “Other” as their main source of income than are their shelter-dwelling counterparts (73.8% compared to 37.3%). Street homeless, in part due to their lessened access to benefits, appear to be more reliant on extra-legal activities to support themselves than are shelter clients. Certainly, it would seem to be no coincidence that the vast majority of non-shelter dwelling homeless is found in the downtown core, which has the highest crime rate in the city. It is not unreasonable to suggest, therefore, that increasing the number and availability of shelter beds would be a useful first step in reducing urban crime rates; long-term solutions, however, will need to include improved access to adequate sources of income, affordable housing, and support services.

Income Source - Shelter



Income Source - Street



Health and Homelessness

A significant portion (60%) of the homeless population has observable substance abuse problems, although no attempt was made to identify the substance(s) in question. However, local needle exchange statistics point to the existence of a significant number of intravenous drug users in Kelowna, with Outreach Health alone exchanging over 25,000 needles annually, raising the spectre of relatively high rates of HIV and HCV infection among the homeless population. However, no quantifiable data was gathered, and further study is necessary before a comprehensive picture of resultant health and social impacts can be presented.

"Most people I was around were drug addicts. The sort of services that street people need most are any that could get them back into the community. For example, treatment for substance abuse, financial aid, counselling, etc." – Anonymous

While qualitative responses show that addictions contribute to continued homelessness, addictions counsellors point out that the opposite is also true – continued homelessness increases the risk of addiction. The scarcity of supportive recovery services, including "low-barrier" transitional shelter facilities and accessible low-income housing, often forces individuals leaving detox to return to the streets, greatly reducing their chances of lasting recovery.

In addition to substance abuse issues, the census attempted to identify homeless individuals with obvious mental or physical disabilities. Unfortunately, many disabilities (particularly mental disabilities) are not readily observable to the layperson – indeed, many go undiagnosed by experienced health care professionals. Furthermore, even those individuals with a previously diagnosed mental illness can experience episodes of homelessness due to poverty, a lack of affordable housing, the cyclical nature of mental illness, lack of access to comprehensive treatment and other factors. Enumerators were extremely cautious in their assessments, with the result that the percentage of individuals observed to have a mental or physical disability is slightly lower (13.1%) than the BC rate of 14% reported by Statistics Canada. Given the methodology, however, it is likely that the data understates the size of the disabled street population.

Even if the percentage of disabled individuals among Kelowna's homeless population were on par with that in the general populace, it would still be more difficult for disabled homeless individuals to get healthy and remain healthy, due to their relative lack of access to necessary healthcare and support services. Future iterations should include an examination of more specific health and social variables, which could assist service providers to develop programs to address specific health-related needs.

"I survive by ignoring the problems... I have manic depression/Bipolar (erratic emotions); 2yrs ago I was diagnosed with uteran cancer." - Anonymous

Residency and Homelessness

Kelowna's homeless population is far less transient than has been suggested in the past, with the vast majority (68.2%) having been resident in Kelowna for more than three months. The finding is significant, as persons resident for less than three months are not eligible for BC Medical coverage, and are restricted from accessing such services as the Kelowna Community Food Bank. The results show that the majority of homeless individuals are entitled to access these services, but additional research into which services are actually utilised (and how frequently) will show how they could be better delivered, and what additional services might be required.

Location – Street vs. Shelter

Compared to other Canadian cities, the proportion of homeless living on the street in Kelowna is high. According to its 2002 Homeless Count, Calgary has roughly ten times as many total homeless as Kelowna, about what one would expect given the relative sizes of the two cities. The difference between the two centres is largely one of where the homeless are found. In Calgary, over 93% of all homeless reside in shelters, compared to only 66% in Kelowna. In terms of actual numbers, Calgary counted only 117 homeless individuals living on the street, while Kelowna, with one-tenth Calgary's population counted 54, nearly half Calgary's total – put another way, Kelowna's street homeless population relative to total population is roughly five times that of Calgary's, clearly an unacceptable state of affairs.

"I am 52 year old male unemployed. Did not have enough weeks for U.I., had to wait 21 day for welfare. With no money and no help from welfare had to move into Gospel Mission hostel. The place is good, but drug and alcohol abuse is out of control. There are a lot of people here who need medical help in a big way. A lot cannot find housing that they can afford. Some are real young 15-18. They need help in getting a start in having a normal life. This problem should be looked at before it becomes like Vancouver downtown east side. Spend a day and night here and you will agree" - Anonymous

In the preceding analyses, a need for improved access to low-barrier shelters has repeatedly been identified as a necessary first step in establishing the continuum of support required to find long-term solutions to homelessness. Kelowna is fortunate to have several excellent shelters, but there are simply far too few of them given the extent of the homeless problem in Kelowna – simply put, the community has a ways to go before it reaches the level of service available to homeless individuals elsewhere.

