

District of Clearwater and Area

Homelessness Partnering Strategy

Rural and Remote Homelessness

Part A

Yellowhead Community Services Society

612 Park Drive
Clearwater, BC V0E 1N1

Funding provided by:
Human Resources and Skills
Development Canada

Project Coordinators:
Charlotte Smith (Lead)
Wendy Vogels

The Catchment Area

The catchment area for the study included the municipal District of Clearwater and the surrounding Thompson-Nicole Regional District, Electoral A. According to the 2011 Census, the District of Clearwater has a population of 2331 and encompasses 55.68 sq. km. Although the Thompson-Nicole Regional District, Electoral A extends northward to include Wells Gray Park, the most populated area is in the southern section adjacent to the Yellowhead Highway # 5. This includes the communities of Vavenby, 26 km. northeast of Clearwater with a population of approximately 700 residents, to Blackpool, a rural residential area 5 km southwest of the District of Clearwater.

Wells Gray Park



↓ 125 km. to Kamloops

In their report, “The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013,” the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) encouraged a shared language. The following definitions provided in their document were accepted for this project.

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.

Canadian Homelessness Research Network 2012

Typology (levels or ranges of homelessness)

Unsheltered - living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation including: a) people living in public or private spaces without consent or contract, and b) people living in places not intended for permanent human habitation. (In other studies this is referred to as Absolute Homelessness)

Emergency Sheltered – staying in overnight emergency shelters designed for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence, and those fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires or floods, for example

Provisionally Accommodated - accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure (or occupancy) including interim (*or transitional*) housing, people living temporarily with others (*couch surfing*) short term temporary accommodation (i.e. hotels or motels), or living in institutional contexts (*hospital, prison*) without permanent housing arrangements. (This entire group is commonly referred to as the Hidden Homeless)

Risk of Homelessness - people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is uncertain or does not meet public health and safety standards. (unaffordable, unsafe, unhealthy, overcrowded, insecure, poorly maintained, or when their income is insufficient or insecure)

Project Overview:

Rationale:

To assess the needs of homeless individuals and those who are risk of becoming homeless, which will be the basis for future community planning and the coordination of activities related to homelessness and housing in the Clearwater District.

Objectives:

- Capture an accurate picture of homelessness in the catchment
- Develop an overarching community strategy to address needs of homeless individuals and those who are at risk of becoming homeless

Outcomes and Results

- Complete a community needs assessment
- Create a user guide for service providers within the community
- Formalize community response to homelessness
- Elevate awareness of homelessness
- Create a strategy for addressing issues related to homelessness
- Identify key agencies to gap implementation of strategy
- Direct assistance to individuals requiring assistance to prevent homelessness (if approved)

The project consisted of three major activities:

- 1) A community needs assessment that identified individuals who were homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- 2) Development of a coordinated strategy that engaged stakeholders and community partners. (Included in this activity was the development of a comprehensive user and client guide to homelessness)
- 3) Identify and complete three projects that would allow individuals who are at risk of homelessness to move towards self sufficiency.

ACTIVITY 1

Community Needs Assessment

Research was collected through two questionnaires: one that stakeholders were asked to complete and the other that was completed during one-on-one interviews with research participants; those who are experiencing some level of homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness. The interviews with research participants consisted of both closed and open questions intended to capture the unique experience of homelessness in the catchment area.

