

Your Worship, Councilors, City Staff and visitors and fellow residents; my name is Ian Graham and I am Chair of the Kelowna Homelessness Steering Committee, an umbrella organization of over 40 agencies and dedicated individuals that are concerned about the homeless in Kelowna. The mandate of the Steering Committee is to **maintain, enhance and keep current** an innovative, comprehensive community-based plan to prevent and reduce absolute and relative homelessness in Kelowna. To this end, we support the work each agency is doing and strive to ensure that we are meeting the needs and identifying and filling the gaps in services for the homeless here.

Every homeless person you meet is someone's child. Each one is someone's brother or sister, someone's spouse, someone's father or mother. Homeless people are members of our community. How we treat them, through the services our community provides is the true mark of "generosity." It demonstrates a willingness to accept diversity and an ability to tolerate differences.

Each homeless person you meet is suffering in some way. Sometimes it is obvious: mental health issues, physical disabilities, drug addiction. Sometimes it is

more difficult to see – childhood trauma, mental, physical or sexual abuse. Sometimes it is something simple that brought that person to the street, like falling through a gap in support services, a series of bad employment experiences, an abusive home, and as little as one bad choice about drugs. However, most of the time it is much more complicated, with multiple issues layered one upon another. **Being homeless is a symptom of a much more complicated societal problem.** One thing is certain the homeless community is as diverse as it is in most communities.

Some homeless people will tell you they are there by choice. **This is their attempt to show they are still in control over the path their lives have taken.** Most would like nothing more than the chance to start over – a roof over their heads, food **to eat**, some support to get past their pain and a way to be a contributing member of society.

At the last census, we counted more than 400 homeless people in Kelowna living in temporary shelters or on the street. Included in this staggering number are mothers with children and seniors over

the age of seventy. We know there are many more that we were unable to include in the count. As disturbing as that number might be, there are also more than 8000 families living in poverty, on the verge of homelessness.

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There is no instant solution for homelessness. It is an issue that is pervasive across Canada the United States and in fact most of the whole western world. In a society that values personal achievement and independence, it is far too easy for those less able- to fall through the cracks. And it is far too easy for us to say: it is someone else's problem, it's not our mandate, and they are not our responsibility. **But they are.**

The only way our community will be able to overcome homelessness is by working together. Family, community, business and government at all levels must each bring their talents and abilities to the

table. Each must build on the other's strengths to create a comprehensive solution to homelessness. No one group has the answer nor is able to solve the problem without the support and cooperation of others, including our leaders, political and otherwise.

So for your 2005 Homelessness Awareness Week, we encourage everyone to be part of the solution. Continue the good work that you have begun and carry it through. Look for new ways to further create and enhance partnerships and relationships throughout the community. Don't be afraid to ask what you don't know, and don't be afraid to step outside the box and look at new possibilities. **Be patient and steadfast, and be true leaders in the community.**

In honor of Homelessness Awareness Week, we would now like to show a short presentation featuring the photography of Michele Rule and the music of Evan Jeffrey.

(Play slide show)

Thank and introduce Evan Jeffrey to all.
Introduce Johnna from Harmony House to tell her

personal story.

Thank Johnna.

Every time a homeless person walks through the door of one of Kelowna's service providers, meets an outreach worker on the street, or simply feels the warmth of a smile from a passerby, there is the opportunity to begin that person on the road to home, to recovery and a better quality of life. This next short video is the story of a man Sean Doucette who found his path through the work of the Kelowna Gospel Mission. Video almost two years old Sean still on his path.

(Play video)

Thank Randy for video.

Homelessness Awareness Week is a joint effort between the Kelowna Homelessness Steering Committee and its many member agencies. Chaired by Michele Rule, co-chaired by Shelagh Findlay the week includes a variety of events numbering more than a dozen designed to raise awareness of the issue of homelessness, and to provide everyone the opportunity to interact with each other and build relationships. I would like to thank the many volunteers and agencies who will be

helping during the week, as well as our sponsors: the City of Kelowna, Habitat Art on Leon, the Kelowna Capital News, MacLean Marketing, Encore Printing, Opus Art Supplies, and the federal National Homelessness Initiative. Full details of the week are available at www.kelownahomeless.com.

Thank you for this opportunity today and for your continuing desire to be part of the solution. I would be happy to answer any of your questions.