

Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT



# 2021: A Year in Review

A global pandemic shut down the world in 2020 and continued in part throughout 2021. At times, the challenges felt insurmountable with increasing Covid outbreaks, the relentless opioid crisis and toxic drug supply, the unpredictable weather patterns and extremes of the highs and lows. For members of our unhoused community, the public health orders designed to protect had the consequence of disrupting support services relied upon. While the pandemic continued to highlight disparities between those that have and those that do not and increased challenges to service delivery, we have also seen the pandemic mobilize unprecedented support and funding from governments, philanthropic agencies, and the community. Coalition membership increased from 31 to 36 agencies this year, all who have worked tirelessly to create opportunities, take on new tasks, and maintain the health and resilience of our community.

Throughout the year, the Coalition continued supporting member agencies and the people they serve, as well as our collective needs. The Coalition's focus was to advocate for an increase in supportive and affordable housing and to provide support to the unhoused during the pandemic. With funding support from the CVRD, Comox Valley Community Foundation, SPARC BC, and from the City of Courtenay we were able to maintain the services provided as well as to extend hours and to build capacity. Detailed information on our responses to homelessness are located throughout the report.

Local partnerships flourished through the development of the CVRD's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The CVRD collaborated with the Coalition, the Comox Valley Community Health Network, The Comox Valley Social Planning Society, other local non-profit agencies, and people with lived and living experience of poverty, to gather information and assess community needs. This information supported the preparation and draft of the CVRD Poverty Reduction Strategy. The strategy is meant to reduce poverty in the Comox Valley by 25% by 2024.

In June of this year, we saw a change in coordination as we sadly said good-bye to Andrea Cupelli as the coordinator for the Coalition. Andrea held the position for 5 years and contributed endlessly to the housing needs of our community as a strong advocate and leader. Although Andrea has moved on from her coordination role, she now holds a seat at the leadership table. In August, we welcomed Angela Fletcher as the new coordinator for the Coalition.

Angela jumped right into the role by prepping for two housing presentations. In September, the Coalition presented at the BC Government Finance Committee budget consultation process to advocate for more non-market housing in the Comox Valley. Further, the Coalition spoke at a Community Listening event in Comox addressing the current homelessness situation, our communities needs and the collective impact of homelessness.

October was an exciting month as The Coalition, together with the City of Courtenay, the Comox Valley Transition Society, and the Comox Valley Regional District applied to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities Strengthening Communities funding stream and were awarded 1.2 million dollars to extend homeless support services in the Comox Valley during the pandemic. Grant activities will begin in January 2022.

With agencies in pandemic survival mode, affordable housing development seemed to be on the back burner in 2021 but we are happy to report the Coalition was able to support the full approval of three affordable housing developments starting in 2022. Wachiay Friendship Centre will be developing 40- studio and one-bedroom units for low-income seniors and Elders, the Comox Valley Affordable Housing Society is constructing 52 units in Comox for seniors and people with disabilities, and the Comox Valley Transition Society is working with BC Housing to develop 40 transitional units on Mission Hill for woman-led families.

We look forward to 2022 and to future community collaborations and partnerships. Thank you to all our member agencies, advisors, municipal leaders, donors, funders, and caring citizens for all your efforts to end homelessness in the Comox Valley.

# COMOX VALLEY COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS

## WHO WE ARE:



The Coalition to End Homelessness is a collective of 36 member agencies who plan, coordinate, recommend, advocate for, and implement community responses to homelessness and increasing affordable housing.

