

**A PROFILE OF NANAIMO'S HOMELESS POPULATION:
A PRELIMINARY REPORT BASED ON THE APRIL 2005 HOMELESS COUNT
CONDUCTED BY
NANAIMO'S WORKING GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS ISSUES
& THE CITY OF NANAIMO**

THE SAMPLE

- 110 completed census forms were returned

- 30 persons (27%) were interviewed on the streets, the remainder at shelters and other facilities for the homeless

- 58 (53%) were males, 49 (45%) females; others were couples or groups

- ages ranged from 15 to 71 with a median of 36 and a mean of almost 36

- 65 persons (68%) were Caucasian, 24 (25%) First Nations, and one (1%) Metis

- length of time in Nanaimo ranged from a few days to 58 years, with a mean of 8.6 years and a median of 3 years
 - the most common reason for being here was that it was a family decision to come here, as with young people (16 cases), followed by one's family being here already (12). Seven came here for reasons like "the grass looked greener..." while 4 fled their former community. Six came because a partner came here. Another six came for alcohol or drug treatment. Work or a search for work drew another seven. Five were natives of the community.

- 71 (66%) were alone, 37 (34%) accompanied by someone else

BECOMING HOMELESS

- this present period of being homeless ranged from a few days to 19 years, with a mean of a little over a year and a median of three months

- addiction of one sort or another or spending one's housing money on alcohol or drugs was cited by 28 persons (30%) as the way they became homeless; next most common was family conflict - 16 persons (17%), followed by eviction - 15 persons (16%)

THE HOMELESS EXPERIENCE

- 35 (32%) were sleeping outside currently, 5 (5%) do sometimes
 - the most common reason for not being in a shelter were being turned away (5 persons) and the shelters' policies being too strict (4)
- 44 (40%) describe their physical health as good, 38 (35%) as fair, and 28 (25%) as poor
- 39 (36%) describe their mental health as good, 35 (32%) as fair and another 35 (32%) as poor
- 19 persons (17%) did not have a meal the day of the interview
 - of those who did have a meal, the most common place it was obtained was at the Salvation Army (30 persons or 34%); another 20 or so (about 20%) had a meal at another homeless facility, and 15 (17%) ate a fast food meal
- 72 persons (66%) had not made any money the day of the interview, while 37 (34%) had
 - most common sources of income were the sex trade with 14 persons (40% of those with income), other work, including recycling and entertaining (10 persons or 29%), and panhandling (5 persons, 15%)

SERVICES AND PROGRAMS USED

- 84 persons (77%) report using local medical facilities or services, with use of doctors at 52 persons (48%), walk-in clinics next (49 persons or 45%), the emergency room at 31 persons (29%), and outreach health at 26 persons (24%).
- 64 persons (64%) are currently receiving some form of government assistance, with Social Assistance (27 persons) and Disability (25) being most common
 - A half dozen persons are in the process of applying for some form of assistance
- of the several dozen different forms of services, the most used are shelters (24 mentions), Salvation Army (19), library (17), 7-10 Club (10), but much more combining of responses about services is still to be done
- as to which ones had been used on the day of the interviews, shelters were most utilized (28 persons), while six used the 7-10 Club, another six visited the library, and five Salvation Army.

NEEDED SERVICES

- A wide range of services, some existing, some not, were mentioned when respondents were asked what services or programs are needed. More combining of responses still needs to be done, but what emerges as most sought after at this point are: shelter or more shelter (15 mentions), affordable housing (10), a women's shelter (9), food or food banks (8), more social programs in general (6), alcoholism programs (5) and drug programs (5)
- a similar question later asked what the respondent thought would help homeless people in Nanaimo; responses showed the greatest call for (more) shelter (15) and affordable housing (11)
- Respondents were asked what was their biggest barrier to getting a home of their own. Money was listed most often: 35 times, trailed by addictions with 20.