

# **REPORT**

## **On the Spring 2004 Census of Homeless Individuals in Kelowna**

*Today I call upon all of you, every global citizen, not to forget.  
We must seize this opportunity to demonstrate  
that we share a common humanity  
and that it matters who my sister or brother is.  
We must never reduce the issue to statistics.*

Nelson Mandela, July 2004

**Conducted and Compiled by**

**Kelowna Drop In and Information Centre  
in Collaboration with  
The Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>1</sup> was adopted and proclaimed on December 10, 1948. In Article 25, housing, amongst other basic needs, was proclaimed to be an international human right.

*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

Despite such declarations of good will, homelessness is on the rise<sup>2</sup>, not just in Canada, but throughout the world. In 1999, mayors in 10 major Canadian cities declared homelessness a national crisis. The National Homeless Initiative<sup>3</sup> was developed as a response to this crisis. Many cities, including Kelowna have benefited from this influx of federal monies to address homelessness. The Kelowna Drop-In Centre, for one, has received monies for outreach and coordination of services, as a primary intervention measure to address homelessness. It is from the funding of these two outreach positions that the Census project, as an offshoot of the **Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group (KHNG)**, was born.

In August 2002, the Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group (KHNG) identified a need for more accurate information about Kelowna's homeless population, and struck the Kelowna Homelessness Census Subcommittee.

**The Kelowna Homelessness Census Subcommittee** reviewed similar projects conducted in other cities before attempting to determine the parameters of its own census. The City of Calgary's Biannual Homeless Count<sup>4</sup> was particularly helpful, as were the advice and sample documents graciously provided by its organizers. The Calgary count served as a template for this census; the results of the two surveys are frequently compared in this report.

The Census Subcommittee, under the auspices of the Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group has published two census reports to date: Spring and Fall 2003. All three census reports will be available this fall at [www.kelownadropincentre.org](http://www.kelownadropincentre.org). Along with the reorganization that has taken place with this census, the Census Subcommittee has been renamed the **Census Advisory Committee**.

### Definition of Homelessness

In order to address the issue of inconsistencies in definitions of homelessness, several authors have been adopting the United Nations definition (Calgary Homeless Study, 2002), in part because it allows researchers to obtain comparable data. This definition makes a distinction between relative and absolute homelessness. Specifically, it defines homelessness as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unac.org/rights/declaration.html> Retrieved August 20, 2004 United Nations Association in Canada

<sup>2</sup> Falvo, N. (May 2003). Gimme Shelter. Retrieved <http://www.socialjustice.org>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www21.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/home/index\\_e.asp](http://www21.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/home/index_e.asp) Retrieved August 20, 2004

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/corporateproperties/countofhomelesspersons\\_2004\\_fullreport.pdf](http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/corporateproperties/countofhomelesspersons_2004_fullreport.pdf)

## **Definition of Homeless cont'd**

*Absolute homelessness* or shelterless refers to individuals living in the street with no physical shelter of their own, including those who spend their nights in emergency shelters. *Relative homelessness* refers to people living in spaces that do not meet the basic health and safety standards including:

- protection from the elements;
- access to safe water and sanitation;
- security of tenure and personal safety;
- affordability;
- access to employment, education, and health care;
- provision of minimum space to avoid overcrowding.

This broader definition includes those “at risk” of becoming homeless. It has been adopted in homeless research in Canadian cities including Calgary, Sudbury and Toronto (Kauppi, 2003)

## **Issue of Underestimation**

Many homeless counts now include people who are in shelters or are on the streets (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002); however, even this more comprehensive approach can result in underestimation of the homeless population. First, the number of points in the time of data collection affects the results. In many instances, homelessness is a temporary situation. Consequently, the number of people who are homeless over a period of time (one year) would be much larger than the number at any one point in time (one day). “A more appropriate measure of homelessness is the number of people who experience homelessness over time, not the number of ‘homeless people [at any one point in time]” (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002, p. 1). Second, studies often do not take into account those denied access to shelters, issues of availability of accommodation, turnover rates in shelters, etc. (Williams and Cheal, 2002). They also tend not to include those who have temporary accommodation with friends or relatives (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002).

## **Additional Funding**

The March 2003 census was coordinated and conducted by volunteers and supported by in-kind contributions, primarily from the Kelowna Drop In Centre (KDIC) with assistance from other agencies. The November 2003 census was again coordinated and conducted by volunteers with partial funding from the United Way. Funding from NHI for the 2004 censuses has made it possible to enhance the census design, process and dissemination and to assist KDIC with administration and project costs. Wages were partially provided for Volunteer and Shelter Coordinators and for the compiling and writing of the Census findings.

A Primary Researcher, Jane Ritchie was also hired to support the Advisory Committee in the design and coordination of the census. Adding a Researcher improves liaison between KDIC and the Census Advisory Committee. The Researcher is assisting with the dissemination of the census results to government, community agencies, businesses and the public and will ensure continuity and enhancement from the spring to fall census.

The Census Advisory Committee is working with KDIC staff and linking with community agencies and the public. Increased capacity, through funding, is assisting the Committee to begin planning, now, for the Fall Census and to work towards more effective collaboration with Kelowna shelters. The financial contribution from NHI clarified that, with adequate funding, the Kelowna homeless census is a building block for expanded research and community capacity. The Census process, however, is still primarily volunteer based.

## **Kelowna Homeless Initiatives**

There are many agencies, church groups and individuals who work to address poverty and homelessness in our community. Many of these belong to the following umbrella organizations and initiatives.

### **Kelowna Homelessness Steering Committee (KHSC)**

KHSC is a volunteer group formed to identify and implement community based solutions. KHSC is facilitated by the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), which was formed by the federal government in July 2001. The Kelowna Community Plan (KHSC, 2003) is available on their website at [www.kelownahomeless.com](http://www.kelownahomeless.com).