## HOW WE DO IT:



**We work within a wheelhouse of housing options to address homelessness.**

*A wheelhouse includes a safety net (emergency shelter, short-term supportive housing), housing with supports (long-term supportive housing, subsidized rental housing) and affordable market housing (rental and homeownership).*



**We believe in the power of collaboration and partnerships**

*A collaborative systems approach is used to provide the most effective support strategies, while securing adequate resources.*



**We use a preventative, client-based approach**

*Supports are delivered with unconditional positive regard, and emphasis will be placed on outreach, frequent contact with clients, relationship building, and individualized services. Ending homelessness requires prevention strategies to ensure more people do not become homeless.*



**We use our platform to educate, increase public awareness, and build community**

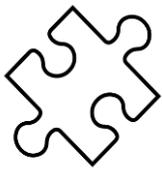
*A coordinated public awareness program builds community understanding of homelessness.*



## We make funding recommendations for the Comox Valley Regional District Homelessness Supports Service Fund

In 2015 the CVRD held a binding referendum asking if voters would pay at least \$5 on their annual property tax to support local initiatives to help address homelessness. Courtenay, Cumberland and the three electoral areas of the CVRD voted. Comox, Hornby, and Denman Islands were not included. 53% were in favour of creating the Homelessness Supports Service allowing the CVRD to fund local affordable housing initiatives based on the Coalition's Housing Plan. Decisions are approved by the CVRD board on an annual basis. Comox has found another way to support the Coalition's recommendations in the Housing Plan.

### The Coalition to End Homelessness has 4 strategic directions that guide the work we do:



*Strategic Priority #1: Create Additional Housing & Supports*

*Strategic Priority #2: Community Collaboration, Prevention & Education*

*Strategic Priority #3: Coalition Capacity Building*

*Strategic Priority #4: Funding & Fundraising*

Our annual update of our Strategic Priority #1 accomplishments can be found in the Coalition's Housing Plan. This includes survey findings, housing built since 2016, 2020 Homeless Count results, housing funded through the CVRD Homelessness Supports Service as well as other affordable housing projects. Strategic Priorities 2-4 are related specifically to the work of the Coalition can be found within the Coalition's Action Plan. Annual updates on other activities and progress are highlighted in this report.

Archived versions of the plan are on our website [www.cvhousing.ca](http://www.cvhousing.ca)



# HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE TEAM

The Homelessness Response Team (HRT) is a street outreach team coordinated by the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness consisting of frontline outreach workers from a wide range of nonprofit agencies as well as partnerships with Island Health, City of Courtenay, RCMP, Island Health and the Ministry of Poverty and Social Development.



The HRT meets biweekly to identify gaps in the system of care to support homeless individuals, to provide updates, ideas and to share knowledge, resources, referrals, and support.

During outreach, HRT members engage with and support homeless persons on the street, parks, at encampments, motels- wherever they may be. Additionally, we have outreach workers stationed at the Warming Centre and at the Travelodge motel. The HRT provides COVID-19 screening and education, provides agency referrals, income assistance support, hygiene supplies, and living supports. The HRT also identifies and prioritizes homeless persons who are medically fragile, or otherwise highly vulnerable, and connects them to health services and physicians.

Through the Coalition, the HRT relays concerns and advocates for the needs of those experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the HRT provides education to the public to raise awareness, break stigma and build understanding on issues related to homelessness.

# CONNECT WARMING CENTRE



The Connect Warming Centre (Connect) is a Coalition initiative, operated by the Comox Valley Transition Society that provides a safe, welcoming space for vulnerable individuals experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. People can escape inclement weather, temporarily store, or dry out belongings, access washrooms, refreshments, and other immediate supports. Connect also aims to improve self-sufficiency by providing assisted access to housing opportunities, social connection, literacy and education, volunteer/ work opportunities, referrals to community social service agencies, as well as food and living supports. Additionally, through our partnership with the Comox Valley Division of Family Practice, there is a physician attending Connect regularly and assisting people on- site.

In 2021, several clients were able to make enough progress around rebuilding their life skills, trust, and confidence to move on to securing housing at the Travelodge motel housing program when space became available.

The Connect warming Centre officially opened in January of 2020 and has become a cornerstone in our community and a hub for other community services. If permanent housing is not available, then at minimum, being able to provide a space for people to go during the day can make a significant impact on people's well-being. Since opening, Connect has had thousands of visits and serves up to 60 people per day.

