



**Greater Vancouver  
Shelter Strategy**

**Homeless Voices, Part 2:  
What We Heard from Metro Vancouver Residents  
Who Have Experienced Homelessness**

 James Pratt Consulting

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## Summary

### Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present the perspectives of people who have experienced being without a home so that decision makers can respond to homelessness more effectively. Their voices need to be heard in the policy and program discussions of organizations such as the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee and BC Housing.

Outreach workers conducted interviews with 28 people in communities across Metro Vancouver, including women, youth, seniors and people who identified themselves as Aboriginal. Each of these people had experienced homelessness in the past 2 years.

### How we became homeless

Interviewers asked: “thinking back to when you first became homeless, what did you need at that point to keep you from losing your home?” Looking at the answers people gave, there are 3 main reasons:

1. Addictions and substance misuse (mentioned by 32%, or 9 of the 28)
2. Lack of income (21%, or 6 of 28)
3. Break ups and changes in household size (18%).

Other factors identified that could have prevented loss of housing were:

- Lack of emotional support (11%, or 3 of the 28 participants)
- Mental health issues (7%)
- Communication problems with landlords (7%)
- Inadequacy of housing (4%).

### How to better prevent homelessness

We asked: “as a community, what do you think we could do better to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place?” The most frequent responses were:

1. Improve the supply of affordable housing (32%, or 9 of the 28)
2. Increase income (18%)
3. Strengthen addiction and mental health services (11%)
4. Provide support to resolve landlord/tenant issues (7%).

Other ideas about how we, as a community, could more effectively prevent homelessness were to:

- Improve support for transition from the foster care system
- Provide more preventative services
- Provide more services on an outreach basis
- Help shelters house people
- Treat people as individuals.

### **How emergency shelters are helpful in stabilizing housing... or not**

All but 3 of the 28 interview participants (89%) said they had used emergency shelters; 1 said they had not, and the other 2 did not clearly answer. Of the 25 who had experienced shelters, less than half (12, or 48%) said shelter services were helpful in stabilizing their housing and the rest said they were not.

Things people found helpful in stabilizing their housing were as follows:

- Moving on to transitional housing operated by the same agency;
- Referrals to needed programs and services (e.g., employment, addictions, support groups, income assistance and victim services);
- Encouragement and emotional support;
- Assistance with housing search;
- Access to newspapers and a phone, along with a number for prospective landlords to leave messages at;
- Access to hygiene supplies, showers and laundry facilities.

Youth participants spoke of highly structured, goal-oriented service and supported referrals as key elements of youth shelters that help with stabilization.

Those who did not find shelters helpful in stabilizing their housing spoke of several factors:

- Lack of related services co-located with the shelter;
- Lack of transportation to access needed services;
- Limited capabilities of staff.

Some interview participants had only stayed at extreme weather sheltering sites, which provide a warm place to sleep but had limited capacity for referrals and stabilization.

Of the 25 people who said they had used shelters, just 10 said they had used more than one shelter. Several identified full-service 24-hour shelters as being most helpful because of their “*stability*”, their provision of transportation, and their “*ways to get people off the street*”. For some it was the combination of emotional and practical support that was the key.

#### Safety of shelters

Asked whether there been any times they had felt unsafe in a shelter, 13 of the 25 shelter users said yes (52%). Of these, several expressed concern primarily about the safety of their possessions. Others spoke of fears related to the behaviour of people using hard drugs.

A woman stated that she always felt unsafe in co-ed shelters.

Asked what would make them feel safer in shelters, participants suggested private rooms, storage lockers for clients’ belongings, increased staff presence and security, and strengthened prevention of drug use on-site. Similar to the comments on stabilization of housing, interview participants suggested that a strong staff presence and 24-hour operation improve safety.

#### **How shelters could help more**

Asked for suggestions about how shelters could do more to help people stabilize their housing, interview participants offered the following ideas:

1. Improved linkages with permanent housing;
2. Increased length of stay allowed at shelters;
3. Provision of transitional housing at more shelters;
4. Help with overcoming a lack of landlord references;
5. Increased assistance with housing search;
6. Improved access to transportation;
7. Provision of counselling and pre-employment training;
8. Expanded opportunities to learn life skills.