To this end funding was secured for the following services:

- Aboriginal Youth Emergency and Transitional Housing
- Dental Treatment Clinic
- Nutritional Improvement Programs
- Safe Centre for Women and Children
- Street Level Outreach
- Youth Detox Centre

### **Kelowna Poverty Task Force (KPTF)**

The Kelowna Poverty Task is a coalition of community representatives working together to tackle poverty issues in the Central Okanagan. The KPTF was created in 1999 as a response to Human Resources Development Canada bringing 23 people together to develop plans to address poverty in a coordinated manner. The vision of KPTF is to alleviate poverty in the Central Okanagan.

### **Inn from & Out of the Cold**

During the winter, a number of church groups including the St. Charles Garnier Parish, the Cathedral Church of St. Michael & All Angels, and the Unitarian Fellowship of Kelowna collaborated to provide additional shelter for homeless people during the coldest months. Transportation to the churches, as well as food and clothing were also provided. This important initiative will continue to operate in Winter 2003 and 2004.

### **Central Okanagan Four Pillars Coalition to Drug Problems**

A Four Pillars (Prevention, Enforcement, Education, and Harm Reduction) Coalition has been formed in Kelowna to address an increasing substance abuse problem. The coalition is in its developmental stages and is gathering information from community members and agencies on awareness of issues in neighbourhoods, priority needs and strategies, and availability of services. For more information visit Living Positive Resource Centre webpage: [www.livingpositive.ca/4pillars.php](http://www.livingpositive.ca/4pillars.php).

## **Kelowna Homelessness Initiatives, cont'd**

### **City of Kelowna Affordable Housing Forum**

The City of Kelowna hosted a comprehensive one-day forum on May 18, 2004 on affordable housing. The morning was devoted to affordable housing; homelessness issues were the focus of the afternoon. The forum was well attended, provided valuable information and supported awareness of and future collaboration between agencies, the City and businesses. For more information on City of Kelowna initiatives visit [www.city.kelowna.bc.ca](http://www.city.kelowna.bc.ca) and follow these links: council/ meetings/June 28, 2004/afternoon agenda.

### **Kelowna Homelessness Awareness Week**

An outcome of the Affordable Housing Forum was the creation of a planning committee for the development of a Homelessness Awareness Week in Kelowna, scheduled for October 15-23, 2004. Events, thus far, will include:

October 15: Affordable Housing Forum / Kelowna Poverty Task Force

October 16: Telus Caring for the Community Clothing Distribution

October 17: Leon Ave. Block Party

October 18: Poverty Meal / First United Church

October 19: Open House / Okanagan Families

October 20: Loaned Executive Day / Kelowna Food Bank

October 21: Open House and Volleyball Media Challenge / Wolf's Den

October 22: Round Table on Homelessness / Okanagan Communicators; Friends of the Homeless Banquet / Kelowna Gospel Mission; Sleepover / Salvation Army; Cardboard Home Building Contest / Canadian Homebuilders Association of Kelowna.

For more information contact the Kelowna Homelessness Steering Committee or any participating agency.

### **Okanagan Mountain Fire**

When natural disaster left many homeless in the summer of 2003, as a result of the Okanagan Mountain Fire, our community came together in a very moving and caring way. An equally heroic effort is required now, to address the serious and growing problem of homelessness in our community.

## QUICK FACTS

On April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004, the Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group Census Sub-Committee conducted its third census of homeless individuals in Kelowna. The census date was chosen to avoid distortion from external factors or seasonal fluctuations. The evening selected was a mid-week night and fell midway between BC Benefits payment dates.

The census consists of both a street and shelter count. The street count was conducted from the Kelowna Drop-In & Information Centre between the hours of 9:30 pm and midnight. Staff from eighteen facilities conducted the shelter portion of the census on the same night.

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. **As a result, the census unavoidably understates the total number of homeless in Kelowna.**

### Numbers

- 221 individuals were enumerated, a 28% increase over March 2003.
- 157 individuals were located in area shelters, and 64 living on the streets.

### Gender

- Females make up 38% of homeless population in Kelowna, while Calgary’s 2004 count is 23%.
- The ratio of male to female participants is 6 to 4, consistent throughout all 3 censuses.
- Shelter population: 79% female and 63% male.

### Age

- 91% of people counted were adults.
- Median age on this census night was 36 years.
- More than 1/4 of women’s shelter residents were under the age of 19.
- Youth (13 - 19): 6% of street population was youth; numbers continue to drop. We know there are youth on the street but we are not accessing them.
- Youth shelters are consistently full and waitlisted.

### Ethnicity

- 26% of Kelowna’s homeless population are Aboriginal (First Nations and Metis combined).
- Aboriginal people comprise only 2% of Kelowna’s total population.
- The Aboriginal homeless population has increased by nearly 40% over the past year.
- 21% of homeless people are French Canadian. 50% have been here for over 1 year.

## **Quick Facts cont'd**

### **Health**

- 62% of total population had eaten at least one meal on census day.
- 42% of total population rated their health as Fair or Poor.
- 36% of respondents are receiving either provincial PPMB\*, PWD\* or federal CPP.

### **Income:**

- 22% of street population declared their income source as other.
- 17% of the street population are on some form of Government Assistance.
- 30% of the street population derive their income from recycling, either bottle returns, binning and/or bartering.
- 11 % of street income is derived from casual labour.
- 34% of homeless people receive provincial disability (PPMB or PWD) assistance.
- 77% of people in shelters vs. 17% of street population were on some form of government assistance.

### **Residency**

- 70% have lived in Kelowna for over one year.
- One third have lived in Kelowna for over 10 years.
- 50% have been homeless for 6 months or less.
- 38% have been homeless for over one year.
- 55% have never been homeless anywhere but Kelowna.

### **Reasons for Coming to Kelowna**

- 27% indicated they came for work.
- 25 % indicated they came for family.
- 21% came for drug and alcohol treatment/recovery.
- 2% came for the weather and Kelowna's appeal.

