

The Homeless/Addiction Crisis – An Emergency Response & Four Stage Solution
From Addiction to Recovery - From Homelessness to Self-Sustaining Independence

Honoured Mayor and City Councilors,

May I begin by thanking you for the services you provide for our community.

I come to you as a concerned citizen and as an individual who has been dealing with the drug addiction and homelessness of my own son for 27 years. Hooked on crystal meth by the age of 15, he is now 42 and trapped in a cycle of addiction, recovery, and relapse which is always accompanied by the added crisis of homelessness. When he is in treatment and therapy, he does amazingly well but falters when he is back in society. Without therapy and the support of a community, his chances of escaping the claws of addiction are zero!

I have witnessed the swelling numbers of desperate individuals on our streets and in our parks and would like to offer solutions that I wish had been in place to provide a path of recovery for my son. The following proposal offers a four-stage incentive-based plan where participants play an active role in their recovery and continually contribute to the betterment of their personal growth and circumstances. It begins with an emergency response.

If Victoria experienced an earthquake and hundreds of people were suddenly left without shelter, the government would call upon the Canadian Reserve and/or the Canadian Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to work with local agencies, assess the number of individuals in need and set up organized emergency shelters in designated areas with on-going attached services.

Presently, there are hundreds of homeless individuals in Victoria and thousands across our country who are living in a state of crisis that demands an emergency response that is organized, systematic, and immediate.

Government Administrators have the power to bring the present homeless/addiction crisis under control by calling on the agencies already prepared to handle disasters. Utilizing parking lots, and vacant land - inside and outside city centers, emergency structures with attached services could be set up in a relatively short time, including more remote and restricted addiction and mental health treatment centers. All municipalities and suburbs should participate so that one area is not shouldering the responsibility of the homeless population.

***Once the shelters are established, the habitation of individuals in public parks or other public areas, including cars or campers outside official campgrounds, should be prohibited and enforced.**

Homelessness & Addictions – Providing a Path of Recovery

Homelessness is a symptom of the underlying causes of drug addiction, mental health issues, lack of employable job skills, lack of job training and job placement programs, and a lack of affordable housing. However, the majority of individuals living in a perpetual state of homelessness have severe drug addictions and/or mental health issues that are often brought on or exacerbated by addictions. Any effort to address homelessness without creating active treatment centers will prove to be ineffective band-aids for the underlying festering maladies of addiction and mental health issues.

Allowing people to shelter in public parks and on the streets is not a compassionate or effective response but neither is handing out housing without addressing the issues that caused homelessness in the first place. Many of those trapped in the prison of addiction and/or mental health issues are living in filth and

squalor. They need safe, organized and supervised dwellings where they can receive basic necessities, addiction treatment, and other programs to assist in their recovery. They also need to be active participants in their self-support and the improvement of their situation.

Help begins with the assessment and assignment of individuals to a particular facility area. Those with addictions would be assigned to one of the emergency shelter areas providing detox and addiction treatment. These can also be set up relatively quickly with facilities that are often used as remote workstations for mining camps. These structures provide housing, kitchen and dining facilities, offices and common spaces. Please see: <https://altafab.com/products-and-industry-solutions/> There are often used units of this sort available at a fraction of the cost. The main benefit is that they can be moved in or removed according to need. It may not be a perfect solution, but we have to start somewhere, and winter will be upon us soon.

The crisis we are facing demands bold moves and a unified plan of action. We would do well to learn from the mistakes of other municipalities that are now dealing with thousands of homeless in their cities.

Watch - *Seattle Is Dying*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpAi70WWBlw&list=PL806d9TE1ng_LEbjUfevU-2GChokpj-yt&index=1

Short Edit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vdzfi0r16hg>

Many agree that it is unreasonable that residents and business owners of any municipality or suburb should be expected to accept unsupervised, random tent dwellings in public areas, especially the recreational spaces that our collective citizenry has paid millions of dollars in taxes to establish and maintain. Allowing the homeless to live in our parks is akin to saying they should be able to stay in the backyards of private homes. For those of us living in condominiums and apartments, these parks are our backyard.

The following four-stage proposal provides an incentive-based plan that begins by mobilizing the emergency resources we have at hand and follows through with accessible programs to assist individuals and families on a path of recovery.