### Connect Community Feedback

*"It's cool here. People are nice and we can sit and relax. If we need help, it's here and there is always food."*

*"I like coming here. Too bad more people couldn't be here from outside."*

*"Thank-you guys for what you do. Having somewhere to go makes a difference to my day. It is good not to be stuck outside."*

## SERVICES AND THE PANDEMIC

Since the government declared COVID-19 a global pandemic the Coalition and its member agencies worked around the clock to respond to the needs of our community's most vulnerable – people who felt isolated, fearful, uncertain, and unable to follow the advice to stay home, self-isolate, wash hands and practice physical distancing. Some social services shut down or hours and capacity reduced creating barriers to accessing support. Emergency shelter spaces reduced maximum capacity to adhere to pandemic safety regulations and remain so today.

Through 2021, staff and services have continuously had to pivot to meet the needs of the unhoused population. With the rise in Covid cases in our community, with the unpredictable weather and the opioid crisis, Connect and the Travelodge program became vital resources to the safety of our unhoused population. However, resources have become stretched and like many agencies, adequate staffing has been a challenge.

On a bright note, community attention has turned toward the unhoused since the onset of the pandemic. Community members want to know what services exist as there has been a visible increase in people experiencing homelessness. As the local community became aware of the services at Connect, we found a marked rise in private donations. We received home-cooked meals to distribute as well as survival items such as: tents, blankets, clothing, shoes, cold and wet weather gear, socks, and hats.



The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the housing and support service deficiencies for so many of our vulnerable populations. While we have collectively made progress in the past 6 years, there is clearly much more to do as the demand for safe, affordable, housing continues to grow during these unstable times.

## SHOWER PROGRAM

The shower program is an extension of Connect Warming Centre operated at the Lewis Centre. The program continued throughout 2021 and extended from 3 to 6 days a week as a Covid prevention measure and now operates Monday – Saturday, 10am-1pm. The City of Courtenay provides the space in-kind; there are two staff (one for men’s and one for women’s showers). Staff monitor safety and proper usage of the showers and serve as a health screening checkpoint providing education and information about COVID-19 and other resources.

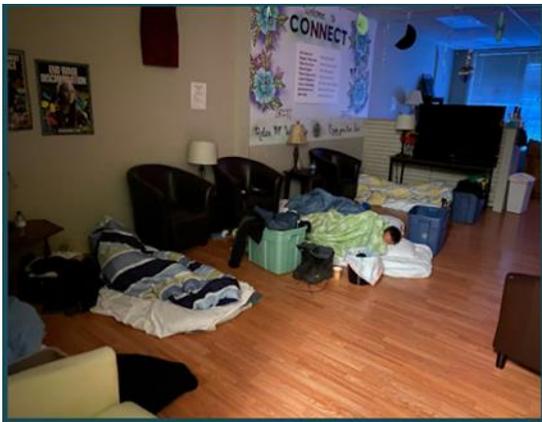
*“I would be dirty without these showers. Keeps me healthy. I’m happy this is happening – where I live there is no water- it’s hard to wash with no water. Thank you!”*

*“Thank you, God, that this is happening for us. We can get clean; we have no worries. You guys are amazing. I appreciate the clean clothes. It doesn’t exist anywhere else; we are very lucky.”*

*“Personally, I don’t think I would’ve survived without you guys.”*

## EXTREME WEATHER- MAT PROGRAM

Connect Warming Centre offers ten mats for overnight use when the weather becomes extreme. The Coalition worked with the Comox Valley Transition Society to actively advocate for the continuation of this much-needed program in 2021.



Together, we have also actively advocated for an expansion of the warming centre to offer more overnight mats and to function as a regular overnight shelter. We are currently working with our partners at the City of Courtenay and assessing all costs and opportunities within the current building.

With continuous use of the overnight shelter, staff observed a marked improvement in the stability and overall health of the guests. Providing a safe place for vulnerable community members to get rest and respite from the street allowed them to make progress and positive decisions regarding the next steps of their journey.