\*People with persistent multiple barriers

\*People with Disabilities

### Comparison with Last Year's Spring Census Results

<i>Date</i>	<i>March 12</i>	<i>April 13</i>	<i>Difference</i>
<i>Category</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	
<i>Shelter</i>	106	157	Up 51
<i>Street</i>	54	64	Up 10
<b>Total</b>	<u>160</u>	<u>221</u>	Up 61
<i>Male</i>	83	126	Up 43
<i>Female</i>	77	86	Up 9
<b>Total</b>	<u>160</u>	<u>221</u>	Up 61

### Comparison Between the Last Three Censuses

<i>Date</i>	<i>March 12,</i>	<i>Nov. 19,</i>	<i>April 13,</i>
<i>Category</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>
<b>Street</b>			
<i>Male</i>	31	56	46
<i>Female</i>	23	14	18
<b>Subtotal</b>	<u>54</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>64</u>
<b>Shelter</b>			
<i>Male</i>	52	103	80
<i>Female</i>	54	101	68
<i>Children/Youth</i>	-	-	9
<b>Subtotal</b>	<u>106</u>	<u>204</u>	<u>157</u>
<b>Total Count</b>	<u>160</u>	<u>274</u>	<u>221</u>
<b>Gender</b>			
<i>Male</i>	83	159	126
<i>Female</i>	77	115	86
<b>Total Count</b>	<u>160</u>	<u>274</u>	<u>221</u>

Though the number of homeless people counted in this census is lower than in November 2003, they are higher than in April 2003. These figures provide a seasonal comparison. Moreover, the numbers alone do not substantiate that there are fewer homeless people in Kelowna. Anecdotal evidence, including media portrayals, strongly suggests that the numbers of homeless people on the streets of Kelowna is on the rise.

## CENSUS METHODOLOGY

### Scope

The initial censuses are limited to gathering basic demographic and economic indicators, in order to develop reliable baseline data and to determine appropriate directions for more extensive future research. Since a comprehensive census covering Kelowna's entire 260 square kilometre area is beyond the capabilities of any one community group, these censuses are limited to those areas with an identified homeless population.

Data about homeless individuals bedding down on private property can only be gathered by trespassing. Since gaining permission to access hundreds of private lots is impractical, the census was conducted only in public spaces.

### Census Date

To make the results as accurate as possible and to avoid skewing of data by seasonal peaks in the homeless population, an off-season census date was selected.

The census was conducted in the evening of Wednesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004. This date was selected because it fell outside of the traditional fruit-picking season, ensuring that the data would not be skewed by the presence of transient workers. In addition, it fell midway between BC Benefits payment dates; homelessness is affected by benefit payments, and the date chosen minimizes any "trough and peak" effect. Finally, it fell mid-week, avoiding the distorting effects of downtown weekend traffic.

### Conditions

The weather that evening was cool and wet, with lows slightly above freezing and much of the area was rain-soaked. "Inn from The Cold", which offers homeless individuals sanctuary in churches on cold nights, was not in operation.

The survey was conducted between 9:30 and midnight on April 13, both in shelters and on the street, using the same questions and methodology. Room for qualitative responses was provided on both shelter and street question forms. Unfortunately very few qualitative responses were in fact received, pointing to staff, volunteer and respondent fatigue.

### Safety and Security

In order to avoid confrontations or injuries, particular attention was paid to the selection of street census areas, and to the training and supervision of volunteers involved with this component of the census.

### Definition of Homelessness

**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.** This definition is consistent with those used by Statistics Canada and other authoritative sources, and has been used by other Canadian cities in similar projects. Relatively homeless individuals such as 'couch surfers' (homeless individuals temporarily staying with friends) and persons in expensive but inadequate temporary housing (e.g. off-season motels) are excluded, as enumerating them is beyond the capabilities of the KHNG.

## **Shelters**

Additional funding for this census made it possible to provide a small honorarium to one volunteer who coordinated the shelter portion and who facilitated increased participation by shelter staff. The volunteer coordinator spent time with as many staff as possible from all participating shelters, orienting them to the census questions and methodology. She coordinated volunteers to assist with enumerating in the largest shelter. Shelters were phoned and reminded of the census on census day. The volunteer coordinator was able to shed significant light on ways the fall census could be improved to facilitate shelter participation.

On the evening of the census, staff of 18 participating facilities enumerated as many persons spending the night in their facility as their schedules allowed. Due to lack of personnel and volunteer resources, the number of people interviewed at the largest shelter fell significantly short of the total number registered for the night. Follow-up feedback has provided ways to remedy this during the fall census.

It is well recognized in the literature that goodwill and collaboration between participating organizations is needed to undertake a comprehensive census (Drever, 1999, Williams and Cheal, 2002). It is also important that the process not impose extraordinary burdens on the participating agencies.

## **Street**

The second component of the survey involved a census of individuals spending the night on the streets. Volunteers were divided into gender-balanced enumeration teams, each under the guidance of an individual experienced in working with homeless people. The teams were then assigned to specific geographic areas of the city, known as hotspots, to enumerate individuals spending the night on the streets. Those who indicated that they had already been interviewed at a shelter were not enumerated again on the street.

The street portion of the census covered public areas in the downtown core (Harvey to Knox Mountain, between Gordon and Lake Okanagan), the Lower Mission (Gyro Beach to Springfield between Richter and Lake Okanagan, plus KSS and OUC), and selected outlying areas. Vacant buildings, rooftops, vehicles, and private property were excluded, despite evidence of individuals sleeping in these areas. Service providers who are familiar with the enumerated areas confirm that the census results likely understate the actual numbers of street homeless people in Kelowna. Because of previous experiences where the media was brought to their residences, many homeless people disappeared during the evening of the census to ensure their makeshift shelters were not compromised as they have been in the past. On the whole, the street count went smoothly.

## **Future Censuses**

More time will be spent collaborating with and providing support to shelters to ensure their full participation.

The Kelowna Homelessness Steering Committee will be asked to consider supporting and endorsing the implementation of the homelessness electronic data collection and management system known as the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) that the National Homelessness Initiative provides, free of charge, as a means to collect information about the population using shelters. This would ensure the collection of a common set of core variables: name, date of birth, gender, entry and exit dates, last permanent address, source of income, health problems, marital statuses, ethnicity, language spoken, underlying reasons for homelessness, etc.