Comments on how shelters could be more helpful included the following:

- *“Have somebody there who helps them try to find a place... Somebody who’s been where we are now and who has conquered that demon.”*
- *“The shelters should have outreach workers. Until you have that transitional step, you’re basically throwing window dressings at the homelessness problem.”*
- *“Get some help into the shelter. The people everyone wants to clean up are there in one place - why not take advantage of that? Instead of making us jump through hoops come down to where we are.”*

## **Conclusion**

This report, the second in a series, further confirms that people who have experienced homelessness can provide valuable input. They offer perspectives that could be used in developing solutions.

Decision makers and other people involved in homelessness work may find the following points significant:

- In addition to mental health and addictions issues, the list of common reasons people say that they became homeless includes lack of income; break-ups and changes in household size; lack of emotional support; and communication problems with landlords.
- In addition to commonly suggested strategies for preventing homelessness (improved supply of affordable housing, increased income, and strengthened mental health and addiction services), they call for provision of support to resolve landlord/tenant issues; improved transition from the foster care system; individualized service delivery; and other preventative solutions.
- Many people who have stabilized their housing say that emergency shelters were not helpful in achieving that, due to factors such as lack of co-located services, lack of transportation access, and limited capabilities of staff.
- Full-service, 24-hour shelters are most effective in stabilizing housing, whereas some lesser services are perceived as *“just people storage”*;
- In the face of widespread experience of feeling unsafe in shelters, former clients call for solutions such as private rooms, storage lockers, and increased staff presence.
- To improve the capacity of shelters to stabilize housing, former clients call for solutions such as: improved linkages with permanent housing; increased length of stay at shelters; co-location of transitional housing and shelters; and help with overcoming a lack of landlord references.

## **Acknowledgements**

The organizations that initiated, advised, funded and administered this project deserve recognition. The Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy served as the lead organization, championing the importance of hearing directly from people who have experienced homelessness and developing a consultation method to make this inclusion possible. Metro Vancouver staff, serving as implementation partners for the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, provided invaluable input in the design and development of this project. The Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation, the City of Vancouver and the United Way of the Lower Mainland provided the necessary funding. Lookout Emergency Aid Society administered project funds as an in-kind contribution.

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Most importantly, the consultant thanks the 28 people who participated in interviews and donated their time so that they could share their views from the perspective of having personally experienced homelessness. Of these 28 people, the following gave authorization to identify their names in this report:

- Adam
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## 1. Introduction

*“Less talk and more action: I hear a lot of ‘you should’ and ‘you need to’...I know what I should do and what I need to do...but that ain’t so f\*%&ing easy when you’re on the streets.”*

– Interview participant, 2008

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the perspectives of people who have experienced being without a home so that decision makers can respond to homelessness more effectively. Their voices need to be heard in the policy and program discussions of organizations such as the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee and BC Housing.

Outreach workers conducted interviews with 28 people in communities across Metro Vancouver, including women, youth, seniors and people who identified themselves as Aboriginal. Each of these people had experienced homelessness in the past 2 years.

### Background and Rationale

Since 1988, the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (GVSS) has served as a unique forum where all levels of government come together with emergency shelter providers and other community-based agencies to develop and coordinate responses to homelessness.<sup>1</sup> The primary strength of this table has been that it brings together such diverse interests. An ongoing challenge, however, has been the absence of a key stakeholder group from the discussion: homeless people themselves. GVSS participants share a belief in including those voices, but have faced the reality that many barriers prevent bringing people from the street to the meeting room.

### Principles

This initiative will uphold the following key principles:

- Respect for the dignity and privacy of participating people;
- Clarity of language to promote common understanding;
- Timeliness of the process so that results can be used.

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<sup>1</sup> The GVSS was formerly known as the “Cold/Wet Weather Strategy”.