Guests often willingly helped with morning chores and clean-up which enabled them to feel a sense of pride, accomplishment, and community.

# TRAVELODGE PROGRAM

At the onset of the pandemic, Coalition agencies worked with BC Housing to provide 42 motel rooms for those experiencing homelessness. This year, those rooms increased to 52. The short-term supportive housing program includes outreach workers onsite, security and assistance with basic life skills. The program is operated by the Transition Society and is financially supported through BC Housing. Without the Travelodge, over 50 more people would be on the streets. The goal with the residents of the Travelodge is to provide supports needed in the immediate and to then move them along to long-term supportive housing when available. Residents of the Travelodge note that they feel safe and secure while at the motel.

Outreach workers note a significant difference in motivation and behaviour in the residents after connecting with peers and outreach at the motel. With having a place to call home, even temporarily, residents become interested in being productive and are more willing to engage in volunteer and paid work. Recently, residents of the Travelodge have teamed up to offer an outside sweep and clean service to the downtown businesses. The outreach van, purchased last year, provides transportation to these activities as well as to appointments, to deliver food and pick-up supplies.

# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES GRANT

After a year of pivoting to meet the needs of our most vulnerable populations, that the Coalition, in partnership with the Comox Valley Regional District, the Comox Valley Transition Society, and the City of Courtenay received funding through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities Strengthening Communities after submitting a successful application. The one-million-dollar multi-faceted proposal aims to strengthen the Comox Valley by providing incremental supports for those in our community experiencing homelessness during the pandemic through activities such as: creating additional shelter beds, meeting increasing demand at the community warming centre, and providing extended outreach services into the rural regions. The funds will also aim to support the neighbourhoods impacted by the pandemic through activities such as clean-ups and anti-stigma campaigns. The proposal also includes municipal training opportunities for staff including harm reduction, conflict resolution, cultural competency, and other trainings that reduce stigma and build compassion and understanding.

The Coalition is currently collaborating with agencies who will take the lead to implement activities. Activity selection is made through an expression of interest submitted by the agencies to the grant committee. Activities are set to begin in 2022.

Thus far, the process has deepened relationships and brought awareness to the Coalition and to community needs.

# POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

The [CVRD Poverty Assessment and Reduction Strategy](#), developed by the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD), in partnership with the City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, K'ómoks First Nation, [The Coalition to End Homelessness](#), [Comox Valley Social Planning Society](#), and [Comox Valley Community Health Network](#), serves to define actions that reduce poverty across the region by 25 percent by 2024. The strategy sets

the stage to leverage collective capacity across multiple systems in support of meaningful and lasting regional change. The Coalition contributed to the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy throughout 2021. The strategy builds upon insights gathered through the [2020 CVRD Housing Needs Assessment](#) and the [2019 Child-Care Action Plan](#) as well as feedback from local service providers and people with lived and living experience of poverty. The plan acknowledges that to reduce poverty, addressing the root causes is the key to success.

Housing is one of the focus areas in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, but we cannot just focus on housing alone. The plan uncovered that coordinating all aspects of why people are experiencing homelessness is imperative to change. For example, we know that mental health is a reason for homelessness, but statistically, income is a challenge for more people. The strategy would then lead us to look at housing costs and we see that the [research](#) shows that from 2013-2018, a single- family dwelling costs rose by 63%. There has been even further increases since 2018 and wages and subsidies have not kept up. Created by a variety of reasons, ending Homelessness requires collective action.

The Coalition is committed to contributing meaningfully to the Strategy. Partners will meet in the new year to discuss next steps.

