

Fraser Valley Regional Homeless Count Sees Numbers Increase

Early findings of the recent Fraser Valley Regional Homeless Count indicate that homelessness continues to be an issue throughout this region. Volunteers in Abbotsford, Mission, Chilliwack, Agassiz-Harrison and Hope found more homeless individuals in comparison to results of a multi-community homeless count in 2004.

A 24-hour snapshot count conducted on March 10 and 11, 2008, found 465 individuals homeless in the Upper Fraser Valley. This number is an increase of 54 individuals over the 2004 count data, or an increase of 13% over the number of homeless individuals found in 2004. Homelessness remains an issue that requires regionally-based solutions.

| Community | 2008 | 2004 |
|-----------------------|------|------|
| Abbotsford | 235 | 226 |
| Mission | 100 | 75 |
| Chilliwack | 98 | 87 |
| Agassiz-Harrison | 12 | 1 |
| Hope | 20 | 19 |
| Boston Bar/North Bend | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 465 | 411 |

This increase has occurred despite the introduction of targeted outreach services (through the Salvation Army and the Province of British Columbia) that have temporarily or permanently housed 625 people in Abbotsford and 242 in Chilliwack since the previous count.

DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

This survey defined the term "homeless" as referring to people who do not have a place of their own where they can expect to stay for more than 30 days and who do not pay rent. This includes:

- the **sheltered homeless**: people living temporarily in emergency shelters, safe houses or transition houses;
- the **street/unsheltered homeless**: people "sleeping rough" in places not intended for human shelter, including parks, alleys, doorways, parkades, beaches, vehicles, dumpsters, under bridges, etc.; and
- the **hidden homeless**: people temporarily staying with friends or family, commonly referred to as "sofa surfing".

In order to facilitate comparisons, this definition is consistent with that used for Metro Vancouver's homeless count. It also takes into account as far as possible the variety of situations in which homeless persons are found.

OTHER FINDINGS

- More people who are homeless are working, usually part time or casual.
- There was a greater proportion of homeless people found outside on night of the count in winter 2008 than in summer 2004.
- 60% of the homeless had been homeless for longer than 6 months.
- 72% of the homeless are from the Fraser Valley.
- Of the total number, 12 reported children living with them.

COUNT ACCURACY

Homeless counts are always undercounts by their very nature. However, improved communication between service organizations and municipalities since 2004, and the increased presence and co-operation among local outreach workers, police, by-law officers and others, have led to a substantial increase in our knowledge of where homeless individuals may be located or gather.

A full analysis of the data will be completed in the late summer of this year.

The 2008 homelessness count was conducted by volunteers, organized by a committee of municipal and regional staff and service organizations. Community Services in each community trained a total of more than 100 volunteers to conduct the count the night of March 10th and day of March 11th. This large group of organizations was able to respond smoothly and rapidly after four years of sustained collaboration through the Fraser Valley Housing Network.

The organizing committee consisted of representatives of

- Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Mission and Agassiz-Harrison Community Services
- Hope and Area Transition Society
- Staff of the Cities of Abbotsford and Chilliwack, and the District of Mission
- Staff of the Fraser Valley Regional District
- Mennonite Central Committee
- Salvation Army
- United Way of the Fraser Valley

| |
|---|
| Contact: Ron Van Wyk Mennonite Central Committee (604) 850-6639 rvanwyk@mccbc.com |
|---|