

The Challenges Youth Face and the Movement to Over Come Them

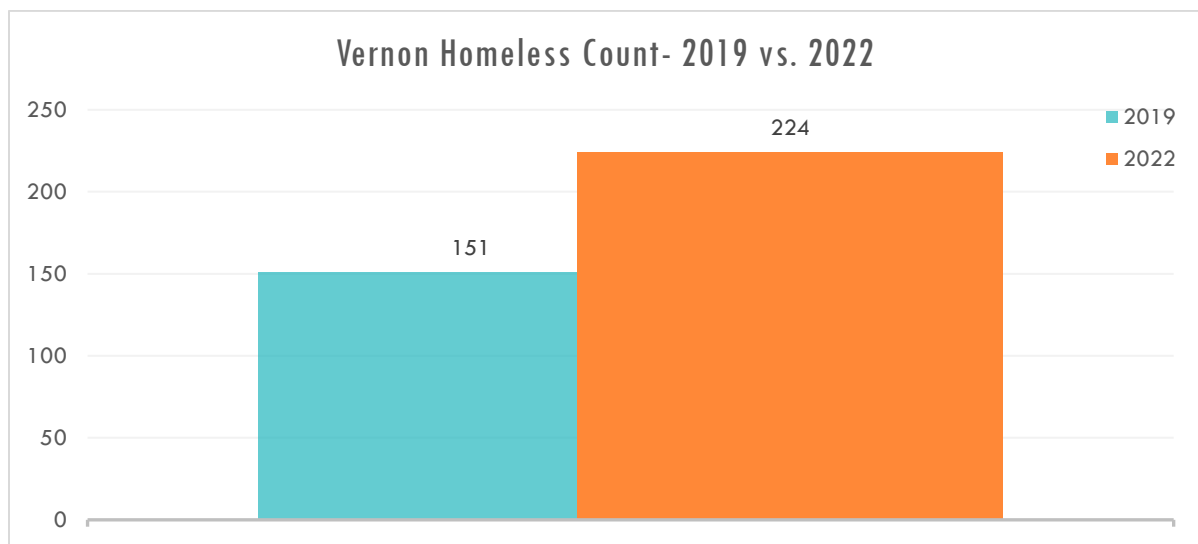
PREPARED FOR THE OKANAGAN INDIAN BAND, PUBLIC SAFETY UNIT

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Homelessness- Vernon BC

In 2020 through 2021, the Homeless Services Association of British Columbia conducted a Point in Time homeless count to provide a snapshot of homelessness in 16 communities across British Columbia. During this count, in May 2021 there were 224 individuals identified as experiencing homelessness in the Vernon area. This number is a significant increase from the 151 individuals identified in the 2018 Point in Time homeless count. Of the 224 identified, 76% were sheltered while the other 24% were unsheltered and resorted to sleeping outside, in makeshift shelter/tent or in a vehicle.

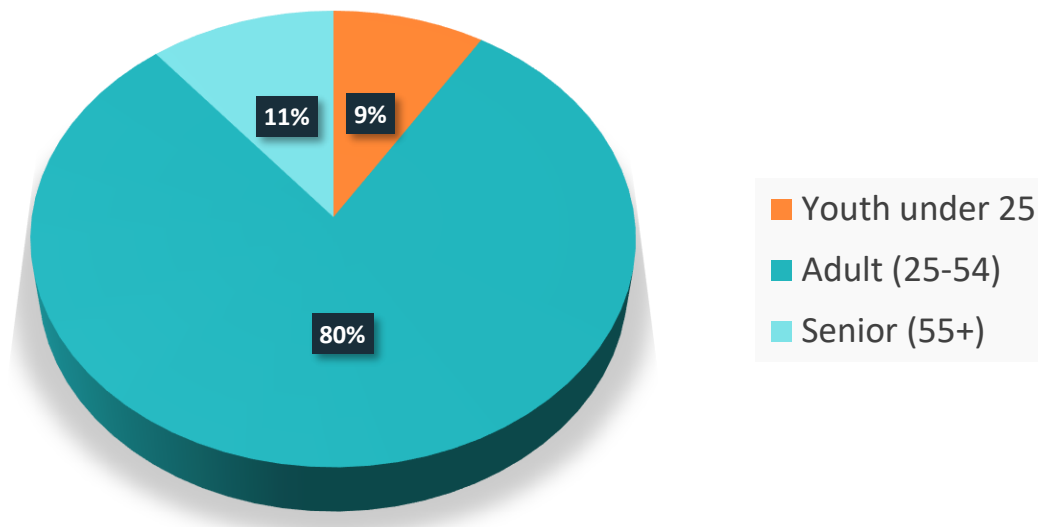


The 2022 homeless count increased by 73 people; this is a 33% increase during a three-year period.

Vernon Homeless Demographics

During the two-day count in Vernon BC, conducted by the Point in Time project, 64% of the respondents identified as Male, while 33% identified as Female and the remaining 3% identified as another gender with 11% of the individuals identifying as being 2SLGBTQIA+. These numbers are consistent with the gender mix throughout British Columbia which are: 68% Male, 30 % Female and 2% another gender. (BC Housing, 2021)

Age of Homeless Population- Vernon, B.C



Of the 224 respondents in the homeless count, 9% were youth under the age of 25, with 80% being between the ages of 25-54 and remaining 11% were seniors over the age of 55.

The survey found that just under half of the homeless population in the Vernon area were Indigenous, with 40% of individuals identifying as being of Indigenous ancestry. Ten percent of the population indicated that their racial identify was not listed within the survey while 1% were of black descent and 1% was of Latin American descent.