## Thank-you to our Municipal Partners

- The Comox Valley Regional District
- The City of Courtenay
- The Village of Cumberland
- The Town of Comox

## Thank-you to Coalition Member Agencies and Advisors

- Affordable Housing Vancouver Island Society
- AVI Health & Community Services
- Comox Bay Care Society (Care-a-van)
- Comox Valley Affordable Housing Society
- Comox Valley Chambers of Commerce
- Comox Valley Community Action Team
- Comox Valley Community Health Network
- Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative
- Comox Valley Family Services Association
- Comox Valley Head Injury Society
- Comox Valley Lions Club
- Comox Valley Peer Outreach teams
- Comox Valley Pride Society
- Comox Valley Recovery Centre
- Comox Valley Regional Chapter of Nurses & Nurse Practitioners
- Comox Valley Seniors Support
- Comox Valley Seventh Day Adventist Church
- Comox Valley Social Planning Society
- Comox Valley Transition Society
- Cumberland Community Housing Society
- Dawn to Dawn: Action on Homelessness
- Hornby Island Housing Association
- Eureka Support Society
- Glacierview Lodge
- Habitat for Humanity
- Indigenous Women's Sharing Society
- K'omox First Nation
- L'arche Comox Valley
- LUSH Valley Food Action Society
- Salvation Army
- St. George's United Church
- Stepping Stones Recovery
- StrongCentre
- St. Vincent de Paul
- Sunday Station
- The Views at St. Joseph

- The Unhoused Society
- United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island
- Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry
- Wachiay Friendship Centre

## **Thank-you to our 2021 Funders**

- The Comox Valley Regional District
- The City of Courtenay
- The Town of Comox
- The Comox Valley Community Foundation
- The Comox Valley Community Health Network
- BC Housing
- SPARC BC
- Union of British Columbia Municipalities
- EMBC
- United Way North and Central Vancouver Island

**Thank-you to each person that has volunteered or that has donated. Thank-you for sharing information and for collaborating on this journey to ending homelessness.**

# Questions about the Annual Report?

Please contact us!



**COMOX VALLEY**  
Coalition To End  
**HOMELESSNESS**

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**Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness**

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**Find us on Facebook!**

**[www.facebook.com/cvcoalitiontoendhomelessness](http://www.facebook.com/cvcoalitiontoendhomelessness)**

# APPENDIX A:

## LOCAL HOMELESSNESS IN THE MEDIA

January 4, 2021: [Comox Valley Community Foundation announces \\$51,170 in grants for COVID-related projects – Comox Valley Record](#)

February 19, 2021: ['Coldest Night of the Year' goes virtual - My Comox Valley Now](#)

February 22, 2021: [Courtenay council approves Extreme Weather Shelter – Comox Valley Record](#)

February 24, 2021: [Courtenay councillor shares thoughts on valley's homeless issues - My Comox Valley Now](#)

May 19, 2021: [BEAE2020 - YouTube](#) – Video

May 30, 2021: [Courtenay warming centre to continue as shelter through April – Comox Valley Record](#)

June 17, 2021: [Province turns down grant for Cumberland project – Comox Valley Record](#)

August 24, 2021: [UBCM grant helps with homeless supports in Comox Valley – Comox Valley Record](#)

September 11, 2021: [Community Listening Event, Sept 11th, 2021, Comox, B.C. - YouTube](#) – Video

September 15, 2021: [Courtenay city staff, RCMP clear out encampment at city hall – Comox Valley Record](#)

September 17, 2021: [CVCF announces granting program for 2021/2022 - My Comox Valley Now](#)

September 22, 2021: [Comox Valley's annual Sock It To 'Em fundraiser in full swing – Comox Valley Record](#)

September 22, 2021: [Connect Centre to extend its lease in Courtenay through to October 2022 – Comox Valley Record](#)

October 7, 2021: [GoFundMe, 24-hours on street supports Comox Valley's homeless - My Comox Valley Now](#)

October 10, 2021: [Comox Valley Legions serve the community in many ways – Comox Valley Record](#)

Oct. 24, 2021: [Warming centre to offer overnight shelter in Courtenay – Comox Valley Record](#)

November 3, 2021: [Homeless encampment numbers increase in Comox Valley – Comox Valley Record](#)

December 26, 2021: [CVRD to open extreme weather warming centre in Courtenay \(cheknews.ca\)](#)