Expanded information on specific groups and issues including youth, mental health issues, etc. would be useful in providing additional details that are beyond the scope of this project. There would be mutual benefits to collaborating with organizations that, because they work with these specific sub-groups, are better positioned to obtain this information.

## **Changes to Methodology**

Revisions were made to census questions in order to better address primary issues. Room for qualitative responses was provided on the worksheets.

### **Health**

Respondents were invited to rate their own general health (good, fair, poor), and were asked questions about their access to health care services and, when relevant, identified specific disabilities. In previous censuses, enumerators attempted to estimate, by observation, the incidence of physical and mental disabilities, and the prevalence of substance abuse among the homeless; in the interest of accuracy and in an effort to avoid interviewer bias, these assessments were not made in this census.

### **Sources of Income**

More detailed information on sources of income has been gathered. Respondents were asked to identify their specific employment activities, as well as the source(s) of any benefit payments. In previous censuses, sources of income were grouped into the broad categories of 'Employment', 'Benefits', or 'Other'.

### **Transiency**

In response to questions about the transient nature of homeless individuals, respondents were asked to indicate: a) how long they had resided in Kelowna, and b) how long they had been homeless in Kelowna. Respondents were also asked whether they had ever been homeless elsewhere, and recent arrivals (resident less than 1 year) were asked why they had chosen to come to Kelowna.

## CENSUS RESULTS

### **Background**

While this census builds on the findings of previous censuses, it is important to note that more research needs to be done before definitive conclusions regarding the demographic characteristics and/or trends of the homeless population can be made. As further censuses are conducted, a more comprehensive database will emerge, and valid assertions about the makeup and behavioural patterns of the homeless population can be made.

As not all individuals answered all 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.

The results likely understate the number of homeless persons living both out of doors and in shelters in Kelowna. The following should also be kept in mind when reading the information and analysis that follow.

### **Geographic Limitations**

As in previous censuses, only slightly more than 1% of Kelowna's total area was examined. For example, Knox Mountain, Mission Creek, and similar outlying areas were excluded, as we did not have the resources to cover such large areas of parkland in the dark during the designated census hours. There is strong anecdotal evidence that several homeless people stay in these areas.

### **Time of Day**

Many homeless people who are known and visible during the day, were not located during the evening street or shelter census hours. Several people refused to be interviewed and many were impatient with questions as it was cold and raining.

The City's major shelter requested that the enumeration be carried out earlier in the evening which, as it turned out, was not advisable since most of the occupants had not come in for the night.

### **Shelter Capacity and Resources**

Several of the participating shelters reported incomplete data. We are working on developing a better working relationship with shelters in order to provide them with more support in preparation for and during the census.

### **Limit of Funding Capacity**

It is clear that the funding received from NHI for this year's censuses has made a difference to our ability to coordinate and most importantly, to research, plan and evaluate more effectively. It has provided time to prepare a more comprehensive report and to ensure dissemination of information is more broadly based. However, the capacity provided by these funds, has shed light on what additional resources and activities are needed to make the census truly collaborative and comprehensive and more accurately reflective of the homeless situation in Kelowna.

## Limit of Funding Capacity cont'd

Additional funding would extend the capacity:

- of the shelter and volunteer coordinators to support staff enumerators in shelters;
- to provide more comprehensive training of volunteer enumerators both on the street and in shelters;
- for the provision of more competitive salaries for coordination, data collection and input, the writing of the reports and dissemination of findings;
- for collaboration and sharing of information between participating agencies, the public and the media;
- for additional research and expansion of methodology.

## Census Results Based on Seven Themes

For the sake of consistency, the following analysis focuses on the same seven themes that were featured in previous censuses – *gender, age, ethnicity, income, health, length of residency and street versus shelter*. These themes demonstrate how all sub-groups, especially (women, youth, the aged, Aboriginal people, French Canadians, and people with disabilities), of the homeless population in Kelowna still require the urgent attention that was identified in the March, 2003 Census.

## Gender and Homelessness

<i>Question: Identified as male or female</i>						
Gender	Male	%	Female	%	Unknown	Total
Census Date						
<i>March 2003</i>	83	52	77	48	0	160
<i>November 2003</i>	159	58	115	41	5	274
<i>April 2004</i>	<u>126</u>	57	<u>86</u>	39	<u>9</u>	<u>221</u>
<i>Shelter</i>	80	79	68	63	0	148
<i>Street</i>	46	72	18	28	0	64

Kelowna's homeless population continues to include an unusually high female population, with females accounting for 38% of the homeless population. By comparison, in the most recent survey in Calgary<sup>1</sup>, only 23% of homeless individuals were female.

- The ratio of male to female participants remains consistent throughout all three censuses.
- Of the total homeless population 79% of females and 63% of males were in shelters.
- On the street, 72% were males and 28% were females

## Age and Homelessness

<i>Question: How old are you?</i>							
Age	13-19	19-29	30-39	50 +	Total		
Census date							
<i>March 2003</i>	27	48	52	0	127		
<i>Nov. 2003</i>	21	38	57	5	121		
<i>April 2004</i>							
Age	19 & under	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	Total
Census date							
<i>Total</i>	15	40	48	39	26	3	169
<i>Street</i>	4	17	11	15	4	0	49
<i>Shelter</i>	11	23	37	24	22	3	120

## Children and Teens

More than 25% of women's shelter residents are under the age of 19. The percentage of homeless people under the age of 19, who were enumerated, is 19%, virtually the same as in previous censuses<sup>5</sup>. However, the number of homeless teens (aged 13-19) enumerated continues to drop with each census. In March 2003, 27 homeless teens were enumerated; in November that number fell to 21 and dropped again in April, 2004 to 12.

While on the surface this decline might seem to be a positive development, it flies in the face of strong anecdotal evidence from service providers and merchants alike that indicates the number of teens on the street is far larger and growing. The teen street population, though visible during the day, is simply not being found at night when the censuses are being conducted.

