

Vulnerable People at Risk: Forum and Business Roundtable Summary

A joint initiative of the City of Whitehorse
and Kwanlin Dün First Nation

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www.whitehorse.ca/vulnerablepeople

Homelessness costs us all... let's do something about it!





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Purpose

The City of Whitehorse (the City) and Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN) have a shared mission to improve the lives of vulnerable people at risk. That's why we invited other governments, businesses, service providers, organizations, and the public to come together to share ideas and insights to better support vulnerable people and find solutions to end homelessness.

We have clearly heard that poverty and homelessness are a community concern and that there is a desire to improve the lives of vulnerable people. Whitehorse is a compassionate community.

We have also learned that poverty and homelessness are complicated problems. The City and KDFN don't have 'the answer', but are committed to working together and with others as part of a whole-of-community solution.

We believe a community that works for everyone benefits us all.



What we've accomplished so far

In 2015, the City and KDFN held two public events at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre to share experiences and harness ideas on how to address this important and challenging issue.

Action #1: Vulnerable People at Risk Forum

Overview

The first event was titled 'The Vulnerable People at Risk Forum' which was a full day, public event held on April 24, 2015. Nearly 300 people attended and overwhelmingly called for a wide range of better housing services to be provided for people in need.

Better housing includes low cost, affordable, supported housing, and providing a variety of safe housing options for youth. Participants also said that people on the street and people in transition from the street, incarceration, addictions and mental health treatment need coordinated, supportive options in the short, medium, and longer term to keep them housed.

Forum participants found that while there were numerous agencies supporting vulnerable persons, there needs to be better inter-organization communication and collaboration. Participants called for the creation of an inventory of existing services, and a new overseeing body or advisory committee to improve agency collaboration.

Participants also called for a more robust system of outreach services to meet the medical, mental health, and safety issues that vulnerable people face. They said such services should be available 24/7, utilize both modern medical and traditional healing strategies, and be tailored to best meet the individual's needs.

Photo courtesy of Whitehorse Star.

Select comments heard from Forum participants include the following (a full summary of the Circles of Sharing ideas and comments can be viewed online: [Appendix 1](#)):

- *“Never give up on anybody.”*
- *“We are all one paycheque away from the streets.”*
- *“Help educate people so their attitude towards vulnerable people change.”*
- *“What would’ve helped me is someone reaching out and saying: ‘hey, I care about you.’”*
- *“We don’t look, we turn our heads like we don’t see.”*
- *“Stop punishing people for their vulnerability.”*
- *“What are our values for a better community and life?”*
- *“I’ve never met anyone who wants to be a drug addict or live on the streets.”*
- *“We need more outreach.”*
- *“When we collaborate we will succeed.”*
- *“Housing has to be first.”*
- *“Ignorance is the parent of fear. We need to humanize the situation.”*
- *“Let’s accept that every person is an equal member of our community, and the way in which we support our most vulnerable is how we measure the quality of our society.”*
- *“Let’s keep doing this so we can grow as a community.”*

Select ideas shared by Forum participants include the following:

- Build ‘tiny houses’.
- Youth need a youth-oriented employment centre.
- Early-years family support services are an evidence-based long-term investment.
- Outreach and planning needs to be person-centred.
- Use nature as a source of healing and venue for leadership development.
- Change legislation to allow for easier information sharing and collaboration in case management.
- Public washrooms and public water fountains are critical.

Commitments

Following the Forum, the City and KDFN met and identified the following commitments:

- Engage the business community.
- Improve opportunities for voices to be heard.
- Increase wellness programs.
- Create dignity through education.
- Expand the circle of who is involved.



Action #2: Business Roundtable Reception & Workshop

Overview

One of the outcomes from the Vulnerable People at Risk Forum was the feeling that success will be found through a holistic, community-wide approach. The business community is viewed as a critical component and a strong ally.

In keeping with commitments made after the Forum, the City and KDFN hosted a follow-up event targeted at engaging members of the Downtown Business Community, the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, and others from the wider business community.

Two consecutive events were planned on September 11th and 12th. Day one was a reception which saw 47 participants. Day two was organized as a workshop that was attended by 57 participants.

Time was spent trying to understand and build consensus on what the issue is. There is recognition that it is complex and requires better and broader understanding.