## Consultation Approach and Method

The GVSS developed the method used in this consultation based on the experience of members who have done homeless outreach work over many years. The concept of hearing from people who have been homeless but are currently stabilized means that their firsthand perspectives can be provided at a time when they are no longer in a crisis state and/or in day-to-day survival mode.

The consultant developed a set of questions, in consultation with the GVSS, the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, BC Housing and the United Way of the Lower Mainland. Each of these bodies provided input so that the process would address the shelter and homelessness issues they are currently addressing. Interviewers then tested the questions to confirm that they would be user-friendly.

Outreach workers throughout Metro Vancouver conducted interviews with people who had experienced homelessness in the past two years but had been housed for the past month or more. The consultant provided a set of guidelines to interviewers so that they could carry out and record these interviews in a consistent way.

Part of the intended approach was to reflect the geographic diversity of the region. As shown in the table below, the 28 interviews occurred in 7 sub-regions of Metro Vancouver.

**Number of Interviews, by Community**

<b>Municipality or sub-region</b>	<b>Total # of interviews</b>
Burnaby	3
Langley	6
Maple Ridge	1
New Westminster	2
North Shore	1
Surrey	6
Vancouver	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

Another aspect of the approach was to reflect the demographic diversity of people who have experienced homelessness in this region, including gender, age and Aboriginal identity. The mix of 28 participants in this second round of interviews was as follows:

- 14 (50%) identified as female, and 14 identified as male;
- The age range was from 18 to 84, and the average age was 39 years;
- 6 (22%) identified as Aboriginal, and 21 did not indicate an Aboriginal identity.

In round 2, the project specifically included agency volunteers who work with young people and seniors. This resulted in both of those populations being well represented. Of the 27 participants, 5 (19%) identified themselves as being under 25 years of age and 4 (15%) identified as 55+.

### **Key conclusions from “Including Homeless Voices, Part 1”**

The report preceding this one, “Including Homeless Voices, Part 1”, demonstrated that people who have actually been homeless are willing and able to give input that should be considered in developing policies and programs.

The input presented in that report can be summarized in the following 6 key points:

1. Emergency shelters and other services for homeless people need to treat people as individuals, and respond to their specific circumstances and needs;
2. Shelters should operate throughout the year, with minimal expansion if any during the winter months;
3. Most would prefer a ‘housing first’ approach instead of relying on the emergency shelter system;
4. Creating affordable and supportive housing is the key to ending our homelessness epidemic, and therefore should be an urgent priority;
5. Improving income levels and services for addiction recovery, mental health and skill building is also important;
6. People who are homeless ask to be treated with dignity and respect.

## 2. How we became homeless

*“Probably someone to talk to in counselling would have helped. I was just through a break-up and I was really fucked up and doing dope. I got evicted... I was suicidal and I went looking for a church, but that didn’t help much. I needed someone to talk to who would understand and would listen to what I was saying.”*

– Interview participant, 2008

Interviewers asked: “thinking back to when you first became homeless, what did you need at that point to keep you from losing your home?” Looking at the answers people gave, there are 3 main reasons:

1. Addictions and substance misuse;
2. Lack of income;
3. Break ups and changes in household size.

### **Addictions and substance misuse**

Almost one in three of the participants (32%, or 9 of 28) spoke of addictions and substance issues as causal factors. In some cases problems with lack of income and unstable housing were part of a vicious cycle, contributing to the substance problem. For example, one person said: *“I needed 2 months rent, so I needed to stop drinking. Knowing that I wouldn’t have to move, knowing that I had a stable home - that would’ve helped me stop drinking.”*

Some suggested that drugs and related financial problems stemmed from underlying personal issues. For example, one said: *“It was a combo of me not being responsible with money (spending it on drugs) that in itself was a reaction to things happening to me...”*

In some cases, addictions of other family members were noted as the main source of the problem. Comments such as the following reveal the inter-generational pattern of addictions: *“if my parents hadn’t been junkies then I wouldn’t have been one. So I guess if they had had some help then things might be different for me.”*