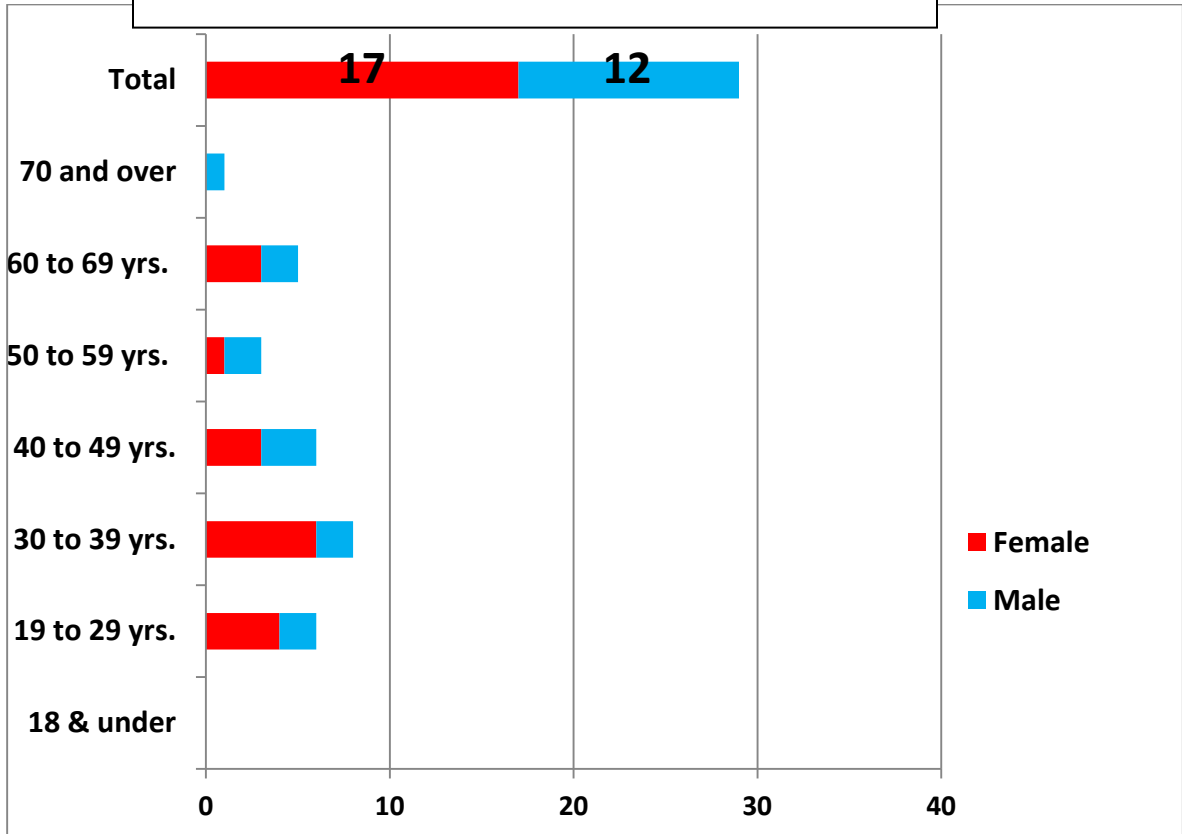
Initially the interviews were to be conducted by the program coordinator(s) so as not to add to the stakeholders' workload and to ensure the consistency of the data collected. However, after discussion at the first Steering Committee meeting it was agreed that it was not necessary to have one (or both) of the coordinators included in the interview. The emphasis was on the information that was shared by the participant not the exact methodology. **Only limitation:** questionnaires would not be handed out to participants for their own completion and that an interview was required.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All information gathered for the purpose of this study was confidential and not shared with any other agency. All data was presented in such a way that the identity of the participants remained anonymous. These two directives were extremely important, especially in such a small community where anonymity and privacy is always a concern. Many of the participants were only willing to be interviewed based on the signed assurance.