More definitive data regarding key issues surrounding homeless teens, including health, sources of income, and family status would be more appropriately gathered by organizations that work specifically with youth.

## Adults

Adults continue to account for the majority of homeless individuals (91%, up from 85% in November, 2003 and 74% in March, 2003). The adult age-range is from 19 to 69, with a median age of 36 years and fairly even distribution within ten-year age cohorts. While the age range is similar to that found in other centres the distribution appears to be somewhat different. In Calgary, for example, the vast majority of homeless adults fall into the 19-29, age range while comparatively few homeless people aged 50 and older are recorded. Vancouver's distribution is closer to that found in Kelowna; a 2001 report showed that the majority Vancouver's homeless population is aged 25 – 45, although data on median age was not provided<sup>6</sup>. Some implications of this age distribution will be discussed in the section on Health and Homelessness.

<sup>5</sup> Children and teens accounted for 20% of the homeless population in November 2003, and 21% in March 2003.

<sup>6</sup> *Shelterlessness in Vancouver* City of Vancouver Administrative Report, 12 June 2001. RTS No. 01379, File No.4659

## Ethnicity and Homelessness

<i>Question: What is your heritage?</i>										
Heritage	Aboriginal (First Nations & Métis)					Non Aboriginal				
Census Date	% of Total					% of Total				
<i>March 2003</i>	33					127				
<i>November 2003</i>	41					233				
<i>April 2004, Aboriginal</i>						<i>April 2004, Non-Aboriginal</i>				
Heritage	First Nation	% of Total	Métis	% of Total	FN/M % of Total	FC	% of Total	Other	% of Total	FN,M, FC % of Total
Census Date										
<i>April 2004</i>	21	12%	24	14%	26%	21	12%	107	62%	38%
<i>April 2004, Street vs. Shelter by Ethnicity</i>										
Heritage	First Nation	% of Total	Métis	% of Total	FN/M % of Total	FC	% of Total	Other	% of Total	FN,M, FC % of Total
Census Date										
<i>April, 2004 Street</i>	7	12%	8	16%	28%	7	12%	32	60%	40%
<i>April, 2004 Shelter</i>	14	11%	16	14%	25%	14	12%	75	63%	37%

### Aboriginal (First Nations and Métis)

In previous censuses, respondents were identified as either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. In the current census, the Aboriginal category includes status and non-status First Nations and Inuit people. The current census has added a separate category for “Métis”. (No homeless Inuit people were counted in this or previous censuses.) While this structural change makes it difficult to compare current data directly to previous censuses, general trends can nonetheless be identified. As in previous censuses, the combined First Nations and Métis people are a disproportionately large (and growing) segment of Kelowna’s homeless. According to Statistics Canada’s 2001 Census, persons of First Nations and Métis descent account for 2.2% of Kelowna’s population. However, they account for 26% of Kelowna’s homeless population, nearly 12 times their representation in the general population, up from 18% in November 2003 and 25% in March 2003. In real terms, the combined Métis and First Nations homeless population has increased by nearly 40% over the past year.

## Ethnicity and Homelessness cont'd

Of the homeless people counted:

- 26% of the total population are First Nations and Métis;
- 25% of the shelter population and 28% of the street population is First Nations and Métis;
- 75% of First Nations and Métis people consider themselves to be in Fair or Poor health compared to 42% for non-Aboriginal people;
- 74% have been homeless in Kelowna for more than one year and 50% for more than 3 years;
- 33% of the females are First Nations and Métis teens, compared to 12% of homeless non-Aboriginal females.

## French Canadian

It is apparent that Kelowna has a significant French Canadian homeless population as 21% of the respondents declared their ethnicity to be French Canadian. The French Canadian homeless population appears to be divided in “length of stay in Kelowna”: half have been here under a year looking for work/picking, the other half have been here over a year. In essence, the French Canadian homeless population is not limited to transients looking for summer work, as there is a good percentage that are long time residents to Kelowna.

## Income and Homelessness

<i>Question: What were your sources of income today? (Not including social assistance-see following section – homelessness and health).</i>						
<i>Census</i>	Casual Labour	Collecting bottles	Binning	Panhandling	Squeegying	Other (unspecified)
<i>April 2004/street</i>	5	7	5	4	2	10 out of a possible 47
<i>April 2004/shelter</i>	11	1	0	1	0	16 out of a possible 94

How homeless individuals derive their income depends largely on where they reside. The previous censuses showed that shelter residents were more likely to be receiving benefits or employed than street dwelling homeless, in large part because they have an address and access to support services. This finding reiterates the roles shelters play in helping people get back on their feet. In the absence of legitimate and sufficient sources of income, people may resort to extra-legal activities. All censuses show that homeless persons living on the street are far more reliant on “other” sources of income than were shelter-dwellers.

The results of the current census generally seem to confirm these findings – for example, 77% of shelter residents received government benefits compared to less than 17% of street dwellers.

It may be noted, that an impressive 30% of the street population indicated their source of income, on census day, was from recycling, either through binning and/or bottle picking.

## Health and Homelessness

<b>Question: Are you on social assistance?</b>					
<b>Category</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Total</b>			
<b>Census Date</b>					
<i>March 2003</i>	41	<b>41</b>			
<i>November 2003</i>	120	<b>120</b>			
<b>April, 2004</b>					
<b>Category</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Disability 1 (PPMB)</b>	<b>Disability 2 (PWD)</b>	<b>CPP/Pension</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Census Date</b>					
<i>April 2004</i>	31	7	37	5	<b>80</b>

Unlike its predecessors, this census did not attempt to gather information on either substance abuse or mental or physical disabilities. While both subjects are central to the homelessness issue, the advisory committee and ethical advisors were concerned that the volunteer enumerators lacked the professional capacity to accurately gather such data by observation alone. Again, interview biases and invasion of their privacy were strongly considered when making this change in the Census, April 2004. As such, the issue was deferred until a more appropriate data collection model is designed. Future censuses could include comparison with data indicating the percentage of homeless people who are registered with mental health and Addiction services.

