

Understanding Homelessness

Why do people become homeless?

Homelessness is a symptom of need, not a lifestyle, and the line between being homeless and being housed is quite fluid. Many people go in and out of homelessness over time. People experiencing homelessness may not have much in common with each other. In most situations, homelessness is the end result of the impact of several different factors over time, rather than one single incident or cause.

Factors that can lead to homelessness include personal factors such as trauma, health issues, problematic relationships or a transition from foster care, and societal factors such as lack of affordable housing, insufficient income or discrimination.

What does the world look like to someone who is homeless?

Persons who are homeless are not a homogenous group, and individuals react differently to homelessness. A youth who is escaping an unstable home and abuse might initially experience homelessness as freedom and adventure. Others will feel vulnerable and scared. Persons who become street-entrenched typically believe they don't fit in with society and experience feelings of shame, worthlessness, rejection and despair. They feel shunned and invisible

What do people who are homeless need?

The longer a person is street-entrenched, the more challenging it is to address their needs. They will find it more difficult to transition back inside, and will have more trauma to work through once they do. Persons who are homeless need a variety

of supports in a respectful, non-judgemental and supportive environment to assist them to leave the street. Expressions of anger, blame and contempt from the public will simply reinforce social alienation. Necessary supports include basic needs of life (food, water, shelter, medical help), listening and emotional support, harm reduction programs, affordable housing with supports, training and employment.

For further information, refer to *Infosheet #1: Understanding homelessness*

Resources for persons homeless in the Tri-Cities

What is available?

Primary resources for persons homeless in the Tri-Cities include a team of homeless outreach workers, a 24/7 low barrier emergency shelter facility at 3030 Gordon Ave, and an overnight mat-based shelter program in host church venues from October to March.

For a comprehensive list of resources and support services available to persons homeless in the Tri-Cities, refer to the *Tri-Cities Street Survival Guide*.

What is missing?

Ending homelessness requires not simply managing the problem through emergency services and supports such as shelters and soup kitchens. Approaches are needed in the Tri-Cities that emphasize prevention and/or interventions such as affordable rental housing, supportive housing, strengthened mental health and addiction treatment services and enhanced supports for youth transitioning out of care

For further information on resources and gaps in the Tri-Cities, refer to *Infosheet #2: Resources for persons homeless in the Tri-Cities*

Responding to problematic behaviour inside or outside a place of business

From time to time, staff of store front businesses might need to deal with unwanted behaviour from persons – whether homeless or not – who enter the premises or perhaps loiter immediately outside.

Do's and don'ts

- ◆ If a colleague is available, ask them to monitor the interaction from the background
- ◆ Approach the person from the front – don't surprise them
- ◆ Keep your posture relaxed and maintain a safe distance from the person (i.e. arm's length)
- ◆ Greet the person respectfully, with a smile
- ◆ Ask if you can help them, ask what they need (provide with a copy of the *Tri-Cities Street Survival Guide* or offer to call Outreach)
- ◆ Listen to the person - without judgement. Feeling heard can be very helpful
- ◆ If a person is extremely agitated or high, do not make eye contact. Concentrate on their chin; you can still see what they are doing but they will not perceive you as a threat
- ◆ Focus on unwanted behaviour, not the person
- ◆ Less words are more effective, keep your voice low, quiet and calm. Speak slowly
- ◆ Never attempt to physically restrain a person

If anger is escalating:

- ◆ Give the person lots of personal space
- ◆ Do not turn your back on an angry person
- ◆ Always know where you are, and have an escape route (never back yourself into a corner or against a wall; do not situate yourself between the person and their way out)

- ♦ If the situation continues to escalate and you sense imminent danger, call 911

Sharps Disposal

There are 2 options to dispose of a discarded syringe in the Tri-Cities:

1. Contact the Purpose Society mobile health van 604-351-1885 for syringe recovery and disposal
2. Self-disposal using instructions provided by Fraser Health Authority

For further information, refer to *Infosheet #3: Sharps disposal*

Panhandling and Trespass

Why do people panhandle?

People panhandle because they need money for something they want. Not everyone that panhandles is homeless, but many share the same issues: – addictions, mental health issues, disabilities, poverty, low levels of education, and unemployment.

How to respond to panhandling

Panhandling, unless it is deemed aggressive or soliciting a captive audience, is not illegal, and deciding whether to give or not is a personal decision. Good alternative use of your money can be made by donating to a local charity responding to homelessness, or by volunteering your time. If you don't want to give money to a person panhandling:

- ♦ Look at the person, be polite and say "Sorry, I don't have any cash on me"
- ♦ If you know a panhandler by name, offer to buy them a snack or meal or provide them with a copy of the *Tri-Cities Street Survival Guide*

Aggressive panhandling

Under the BC Safe Streets Act, a person commits an offence if they solicit money or another thing of value in a manner which creates a concern for the solicited person's safety, solicits a captive audience or while on a roadway solicits a person in a stopped, standing or parked vehicle.

Trespass Act

Under the BC Trespass Act, someone who has been directed by a person who has responsibility for a premises to leave the premises or stop engaging in an activity on or in the premises commits an offence if they do not leave or stop the activity, or they re-enter or resume the activity.

For further information, refer to *Infosheet #4: Panhandling and trespass*

When to Call for Help

Call police non-emergency if:

- ♦ A property crime is being or has been committed, including violations of the Safe Streets or Trespass Act.

Call 911 emergency if:

- ♦ You fear there is imminent danger to your own or someone else's safety.
- ♦ There appears to be a serious medical issue.

CPTED

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is an approach to crime prevention which focuses on proper design and effective use of the built environment. For further information, refer to *CPTED for Business: Tips to get you started*

Homelessness: a primer for business



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Task Group

Start with Home