## **Lack of income**

One in five (21%, or 6 of the 28) spoke of lack of income or financial problems. For some, the issue was associated with transitions:

- *“I lost my job and couldn't pay rent. Waiting for EI for 8 weeks... A month behind - trying to move but couldn't afford moving expenses, needed a truck. I sold my mechanic tools to live.”*
- *“I needed welfare to provide money for storage. I was evicted and of course I was unable to find a place in that period of time.”*

One participant had housing in another province and came to BC thinking it would be easy to get a house and a job. Then they found themselves *“caught between not having a job or an apartment.”*

Another spoke of psychological barriers to accessing income assistance: *“When I became homeless I feared going to the welfare office. I didn't apply until I came to the shelter.”*

## **Break ups and changes in household size**

Five participants (18%) spoke of relationship break ups and/or changes in household size. Three of the five commented on inability to pay the rent when room mates moved out. One suggested that a mere \$375 to cover the one-month gap in rent could have saved her from becoming homeless. Another simply said: *“When my roommate moved out I could not afford the rent on my own.”*

Some spoke of a lack of a support from friends and family that would have helped them through those transitions.

- *“When my marriage fell apart I ended up on the streets. We came from back east and knew nobody. If there was a place to go that was easy to access it might have kept me off of the streets.”*
- *“Things fell apart when my ex left me and my family couldn't see my side of things so they pretty much cut me off.”*

## **Other reasons**

The other four factors identified that could have prevented loss of housing were:

- Lack of emotional support (11%, or 3 of the 28 participants)
- Mental health issues (7%, or 2 of the 28)
- Communication problems with landlords (7%)
- Inadequacy of housing (4%).

### Lack of emotional support

People spoke of the need for friends and family to provide emotional and moral support. For example, one said what they needed was: *“friends for moral support, because I didn’t have anyone I could talk to at that point. I was living in a boarding house, and there was a lot of drug use there and no one you could really talk to.”* Another spoke a need for emotional support while getting over an accident.

### Mental health issues

One of those who spoke of mental health issues focused on social isolation: *“I didn’t want anyone to be close to me so I don’t know how anyone could have helped me.”* Another said that they were suffering from severe, untreated depression at the time they became homeless.

### Communication problems with landlords

One of the participants who spoke of communication problems with landlords suggested that having someone who could talk to the landlord would have made the difference: *“If there was someone with some pull to speak for us that would help.”*

### Inadequacy of housing

The person who suggested that the inadequacy of their housing caused them to become homeless said that *“a bigger space and my own washroom”* would have made the difference.

### 3. How to better to prevent homelessness

We asked: “As a community, what do you think we could do better to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place?” The most frequent responses were to:

1. Improve the supply of affordable housing (32%, or 9 of the 28)
2. Increase income (18%)
3. Strengthen addiction and mental health services (11%)
4. Provide support to resolve landlord/tenant issues (7%).

#### Improve the supply of affordable housing

*“Doesn't the UN Declaration on Human Rights say we are entitled to housing? So where is it? As a country we say one thing, but as a reality people are left on their own.”*

– Interview participant, 2008

Improving the supply of housing, particularly subsidized housing for low income people, was by far the most frequently identified way to prevent homelessness. Some of the specific points from the 9 people who commented on this are as follows:

- Seniors and young people need different housing;
- Housing for single people is needed;
- More drug-free housing for people coming out of addiction treatment;
- More programs to help people find low cost housing;
- People need housing that includes hydro, heat and phone.

#### Increase income

*“The rate that welfare gives you to find housing makes it hard to find anything out there.”*

– Interview participant, 2008

Increasing income was the second most frequently mentioned way to prevent homelessness. In addition to several comments about the need for an increase in the shelter allowance component of income assistance, one person suggested that everyone's situation is different and that there is a need for income assistance *“to be flexible to consider the needs of the individual.”*

Others emphasized the importance of assistance with education, job search and the transition to employment. One suggested improvement of the rental assistance program.