Homelessness- British Columbia

The 2020/2021 Report on Homeless Counts in B.C. counted 8,665 individuals throughout British Columbia as experiencing homelessness, including 222 children under the

age 19. More than half of those counted were sheltered (62%) while the remaining (38%) were unsheltered and sleeping outside. Some communities participated in both the 2020/2021 and 2018 counts, when comparing the numbers, the report identifies an 11.5% increase in population of individuals experiencing homelessness while the Vernon area seen a 33% increase in individuals experiencing homelessness.

Indigenous Homelessness

Indigenous population amongst the individuals identified as homeless is disproportionately higher than non-indigenous people. Of the 8,665 respondents, 39% were identified as being of Indigenous ancestry. This rate is consistent and comparable to 40% in the Vernon homeless count who identified as being Indigenous. These high numbers are alarming as the 2016 Census, indicates that Indigenous peoples represent 6% of B.C.'s total population. (BC, 2021)

Indigenous homelessness is a result of colonization and can be traced back to the trauma, oppression, racism and discrimination that Indigenous peoples face. Government facilities and processes such as the Indian Residential schools, 60's Scoop and the child welfare system have played significant roles in the instability of families and homes.

“ There is a strong link between the institutionalization of Aboriginal children and youth and the high rates of Aboriginal youth homelessness in some cities. Due to poverty and the lack of stable affordable housing options, many Aboriginal youth have been caught up in the cycles of care/custody/incarceration”. (Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions, 2009)

Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue experienced nationally throughout Canada. Common contributing themes to youth homelessness include but are not limited to:

- Unsafe housing
- Inadequate or negative experiences with the foster care system
- Trauma
- Drug and/or Alcohol addictions
- Mental health issues
- Lack of affordable housing

In January 2022, the City of Penticton conducted a youth homelessness research report “No Where to Go- A Report from the Youth Homelessness Research Project” that highlights the Youth Emergency Service’s collection of youth voices over a six-year period, from 2013-2019 where it was identified that the most significant issues impacting youth were: mental and physical health, drugs and alcohol use, poverty and lack of resources including social, health, housing, and recreational options. (WRH Consulting, 2022)

Unsafe Housing

Youth report that they are fleeing unsafe homes where they experience a variety of issues including family violence, neglect, abandonment, physical and sexual abuse. (WRH Consulting, 2022) In some cases, youth have reported that they have been kicked out as a result of sharing their sexuality of being gay, bisexual, transgendered or questioning their gender.

Inadequate or negative experiences with the foster care system

Research has shown that there is a correlation between youth homelessness and involvement with child welfare systems. In a B.C study, *“High prevalence of exposure to the child welfare system among street-involved youth in a Canadian setting: implications for policy and practice”* it was noted that it was 160 times more likely that street-involved youth were from government care than the general population of youth. It was also indicated that it is twice as likely that the street-involved youth who were formerly in government care were First Nations, Métis or Inuit. (Barker)

University of Calgary graduate social work student, Katherine McPharland released a report *“From Marginalized to Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions from Those with Lived Expertise”* where the information was gathered in a youth-led process. The report illustrates the detrimental impacts of youth aging out of services such as: foster care, mental health, disability and health care supports which can often result in youth homelessness.

Trauma

Studies have shown that trauma experienced as a result of physical, emotional, sexual abuse, exposure to domestic violence and intergenerational trauma are pathways to homelessness. Youth are further traumatized when they experience homelessness as they are more likely to endure physical violence, mental health risks, unsafe housing situations, vulnerable to exploitation, increased substance abuse and even death. (McPharland, 2020)

Drug and/or Alcohol Addictions

During the 2020/2021 Point in Time- BC Count, it was uncovered that 67% of the homeless population were living with addictions and 22% of the respondents indicated that substance use was a cause for their homelessness.

Living on the streets is frightening with negative effects such as being exposed to violence, exploitation, extreme weather conditions and hunger which can lead to youth using drugs or alcohol as a way of coping with these challenges.

Mental Health Issues

The report *“Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey”* uncovers the correlation between homelessness and the national mental health crisis. The report has identified that 85.4% of homeless youth were experiencing a mental health crisis, 42% of homeless youth reported at least one suicide attempt and 35.2% of homeless youth reported having at least one drug overdose requiring hospitalization. Indigenous youth and LGBTQ2S youth are more likely to experience mental health challenges, attempt suicide and experience homelessness at a young age. (Stephen Gaetz, 2016)

Lack of Affordable Housing

Given that many homeless respondents experience poverty, the lack of affordable housing has been uncovered as another pathway to homelessness. During McPharland’s study, some youth shared that their parents were homeless while others shared their parent’s housing instability which highlights the generational and socioeconomic factors that are a key factor in homelessness. (McPharland, 2020)

Recommendations

Through the youth-led report *“From Marginalized to Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions from Those with Lived Expertise”* the youth generated 11 solutions which are:

1. Listen to the youth: invest in lived expertise leadership
2. Access to a continuum of government-funded distinct youth housing options
3. Improve foster care placements to meet the needs of youth at risk
4. Change MCFD policies (Youth Agreements and Emancipation)
5. Increase cultural services
6. Improve emergency response to youth homelessness

7. Increase financial supports such as income assistance and rental subsidies
8. Increase community supports
9. Foster young peoples' connections to natural supports and community
10. Improve education opportunities
11. Increase youth employment

The report further recommends an action plan be created and implemented to address youth homelessness. Youth have recommended that this action plan be co-developed between youth with lived experiences, service providers who work with them and the provincial government. (McPharland, 2020)

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