Recommendations

“Those of us who find ourselves, for various and sundry reasons, being obliged to avail ourselves of the accessible charities and donated resources, via various institutions and providers, in order to meet our food and lodging needs are in an untenable position. The Proverbial ‘Catch 22’. As an adolescent’s lack of work history and therefore applicable experience will adversely affect his ability to procure meaningful employment, so also with those marginalized by poverty. The only way they will become a benefit to their fellow citizens is if they are given the opportunity to participate in their own development. This is always a mutual benefit. Vision plus participation equals success!” - Anonymous

The following recommendations can be made, based on the data discussed above. However, the causes of, and issues surrounding homelessness are complex and inextricably intertwined - no one recommendation made below will resolve the problem by itself. Current literature on homelessness emphasises the need for a continuum of support combining affordable housing, adequate income, and support.

Shelters: Government – Federal, Provincial and Municipal – should provide financial support to existing shelter facilities, and should encourage the creation of new low-barrier shelters accommodating all ages, genders and family types.

Affordable Housing: Governments should make the development of affordable housing a priority. For example, all new housing developments should be required to include a set percentage of affordable housing units. In addition, existing programs such as the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program should be expanded to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Education, Job Training and Employment Supports: Qualitative responses indicate that many homeless are willing to work, but not all have the necessary skills. Improved access to flexible forms of education and job training, more job creation programs (such as targeted wage subsidies and employment assistance initiatives) and greater incentives for employers are necessary to help homeless individuals become self-supporting. Many homeless lack such basics as appropriate clothing and toiletries and have limited access to transportation, without which maintaining employment is difficult, if not impossible.

Teens: Support services specifically directed at teens should be expanded and improved; for example, a downtown youth drop-in/outreach centre that is more amenable to homeless youths should be established.

Women: Additional and expanded support services directed at women of all ages should be encouraged.

Aboriginal People: Additional and expanded support services directed at persons of Aboriginal descent of all ages and genders should be encouraged. Service providers should work closely with local First Nations and such groups as the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society to ensure that programs are effectively designed and delivered.

Health and Support Services: Government and community groups should encourage the expansion of existing support services (including addictions services, safe houses, mental health services, disability services, sexual abuse counselling, needle exchange programmes, etc.) and the establishment of new services as circumstances demand.

Public Education: Education campaigns should be established to educate the public, business owners and public employees about the extent and realities of homelessness in Kelowna, and to encourage respect for the homeless as individuals.

Mayor's Task Force: The City of Kelowna should establish a Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, to encourage public debate, aid in the development of locally based solutions, and monitor the effectiveness of, and facilitate co-operation between, governments, individuals and agencies addressing homelessness in Kelowna. The Task Force should also facilitate the ongoing involvement of the City of Kelowna in future censuses, in order to increase their scope and accuracy.

Directions for Future Research

The census provides a useful snapshot of our existing homeless population, its size and gross demographic characteristics, and identifies important trends and characteristics. However, a comprehensive picture of the homeless situation in Kelowna cannot be based on a single census covering a limited area. Additional censuses will be necessary if we are to establish credible baseline data, understand how the homeless population changes over time, explore health and social correlates and determine how effective local services and initiatives are in addressing the issue.

The next census is tentatively scheduled for late October 2003. Its commission is necessary to establish credible baseline data, to monitor the impact and effectiveness of local programs and initiatives, to confirm the accuracy of the data supporting those initiatives, and to help ensure that existing resources are being put to the most effective use possible in addressing homelessness in our community. As has been the case in other cities, certain methodological changes can and should be made in order to improve the quality and quantity of data gathered.

Recommended methodological changes and directions for future research include:

Expanding the area covered by the census: Future censuses should incorporate more areas of the City and its environs (including Rutland, Knox Mountain Park, Mission Creek Park, the west end of the bridge and the area around Bear Creek Park) in order to provide a more complete picture of the homeless situation in Kelowna.

Changing the timing of the census: The homeless community includes urban and suburban subgroups. The urban group tends to dwell in and around the downtown core, and their habits are matched to those of the surrounding area – waking early, remaining relatively active until later in the evening, then tending to bed down between 10:00 – 11:00 PM, after the Gospel Mission has closed and most people have left the downtown core. The suburban group, on the other hand, spends much of the day downtown, then “commutes” to the relative privacy of outlying areas as early as 6:00-7:00 PM. In addition, the suburban population is less static than the urban group – urban homeless tend to “lay claim” to a certain location and return to it nightly, while the suburban population moves (individually or in small groups) between any number of semi-permanent campsites to avoid discovery. Future censuses should send enumerators out in 2 stages (early in the evening to enumerate suburban groups, and later in the evening for urban homeless) and should monitor activity at campsites prior to the census to ensure accurate data collection.