Businesses also want action. There is a desire to start with a few achievable actions, and a wide variety of ideas were presented.

We heard that Whitehorse's business leaders are compassionate and want to be involved in a community-wide solution.

What we did

The purpose of the Friday reception was to define and seek consensus on the issues of poverty and homelessness. The goal was to solicit interest from business community to support the City and KDFN with their intention to create a more equitable community for all residents.

The reception was a facilitated event that was supported by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition. Part of the intention was to motivate participants to attend the following-day Workshop. The purpose of the Workshop was to develop a number of actionable items for the City, KDFN, and the business community to accomplish alone and together. Key personnel from various agencies were available to provide information and support during the event.

- *“Sometimes I have to tell someone they have to move. If I’ve got to deliver bad news, what resources are out there? I don’t want to pass the buck, but I need to know what resources I can provide to people.”*
- *“I came here to learn. I have three employees who are fulltime, but they can barely pay their rent. I feed my staff because a lot of them go hungry otherwise. As businesses, we see but don’t want to talk about it. This is something we need to fix.”*
- *“I want to share some of the things we’ve done as a business. I’ve seen all forms of dysfunctional communities and I think Whitehorse is a dysfunctional community in part because as a community grows it starts to lose its soul and forget that citizenship involves accepting responsibility, accountability for actions. Individual action inspires collective action. A healthy community is diverse. One that has not lost sight of every person in it, of all backgrounds.”*

Select ideas shared by business participants include the following:

- Develop a ‘Wellness Watch Team’ to patrol Downtown and provide supports.
- Make the waterfront a safer place for all residents.
- Take out a one-page newspaper ad by supportive businesses with logos stating commitment to working towards a solution.
- Just say ‘hi’ to people.
- Need an alternative to RCMP for businesses having issues.
- Chamber could host a breakfast for members about poverty and homelessness.
- City needs to plan by considering ‘crime prevention through environmental design’; KDFN already has a plan.
- Develop a progressive and responsive alcohol program such as a managed alcohol program.





Next steps

Over two brief sessions, we learned that the Yukon community is a caring community and that those gathered want to see effective support take shape and take hold for our most vulnerable residents. Participants want to see action. A clear priority, though not the sole priority, is affordable housing.

After concluding the forum and roundtable, KDFN leadership with support from the City successfully secured funding from the Government of Yukon for specific, focused support for this initiative.

With partnership and financial support from the Government of Yukon our next steps will be to:

- Complete a comprehensive action plan to end homelessness in Whitehorse and Yukon.
- Host a youth event to engage this critical group as part of this initiative.
- Engage the community on the release on the comprehensive action plan.
- The three governments will work together for additional funds for contract services to coordinate our actions and, to research and develop a proposal for federal support for infrastructure and program requirements to implement the comprehensive plan.

The comprehensive action plan to end homelessness will integrate three levels of government and service providers in working together to end homelessness in Whitehorse and Yukon. The plan will be shared with other northern jurisdictions and may potentially be adapted towards ending homelessness in the North.

Other initiatives

Two projects planned will provide benchmark information that will inform the development and the future evaluation of the comprehensive action plan to end homelessness.

Under the implementation of the Yukon Housing Action Plan, a data compilation project will be done that will focus on affordability and gaps, and determine what housing is available and what is needed.

Through the Yukon Planning Group on Homelessness, there will be a point-in-time count. The point-in-time count will take place over a 24-hour period the week of April 11, 2016. It will count individuals who are unsheltered and those who are precariously housed and at risk of becoming homeless. The Yukon Planning Group on Homelessness includes service providers, advocacy organisations, governments, and the RCMP.



Our commitment

It is clear that our community has the expertise and creativity to solve complex problems. More importantly, our community has demonstrated humanity in its desire to be compassionate and has the will to improve the lives of vulnerable people.

We are proud of the overwhelming positive response from the community on the issue of poverty and homelessness. These issues strike at the very core of any community and it will take the heart of that community, and the whole community, to bring about change.

As we gain momentum, we see a strong willingness to keep going and make a difference together. We are charting new ground and that is okay because we know our community is behind us. We do not have all the answers, but we will continue to work with our community towards a better society for everyone.

- Mayor Dan Curtis and Chief Doris Bill