### **Strengthen addiction and mental health services**

*“I think we need people who are generally caring and interested in you, a compassionate person who could relate to you and understand you. I think people out there use drugs because they’re so overwhelmed with what is going on in their lives.*

*I wish there were a 24-hour person that you could talk to who knows what’s going on with addictions and stuff, and could tell you where you could go for help, because I did have moments of clarity while I was out there. There was nobody to go to in that one second of clarity where I could go and say ‘I’ve had enough, I want to get out of here.’ Just somebody to talk to, somebody to give you a little bit of hope.”*

– Interview participant, 2008

Several participants spoke of the need for addictions and mental health support to people on the street. One said: *“show them what else is out there. Show them a life of sobriety. Show them other people suffering, how bad it can be.”* One specific idea for strengthening addiction services is to have 24-hour access to someone who could compassionately listen and assist with referrals to treatment, so that people could get help when they are ready to receive it (i.e. a phone-based support service – as suggested in the boxed text above).

### **Provide support to resolve landlord/tenant issues**

*“...help people before they have nowhere to turn. The landlords seem to be able to do whatever they want... Help people with the landlords... I know sometimes I deserved to be kicked out. but things might have been different if someone not involved in renting me a place or using (drugs) told me to straighten up a bit.”*

– Interview participant, 2008

Two participants suggested that we need to provide support and intervention in landlord/tenant conflicts as a way to prevent homelessness. One suggested making laws tougher on landlords.

## Other ideas about prevention of homelessness

*“A lot of homeless people are youth from the foster care system. I think there should be a better transition process from care. I remember the Ministry taking care of everything for me and then a month before I turned 19 it was ‘okay you have to start taking care of yourself now’. There was help but it wasn’t that valuable.”*

– Interview participant, 2008

Other ideas about how we, as a community, could more effectively prevent homelessness were to:

- Improve support for transition from the foster care system (see comment above);
- Provide more preventative services
  - *“More services before they hit the shelters.”*
- Provide more services on an outreach basis
  - *“I know people who are scared of going into offices—nothing good comes from those meetings. If you have to go into someone’s office then you end up having to fill in paperwork or you talk to someone who has no f&\*%ing clue what it’s like on the street.”*
- Help shelters house people
  - *“Support what goes on in the shelter. If the churches could help find housing then when we came into the shelter there would be a purpose.”*
- Deal with people as individuals
  - *“Everyone’s different, everyone’s unique and special, we are not statistics, we’re people, we’re humans. We need individual support, not to be dealt with as one problem.”*

#### 4. How emergency shelters are helpful... or not

*“The outreach program, and going to self-help programs... Finding that spark in myself, and believing that I am going to be okay... Now I have a home, a job, contact with my kids every single day on the phone. A smile and a way of living that offers my sisters on the Downtown East Side hope: don’t give up, ‘cause keeping one foot in yesterday and one foot chasing tomorrow, you’re just going to piss on today.”*

– Interview participant, 2008

##### How shelters helped stabilize housing

All but 3 of the 28 interview participants (89%) said they had used emergency shelters; 1 said they had not, and the other 2 did not clearly answer. Of the 25 who had experienced shelters, less than half (12, or 48%) said shelter services were helpful in stabilizing their housing and the rest said they were not.

What people found helpful in stabilizing their housing was:

- Moving on to transitional housing operated by the same agency;
- Referrals to needed programs and services (e.g., employment, addictions, support groups, income assistance and victim services);
- Encouragement and emotional support;
- Assistance with housing search;
- Access to newspapers and a phone, along with a number for landlords to leave messages at;
- Access to hygiene supplies, showers and laundry facilities.