Instead, the census invited respondents to rate the overall state of their health (Good, Fair, Poor), and asked a series of questions related to use of healthcare services. Among the findings:

- nearly 42% of all respondents characterized their health as either fair or poor;
- 65% of those in poor health, and 42% of those in fair, are over the age of 40.

The high proportion of *aged homeless* with health problems is a concern, as the incidence of poor health generally tends to increase with age. This is particularly true when aggravating factors common among the homeless (poverty, poor nutrition, lack of adequate shelter and/or sanitation, reduced access to medical services, substance abuse, etc.) are present. A recent Vancouver report<sup>6</sup> described its 40+-year old homeless population as “the most physically unhealthy of the shelterless”, often suffering from multiple addictions and/or mild to moderate mental illness”.

When looking at “best practices” service providers need to consider the issue of “concurrent disorders” as people with mental health and/or addictions issues are over represented in the homeless population (NeuroScience Canada, 2004). BC Interior Health Region has begun to address this issue by transferring addictions services under the Mental Health umbrella. Much more is needed in order to garner a better understanding and to provide services for this subpopulation.

The following statistics indicate that the majority of respondents did not have medical coverage and one third of the respondents, due to the fact that they are recipients of disability pensions, have either a mental or physical disability or substantial barriers to employment.

- 77% of street residents and 45% of shelter residents do not have BC Care Cards
- Approximately 34% indicated they were receiving PPMB or PWD disability pensions.

The conditions facing the homeless virtually guarantee that their health needs will continue to grow unless steps are taken to address aggravating factors.

<sup>6</sup> *Shelterlessness in Vancouver* City of Vancouver Administrative Report, 12 June 2001. RTS No. 01379, File No.4659

## Residency and Homelessness

Few aspects of Kelowna's homeless problem generate as much debate as the issue of residency, dominated by two factors: 1) transiency and, 2) the belief that providing services and Kelowna's moderate climate attracts more people.

To assess the validity of this assumption, the census asked the following questions.

- How long have you lived in Kelowna?
- How long have you been homeless in Kelowna?
- Why did you come to Kelowna?
- Have you been homeless elsewhere?

The results show conclusively that Kelowna's homeless population is not predominately transient. On the contrary, it includes a large number of individuals who have lived here most or all of their lives. Although a sizable minority (20%) of respondents had been in Kelowna for less than one month, the vast majority (nearly 70%) had lived here for at least one year. Overall, the median length of residency was three years, with nearly one-third of all respondents having lived in Kelowna for 10 or more years.

By comparison, the median length of time for which these same respondents had been homeless was six months, with the majority of respondents (57%) indicating that they had been homeless for only a fraction of their time in Kelowna. Most respondents are long-term residents, a significant number of whom have only recently become homeless.

Specifically, the data shows that of all homeless people in Kelowna:

- 38% had been homeless for more than one year;
- 55% had never been homeless elsewhere;
- 27% come to Kelowna seeking employment;
- 25% came to Kelowna for family reasons;
- 21% came to access treatment or resources;
- Less than 3% were attracted by the climate.

As a whole, the data does not support the belief that the climate or the quality and availability of services are key attractants to Kelowna, for homeless individuals across the country. The majority of respondents were not homeless when they arrived in Kelowna and have been a part of the community for years, if not decades.

## Street vs. Shelter Analysis

### Street Count

Relative to total population, Kelowna's overall homeless population is roughly on par with that of Vancouver and Calgary. The distribution of this population between shelters and the street, however, is not. Larger centres tend to have more shelters, and are able to accommodate more of the homeless population. In Calgary, for example, over 93% of all homeless reside in shelters, compared to only 72% in Kelowna. In real terms, this means that Kelowna has 64 people living on the streets, while Calgary, despite having ten times the population, has only 117. Relative to total population, Kelowna's street homeless population is five times that of Calgary<sup>7</sup>.

### Shelter Count

Several people enumerated in the shelters insisted that they were not homeless, despite the fact that their stays were short term and they would have nowhere to go if they were not in the shelter. So by definition they are in fact homeless.

The data shows that homeless people in shelters are far more likely to have a steady source of income, a doctor and Health Care coverage (80%) compared to street people who access these services (38%).

### Shelter Capacity

Information about capacity, provided by participating facilities, indicated that all detox centres and short and long-stay shelters, except the largest men's facility, were full on the night of the census. Most had waitlists and several had empty beds that could not be used because of funding cutbacks. All facilities are over capacity and stressed that lack of operating and capital funding was preventing them from responding to the growing demand for their services and programs. The following is a sampling of information provided by some of the facilities.

- One ten-bed women's recovery house has a waitlist long enough to fill another same-sized facility.
- A youth detox facility with two beds indicated it needs at least four more beds as they turn away four or five youth per month. They stressed that there is a small window of opportunity when a client is motivated and locatable.
- Insufficient funding is preventing a major detox, treatment and supportive living facility from using seven of its fifteen-detox beds. Meanwhile the wait to enter detox continues to lengthen.
- The eight-bed Aboriginal youth shelter indicated a need for a facility that could accommodate at least thirty-five more beds.
- A safe centre for women and children was over capacity on the night of the census and indicated they needed at least twenty more beds. The same organization has two safe houses for sexually exploited women (15-29 years), which turn away about 15 females per month. With adequate funds they could more than double their capacity.
- An eleven bed residential facility for men with mental health issues does not keep waitlist statistics but indicated that the "phone rings off the hook" and if they could, they would be accommodating eighty men.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.calgary.ca/cweb/communities/community.asp?UserID=2&CommunityID=203> search "homeless"

## **SUBSTANTIAL BARRIERS**

### **Lack of Safe & Affordable Housing**

Falvo (2003) clearly outlines what many low income Canadians know from experience: Canada is in the midst of a national social housing crisis that requires government intervention. His solution is the implementation of a *1% Solution* that would require that each level of government spend 1% of their budget on affordable housing. He also advocates making the federal government legally responsible, through a Housing Bill of Rights, for ensuring that every Canadian has affordable housing.