Proposal Overview

Four Stage Emergency & Incentive Based Transitional Housing Proposal

- Stage one - Basic Necessities Emergency Tent or Basic Structure Shelters – to include on-site evaluation for separate substance detox and/or mental health facilities
- Stage two – Responsibility - Incentive Based - Basic Housing (similar to boarding houses)
- Stage three – Incentive Based - Subsidized Housing
- Stage four – Independent Living – with on-going community wellness programs

Stage One – Basic Necessities Emergency Tent Shelters & Provisions

- On-site, mandatory evaluation for addiction and mental health issues and personal needs assessment to determine placement. Those with addiction issues or violent tendencies would be moved to a more restricted facility for detox and addiction treatment programs.
- Emergency group tent or basic shelter – organized, supervised and regulated - with a cot & blanket and a space to safely store limited belongings.
- Common area for meals, counseling services
- High power electric heat blowers if group tents are used to provide adequate heat
- On site Manager/Counselor 24/7

- On site Security 24/7 and regular inspections
- Separate facilities for male, female, gender neutral, and families
- Code of Conduct - No drugs or alcohol, restricted smoking areas, mandatory quiet times
- Clean drinking water, portable toilets, showers, and laundry facilities, garbage pickup
- Meals catered or prepared on-site. No cooking facilities other than the one providing meals.
- Overhead lighting, charging stations and access to time-limited internet
- On-site social service counselors
- On site peer counseling groups similar to Alcohol Anonymous
- On-site work counselors and access to daily jobs and unskilled labor opportunities
- Access to job training programs
- Participants would be required to play a role in the up-keep and cleanliness of the shelter
- After participants have demonstrated their ability to remain sober and a willingness to work and take an active role in bettering their circumstances and desire to contribute to community, they would be moved to Stage Two

Stage Two – Responsibility Based – Basic Housing

A step up from emergency tent or basic group shelter to a facility similar to a boarding house

- Gender separated group housing with individual rooms (8x10) with single bed and shelf for some belongings.
- Families would be in a separate facility with larger rooms and those with children would have their own bathroom.
- On-site Manager
- On site Security 24/7
- Shared bath, shower and laundry facilities
- Meals to be provided in a community dining space – catered or prepared on site.
- Code of Conduct – smoking area, no drugs or alcohol, quiet times
- Regular inspections
- Incentive based housing would require participants to engage in community work for designated hours per day such as: street cleaning, kitchen work for shelters, facility cleaning, grounds-keeping, movers, cooking, etc. The work hours are at a per/hour wage with a minimum required according to capacity. The wage is subtracted from the cost of accommodation, food, power, water and garbage fees.
- Occupants would also be required to contribute service hours for food prep and cleanup and facility cleaning of their own facility. These hours are in addition to required community work/service hours.
- On-site Individual Counselors & peer group counselling similar to Alcoholics Anonymous
- Visiting job counselor – to provide daily jobs or long-term skilled or unskilled labor opportunities
- Access to free job training programs to create opportunities for participants to become independent workers. Job training would be in addition to minimum work/service requirements, but adjustments could be made for intensive training programs.

Stage Three - Incentive Based Subsidized Housing

Subsidized housing is a step up from Stage Two accommodation and is similar to what is offered now through BC Housing programs. Participants would be required to subsidize their housing costs from wages earned and additional hours as community volunteers. Those who have progressed to Stage Three could be mentors for others entering the program.

- Subsidized Housing would provide independent living spaces with private kitchen and bath and a common space for individual and peer group counseling and community support

- Shared laundry facility
- Community Rules
- Regular Inspections
- On site Manager/Security
- Continued job assistance counseling including job training options
- Continued counseling with individual plans for participants to transition into independent living
- Individuals who lose their work or violate rules are given a time period to improve their situation after which they would go back into Responsibility Based Housing or mandatory treatment.
- Time restrictions for subsidies based on individual assessment
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Stage Four – Independent Living

- Individuals or families would be provided with assistance to find regular housing
- On-going community-based peer groups to check in and insure personal health
- Continued professional counseling/assessment and check in to insure continued progress

Conclusion

As of October 2020, our national government spent 212 billion dollars on top of the national budget to provide support for Canadians during the covid crisis. However, the homeless numbers continue to grow.

The four-stage incentive-based plan before you begins by calling upon available emergency resources to work in cooperation with local agencies and community groups in order to mobilize an emergency response to the homeless/addiction crisis.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the details of the proposal with anyone interested in exploring effective strategies to provide a path from addiction to recovery, from homelessness to independent healthy living.

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