Youth participants spoke of highly structured, goal-oriented service and supported referrals as key elements of youth shelters that help with stabilization. For example, one commented on how the youth shelter *“provided structure, created routine – no drugs – goal setting”* and another said the shelter connected them with *“day treatment and then the Skills Link work program.”*

Some people spoke of the caring mentality of shelter staff as an important factor. For example, one said: *“Staff seemed to care about me and my situation. I found that this helped when I was so stressed out.”*

*“What they don’t have are 3 things that are crucial to someone finding stable housing. First: being able to maintain possessions in a safe place -you’re kicked out every morning with all your stuff, and having to truck it around with you all day is not conducive to finding stable housing. The other thing is cleanliness: in order to get housing you need to look presentable, so a shower and laundry is important. The third thing is transportation. If you can’t get around, you can’t find housing. Without those 3 key things, its no wonder there is a homelessness problem.”*

- Interview participant, 2008

### How shelters failed to help stabilize housing

Those who did not find shelters helpful in stabilizing their housing spoke of several factors:

- Lack of co-located services
  - *“Get Job Wave or some sort of service to show up. Half the problem people on the streets have is not being able to keep track of appointments...so bring someone to us.”*
- Lack of transportation to access needed services
  - *“...they don’t even have bus tickets. How am I getting place to place ... to look for a job if I can’t take a bus?”*
- Limited capabilities of staff
  - *“I don’t really know that anyone that was working at the shelter could help stabilize housing. I don’t know that they ask the right questions...or what to look for in someone.”*

Some interview participants had only stayed at extreme weather sheltering sites, which provided a warm place to sleep but had limited capacity for referrals and stabilization. One of those participants said: *“There are people with lots of good intentions but no connections to what we need to find housing.”* Another said: *“They are there to open when the weather is really bad. Everyone there has a day job but none of them work with us after the shelter closes.”*

Of the 25 people who said they had used shelters, just 10 said they had used more than one shelter. They identified full-service, 24-hour shelters as being most helpful because of their *“stability”*, their provision of transportation, and their *“ways to get people off the street”*. For some it was the combination of emotional and practical support that was the key.

The following two comments illustrate the contrast between basic and full-service shelter in terms of impact on housing stability:

- *“A warm place to stay and hot food is nice...but really it never moved me along.”*
- *“I’ve stayed in a few places.... Some are just people storage...”*

### Safety of shelters

Asked whether there been any times they had felt unsafe in a shelter, 13 of the 25 shelter users said yes (52%). Of these, several expressed concern primarily about the safety of their possessions. Others spoke of fears related to the behaviour of people using hard drugs.

A woman stated that she always felt unsafe in co-ed shelters.

One person spoke of the emotional danger that can result from raised hopes without corresponding support and assistance: *“they are trying to help without knowing how to help. Sometimes that can be more dangerous than a blade: pumping up someone’s hopes without being able to help.”*

Asked what would make people feel safer in shelters, participants suggested private rooms, storage lockers for clients’ belongings, increased staff presence and security, and strengthened prevention of on-site drug use.

Similar to the comments on stabilization of housing, interview participants suggested that a strong staff presence and 24-hour operation improve creating safety. For example, one said: *“The shelter is staffed 24/7. I never felt unsafe.”*

## 5. How shelters could help even more

*“Shelters should be a pipeline to resources. People need transportation money to go see places. They need telephone and internet access to connect with landlords and research housing options. The shelter could be the return phone number and have a message service. They don’t even supply the daily papers or applications for BC Housing. How are you supposed to find housing?”*

- Interview participant, 2007

Asked for suggestions about how shelters could do more to help people stabilize their housing, interview participants offered the following ideas:

1. Improved linkages with permanent housing;
2. Increased length of stay at shelters;
3. Provision of transitional housing at more shelters;
4. Help with overcoming a lack of landlord references;
5. Increased assistance with housing search;
6. Improved access to transportation;
7. Provision of counselling and pre-employment training;
8. Expanded opportunities to learn life skills.