### **BC Government Cutbacks to Social Programs**

Over the past three years, community agencies and individual citizens have been severely affected by government cutbacks to social services. A reduction in core funding from the province has caused a ripple effect forcing organizations to:

- compete more aggressively for funding;
- deal with increased need with reduced capacity and resources;
- cope with work overloads and staff burn out;
- turn people away;
- close or reduce staff and services.

These cutbacks have the effect of downloading *essential services* onto communities and individuals. Mentioned earlier were the cutbacks to shelter facilities. Another glaring example is the cutbacks that are continually being made to welfare or BC Employment & Assistance, as it is currently called. It has become very difficult for homeless people and youth in particular to obtain and stay on welfare. If one is fortunate enough to be on Income Assistance, it is important to realize that the amount of financial assistance provided is highly inadequate and a set up for failure. Klein & Long's (2003) analysis of the BC Welfare system provides hard data on benefits versus costs that clearly demonstrates that it is impossible to survive on welfare as it is now. The National Council of Welfare (2004) calls the system "cruel and punitive".

### **Common Misconceptions surrounding Poverty and Homelessness**

A common misconception voiced is that people *chose* to be homeless and remain addicted to drugs or alcohol. It is our strong rebuttal that people cannot even consider exercising choice when there is a fundamental lack of emergency shelters, housing, services, and inadequate access to liveable income.

Another common question that is voiced is "Why don't they just get a job?" The fact remains, however that the current economic environment consists of rampant underemployment, involuntary part time workers, low minimum wages, little job security, and that many people just cannot make a living (Falvo, 2003). Moreover many homeless people cannot work due to mental health issues or disabilities. Falvo goes on to clarify that "people who lack adequate housing face tremendous barriers to employment –most notably, a lack of transportation, the inability to purchase basic amenities, being in poorer overall health, not having a telephone and being constrained by shelter curfews" (2003, p. 15).

This report refers to many excellent documents that clarify many of the core issues that contribute to homelessness.

## **Barriers cont'd**

### **Criminalization of the Poor**

There is a trend in the United States and Canada to use legislation to create “safe streets” by “sweeping homeless people and their property from public areas rather than addressing the root causes of poverty and homelessness (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2003). This committee would like to encourage the City, the RCMP and Bylaw Enforcement to work with social service agencies to ensure that homeless individuals are not chased from one location to another. We would also like to encourage advocacy efforts that seek to address the root causes of homelessness rather than target its victims.

### **Perceived Costs of Addressing Homelessness**

Another common objection to dealing with homelessness is cost. Nevertheless, several reports (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness & British Columbia, 2001) clearly demonstrate that the cost of not addressing chronic homelessness, in particular, results in the use of costly public services including emergency medical and psychiatric services and increased law enforcement. They go on to state that communities who effectively address chronic homelessness can expect significant savings from reduced use of public services, cleaner and safer streets, and more resources to address other homeless subpopulations and to prevention measures.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Community Action

Homelessness is a complex issue affecting the entire country, not just Kelowna. No one initiative will resolve the problem by itself. The co-operation of all levels of government and of the community at large is necessary if meaningful responses to homelessness are to be found.

Current literature on homelessness emphasises the need for a continuum of services at the local level, combining safe and affordable housing, adequate income, and support services<sup>8</sup>. The Census Advisory Committee strongly urges that such an approach be adopted in Kelowna.

We encourage all interested parties to use the census results to inform the public about the real issues surrounding homelessness, and to motivate all levels of government to take action.

The City of Kelowna and its citizens need to:

- actively pursue the development of locally based solutions;
- facilitate co-operation between governments, individuals, church groups and agencies;
- advocate for long-term solutions to address homelessness in Kelowna.

### Data Collection

As previously mentioned, we recommend that shelters implement the NHI Homeless Individuals and Families Information Services (HIFIS) that NHI provides free of charge. This data base collects many variables including name, date of birth, gender, entry and dates, last permanent address, source of income, health problems, marital status, immigration status, language spoken, ethnicity, underlying reasons for homelessness and reasons for leaving the shelter. We recommend that the Kelowna Homelessness Steering Committee and the City of Kelowna absorb the implementation and upkeep costs so there are no monetary costs to the shelters themselves.

### 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, family types, presenting issues and target populations. No one shelter can address the varying needs of all the subpopulations on the street.

Given that the Gospel Mission is the only shelter that is not full to capacity, we recommend that a feedback form be devised and be distributed city-wide where the homeless congregate to determine why homeless men are not taking advantage of the availability of these beds.

### Affordable Housing

Governments should make the development of a national affordable housing policy such as the 1% solution an urgent priority. This would be an important prevention measure. Anecdotal evidence and research indicates that it becomes more difficult to rise above homelessness the longer one remains homeless.

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<sup>8</sup> British Columbia. (February 2001). Homelessness – Causes & Effects. A Prolife, Policy Review and Analysis of Homelessness in British Columbia.

## **Recommendations cont'd**

### **Income Supports**

People need to have access to adequate levels of income that correspond to today's cost of living whether the source is from employment, employment insurance, or BC Employment and Assistance.

### **Education, Job Training and Employment Supports**

Homeless people, who are able to work, may not have the necessary skills or education. Improved access to flexible and diverse forms of job creation programs that include education and job training are necessary to help homeless individuals become self-supporting. It is important to realize that homeless people often lack such basics as hygiene facilities, phone access, an address, transportation, interview skills, or even work clothing and tools, that are essential to getting and keeping a job. People with persistent physical and mental health issues face substantial barriers to job readiness unless extra supports are in place.

### **Health and Support Services**

Homeless people experience a plethora of barriers to obtaining existing services: appearance, lack of identification, lack of health care coverage, a regular physician, presentation of concurrent disorders (having a mental health and addiction issues), and contact number when their name does come up on waitlist for treatment and follow-up, etc. Government and community groups are encouraged to support existing services and to advocate for the expansion of services to address the dire need in our community.