Gathering more data on key subgroups: Future censuses should collect more data on gender issues, youth, persons of Aboriginal descent, addictions, and physical and mental disabilities. Such topics as services to homeless males, violence against women, sexual exploitation and child-raising among the homeless should be addressed. In addition, future censuses should attempt to gather information on pregnancies among homeless individuals, and correlate that with substance abuse data.

Causality: Future censuses should attempt to identify causal factors related to homelessness. In addition, attempts should be made to plot the relative changes to these population subgroups over time.

Nutrition and eating habits: Questions (designed in consultation with experienced researchers/assessors) could include general queries about what and how often individuals eat, as well as where and how they get their food.

Gathering more qualitative data: Future censuses should attempt to investigate other important characteristics of the homeless community that are more difficult to quantify, in part by placing a greater emphasis on the collection of qualitative data. Some possible research topics for future censuses include:

- Causes of homelessness
- Literacy and education
- Job skills, specialised training and work experience
- Barriers to employment
- Barriers to finding stable housing
- Specifics of extra-legal activities
- Accessibility of support services
- Utilisation and effectiveness of support services
- Need for additional services
- Specific health challenges or disabilities, and their effect
- Specifics of substance use

Clearly, more discussion needs to take place before the next census is conducted – some of the topics above might be best addressed through qualitative questions, while some might be answered through quantitative means. It is hoped that, with the continued support of the City of Kelowna, it will be possible to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of the data gathered in future censuses – and, of course, to come up with specific recommendations for action that speaks to the realities of homelessness in Kelowna.

It's not just what you can give the people on the street, I mean sure we all need food and at times we all need some hot-coco, but we need to feel loved and accepted to. We have to know that over time things will get better, we have to keep a positive attitude built on love, faith, and hope. We have to know that life will not always be like this and we need all the support we can get. - Anonymous

Acknowledgements

The Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group would like to thank the many groups and individuals whose assistance ensured that this census took place. The quality and level of support for the project by service providers and private citizens alike was impressive, and shows that Kelowna truly is a community that cares.

The group would particularly like to acknowledge the efforts of the following persons and organisations, who took leading roles in the organisation of the census:

Alexandra Gardner Women & Children's
Safe Centre
City of Kelowna
Kelowna Community Resources
Kelowna Drop-In & Information Centre
Kelowna Gospel Mission

Okanagan Advocacy & Resource
Society
Okanagan Families Society
Outreach Health
Sylvia Bailuk
64 wonderful volunteers

Finally, a very special thank you to the nearly 200 homeless people who participated in this census – we hope that this report will help to affect positive changes in your lives.

Appendix 1 - Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group Members:

- Adventist Community Services
- AIDS Resource Centre
- Alexandra Gardner Women & Children's Safe Centre
- ARC – Changes
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Cannon Addiction Place Society
- Central Okanagan Brain Injury Society
- City of Kelowna
- Come & C
- Crossroads Treatment Centre
- Evangel Church (Zoe Bus)
- First United Church
- Forensic Psychiatric Services
- Freedom's Door
- French Cultural Centre
- Habitat for Humanity
- Interior Health Authority Community Mental Health Programmes
- Inn From the Cold
- Kelowna Christian Centre
- Kelowna Community Food Bank
- Kelowna Community Resources
- Kelowna & District Consumer Council
- Kelowna Downtown Association Patrol
- Kelowna Drop-In & Information Centre
- Kelowna General Hospital
- Kelowna Gospel Mission
- Kelowna Homelessness Steering Committee
- Kelowna Poverty Task Force
- Kelowna Street Help Society
- Kelowna Women's Resource Society
- Kelowna Women's Shelter
- Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society
- Ministry of Human Resources
- Neighbourlink
- Okanagan Aboriginal AIDS Society
- Okanagan Advocacy & Resource Society
- Okanagan Families Society
- Okanagan Youth for Christ
- Outreach Health Services
- Reconnect
- Robert James
- Rutland Group
- Rutland Haven Ministries Society
- Salvation Army Community Services
- SHARE
- Shepherd's Reach Ministries
- Society of Hope
- St. Vincent de Paul Society
- Sylvia Bailuk
- Wolf's Den

Appendix 2 – Participating Shelters:

- Alexandra Gardner Women and Children's Safe Centre
- Crossroads Treatment Centre
- Harmony House
- Kelowna General Hospital (Emergency Ward)
- Kelowna Gospel Mission
- Kelowna Women's Shelter
- Now Canada Apartments
- Penny Lane
- RCMP (Holding Cells)
- Wolf's Den
- Women in Need Getting Support (WINGS)
- Youth Detox Centre