Suggestions included the following:

- *“Have somebody there who helps them try to find a place. More support. Somebody who’s been where we are now and whose conquered that demon.”*
- *“The shelters should have outreach workers. Until you have that transitional step, you’re basically throwing window dressings at the homelessness problem.”*
- *“Have counselling available. On one hand we have to have shelters, but it’s cosmetic: it’s a necessary evil.”*
- *“Get some help into the shelter. The people everyone wants to clean up are there in one place - why not take advantage of that? Instead of making us jump through hoops come down to where we are.”*
- *“If I come to a shelter it means I have nowhere else to go. So start there. Have places where people can go from the shelter. If everyone that went to a shelter had a place to go after you wouldn’t need the shelter no more.”*

## 6. Conclusion

*“The shelter is for those without housing...so people are already on the streets, right? You gotta get them before they end up in the shelter. That seems to be someone else’s problem, right? How do you stop people losing their housing?”*

– Interview participant, 2008

This report, the second in a series, further confirms that people who have experienced homelessness can provide valuable input. They offer perspectives that could be used in developing solutions.

Decision makers and other people involved in homelessness work may find the following points significant:

1. In addition to mental health and addictions issues, the list of common reasons people say that they became homeless includes lack of income; break-ups and changes in household size; lack of emotional support; and communication problems with landlords.
2. In addition to commonly suggested strategies for preventing homelessness (improved supply of affordable housing, increased income, and strengthened mental health and addiction services), they call for provision of support to resolve landlord/tenant issues; improved transition from the foster care system; individualized service delivery; and other solutions.
3. Many people who have stabilized their housing say that emergency shelters were not helpful in that regard, due to factors such as lack of co-located services, lack of transportation access, and limited capabilities of staff.
4. Full-service, 24-hour shelters are most effective in stabilizing housing, whereas some lesser services are perceived as *“just people storage”*;
5. In the face of widespread experience of feeling unsafe in shelters, former clients call for solutions such as private room, storage lockers, and increased staff presence.
6. To improve the capacity of shelters to stabilize housing, former clients call for solutions such as: improved linkages with permanent housing; increased length of stay at shelters; co-location of transitional housing and shelters; and help with overcoming a lack of landlord references.

## **Appendix 1:**

### **Interview Guide: Including Homelessness Voices, Round 2**

Revised November 9, 2007

#### **Step 1: Identify potential participants**

Interview participants for round 2 of Including Homeless Voices may or may not have been involved in the first round of this process. Contact those participants from the first round of interviews who said they would be willing to do another interview. If they are willing and currently housed, review Step 2 briefly.

Participants must have experienced being homeless within the past two years, but are now housed (for at least the past month). If you're uncertain, ask them:

- Was there a time in the last 2 years that you did not have a place that you paid rent for (or owned)? *[If no, cancel the interview.]*
- Are you currently housed? *[If no, cancel the interview.]*

#### **Step 2: Explain the purpose and ask for consent to participate**

The purpose of these interviews is to hear from people who have experienced being without a home so that their voices can be heard by groups working on homelessness. We will present a summary of what we hear in these interviews, in writing and verbally. *(For example, groups like the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy and the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness.)*

- Are you willing to donate about 20-30 minutes for this purpose?
- Your input will be reported anonymously, but we will list your name in the credits if that's okay with you.
- If you are interested in giving feedback on the draft report from these interviews, and if you have an email, we would welcome that. *(If yes, collect email address.)*
- Do you want a copy of the report from the last round of interviews? *(If yes, provide a hard copy of the summary version of the report, and/or the full version.)*

#### **Step 3: Sit down, over lunch/coffee if that works well, and do the interview**

(see questions on next page)

### Interview Questions

1. Thinking back to when you first became homeless, what did you need at that point to keep you from losing your home?
2. As a community, what do you think we could do better to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place?
3. Did you stay in a shelter while you were homeless?
  - a. *[If yes:]* What did you find helpful in stabilizing your housing?
4. If you accessed more than one shelter, which did you find more helpful and why? *[NOTE: the report will not name specific shelters, but may refer to types of shelters].*
5. Have there been any times you felt unsafe in a shelter?
  - a. (If yes:) What would make you feel safer in shelters?
6. Do you have any suggestions about how shelters could do more to help people stabilize their housing?
7. Are you willing to have your name listed in the credits for this report?

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location/community: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Aboriginal? \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your time!!*

#### **Step 4: Send in the interview results**

Email or fax word-for-word notes and participant data along with receipts for meal/coffee reimbursement, if any, to James Pratt.