### **Needs of Aboriginal people**

Clearly, persons of Aboriginal (First Nations or Metis) descent, particularly teens and females, are at much higher risk of homelessness than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Financial and human resources are needed both at the First Nation and Urban Aboriginal levels to assist with more effective, coordinated efforts to address the unique and complex issues relating to homeless Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal sectors must be supported to collaborate in the establishment of additional culturally appropriate shelters, affordable housing, treatment centres, recovery houses and income/employment programs for all homeless Aboriginal people.

### **Public Education**

We support and encourage education campaigns, such as the Homelessness Awareness Week. Events like these can serve to inform the public about the extent and realities of homelessness, to bring attention to the pressing need, and to provide a variety of venues that bring people together. Ultimately, we need to create the political will, and to exercise our democratic powers to address homelessness for the benefit of our entire community. Indeed, it is our belief that the entire Kelowna community can bloom<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Reference to Communities in Bloom Campaign [www.comunitiesinbloom.ca](http://www.comunitiesinbloom.ca)

## **PARTICIPATING AGENCIES AND FACILITIES**

### **Kelowna Drop In and Information Centre (KDIC)**

The **Kelowna Drop-In & Information Centre** originally grew out of the Unemployment Action Centre which was funded by the BC Federation of Labour and which concluded its activities in 1986. The doors remained open, however, through funding provided by the Church of St. Michael & All Angels. Services expanded as various individuals and organizations provided financial and material assistance. The Centre began to offer lunch, coffee and snacks, resume writing, laundry and shower facilities and referrals to other community agencies. Our clientele also grew to include transients, the working poor, and homeless. The Kelowna Drop-In Centre has been at its current location on Leon Ave. for twelve years. For more information visit: [www.kelownadropincentre.org](http://www.kelownadropincentre.org)

### **The Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group (KHNG)**

The Kelowna Homelessness Networking Group is a large coalition of over 50 shelter and housing agencies, outreach groups, advocates, service providers, church groups, and private individuals interested in addressing homelessness in Kelowna. It is hosted and facilitated by the Kelowna Drop-In and Information Centre.

### **National Homelessness Initiative (NHI)**

The National Homelessness Initiative assists governments and community organizations in coming together to alleviate homelessness. By encouraging innovative and progressive cooperation, this approach is supporting long-term local solutions to address homelessness.

For more information on Kelowna and countrywide initiatives visit: [www.homelessness.gc.ca](http://www.homelessness.gc.ca)

## **KELOWNA HOMELESSNESS NETWORKING GROUP MEMBERS**

- Adventist Community Services & Street Ministry
- Alexandra Gardner Women & Children's Safe Centre
- BC Schizophrenia Society
- Boys & Girls Club: Outreach Health Services
- Boys & Girls Club: Penny Lane
- Boys & Girls Club: Reconnect
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Cannon Addiction Place Society
- Central Okanagan Brain Injury Society
- Central Okanagan Four Pillars Coalition to Drug Problems
- City of Kelowna
- Crossroads Treatment Centre
- Downtown Kelowna Association Patrols
- Evangel Church (Zoe Bus)
- First United Church
- Forensic Psychiatric Services
- Freedom's Door
- French Cultural Centre
- Gardell & Associates
- Inn from/Out of the Cold
- Interior Health
- John Howard Society South Okanagan
- Kelowna & District Consumer Council
- Kelowna Alcohol & Drug Services
- Kelowna Christian Centre
- Kelowna Community Food Bank
- Kelowna Community Resources
- Kelowna Drop-In & Information Centre
- Kelowna Family YMCA-YWCA
- Kelowna Food Bank Society
- Kelowna General Hospital
- Kelowna Gospel Mission
- Kelowna Homelessness Steering Committee
- Kelowna Poverty Task Force
- Kelowna Women's Resource Society
- Kelowna Women's Shelter/Central Okanagan Emergency Shelter Society
- Ki-low-na Friendship Centre: Family & Wolf's Dens
- Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society
- Living Positive Resource Centre
- Ministry of Human Resources
- Neighbourlink
- Okanagan Aboriginal AIDS Society
- Okanagan Advocacy & Resource Society
- Okanagan Families Society
- Okanagan Independent Living Society
- Okanagan University College
- Okanagan Youth for Christ
- Pat's Place
- Robert James
- Rutland Haven Ministries Society
- Rutland Task Group
- Salvation Army Community Services
- SHARE
- Shepherd's Reach Ministries: WINGS
- Society of Hope
- St. Vincent de Paul Society
- Sylvia Bailuk
- United Way of Central & South Okanagan

**PARTICIPATING FACILITIES (18)**  
**Social Services, Health & Criminal Justice System Beds**  
**Participation in 2003 & 2004 Censuses**

(√ indicates participation )

Name of shelter	March 12, 2003	Nov. 19, 2003	April 13, 2004
Boys & Girls Club, Penny Lane Youth Shelter	√	—	√
Cannon Addiction Place Society (CAPS)	√	√	√
Crossroads Treatment Centre	√ (data unusable)	√ (data unusable)	√ (data unusable)
Freedom's Door	—	—	√
Kelowna General Hospital – Emergency	√	√	√
Kelowna General Hospital - McNair Unit	—	√	√
Kelowna Gospel Mission	√	√	√
Kelowna Gospel Mission's Harmony House	√	√	√
Kelowna Women's Shelter / Central Okanagan Emergency Shelter Society	√	√	√
Ki-low-na Friendship Society – Wolf's Den	√	√	√
Ki-low-na Friendship Society – Family Den	Just opened	Just opened	√
NOW Canada, Alexandra Gardner Women & Children's Safe Centre	√	√	√
NOW Canada Safe Homes	√	√	√
Okanagan Families Society- Youth Alcohol & Drug Detox Program	√	√	√
Pat's Place	—	√	√
RCMP City Cells	—	√	√
Shepherd's Door	—	—	√
Society of Hope	—	√	— “not homeless”
WINGS (Women in Need Getting Support)	√	√	√

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