DATA SUMMARY

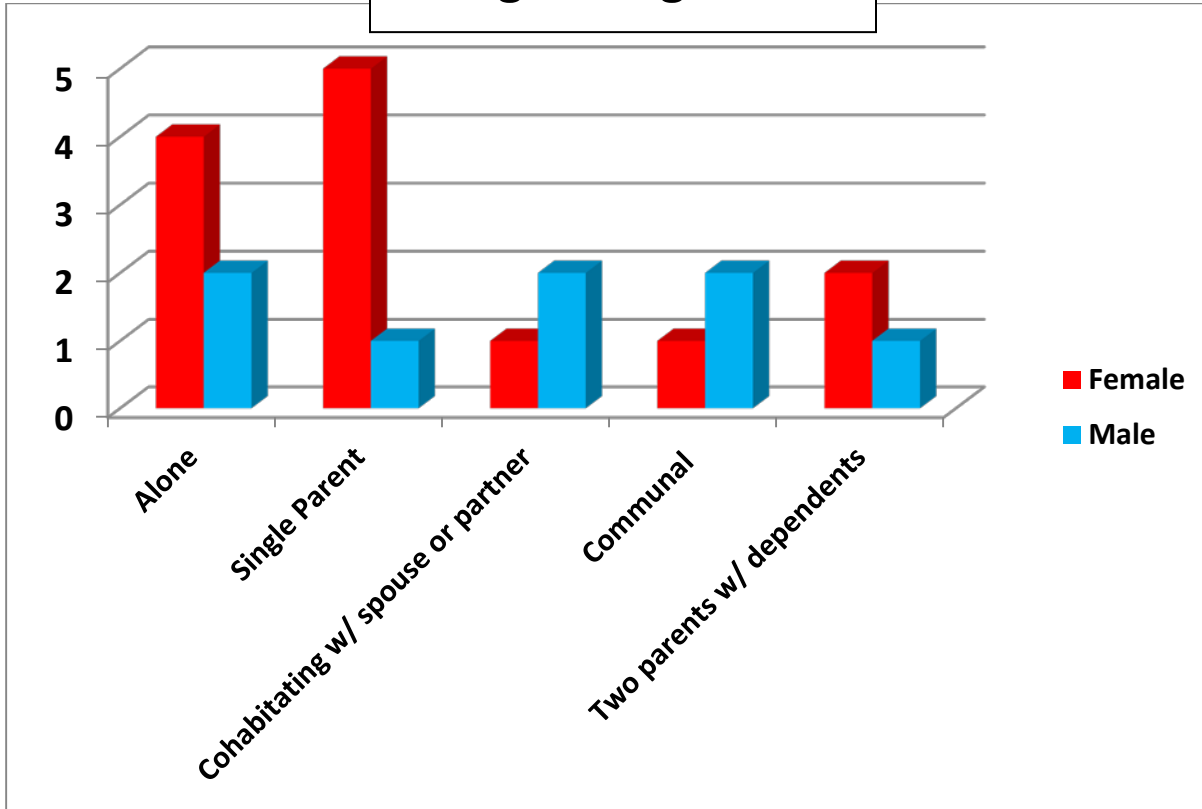
Participants by Age and Gender



Status

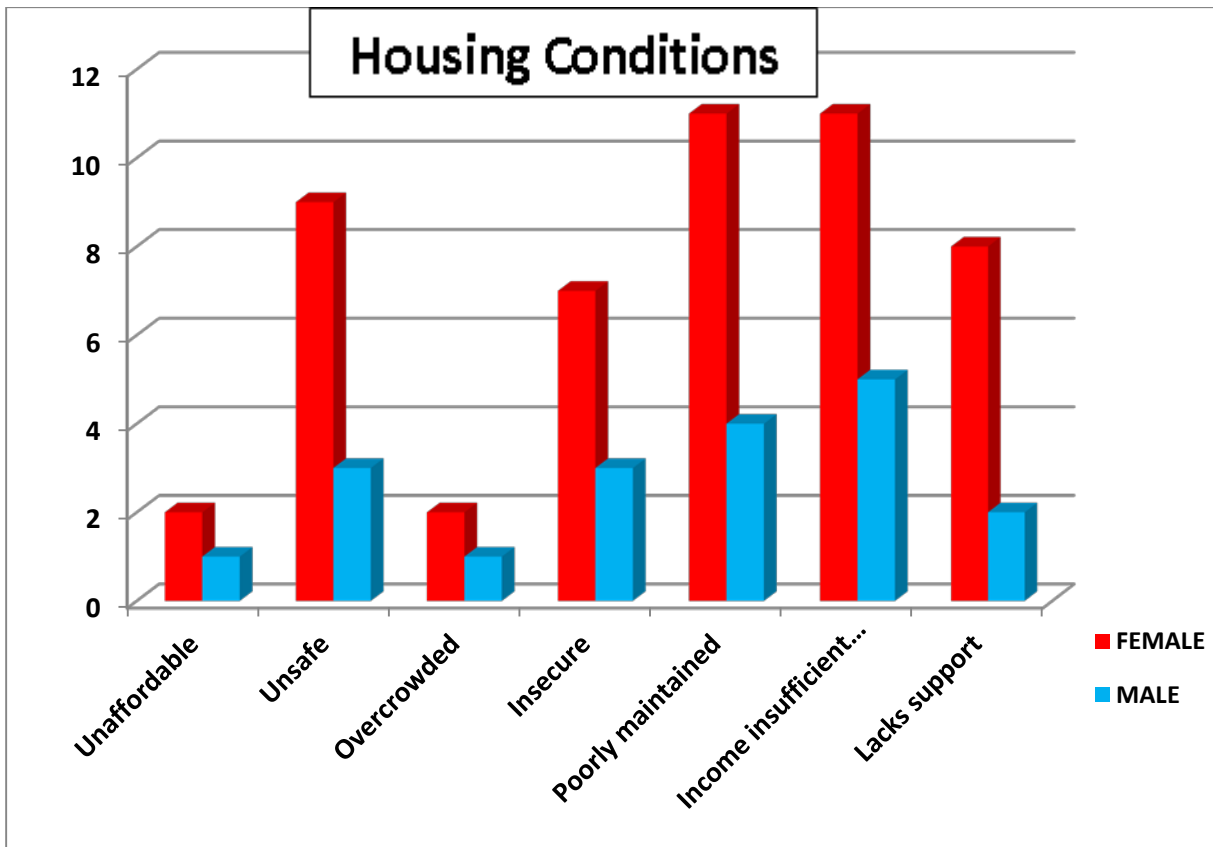
	Female	Male
Aboriginal	5	2
Métis	2	2
Inuit	0	0

Living Arrangements



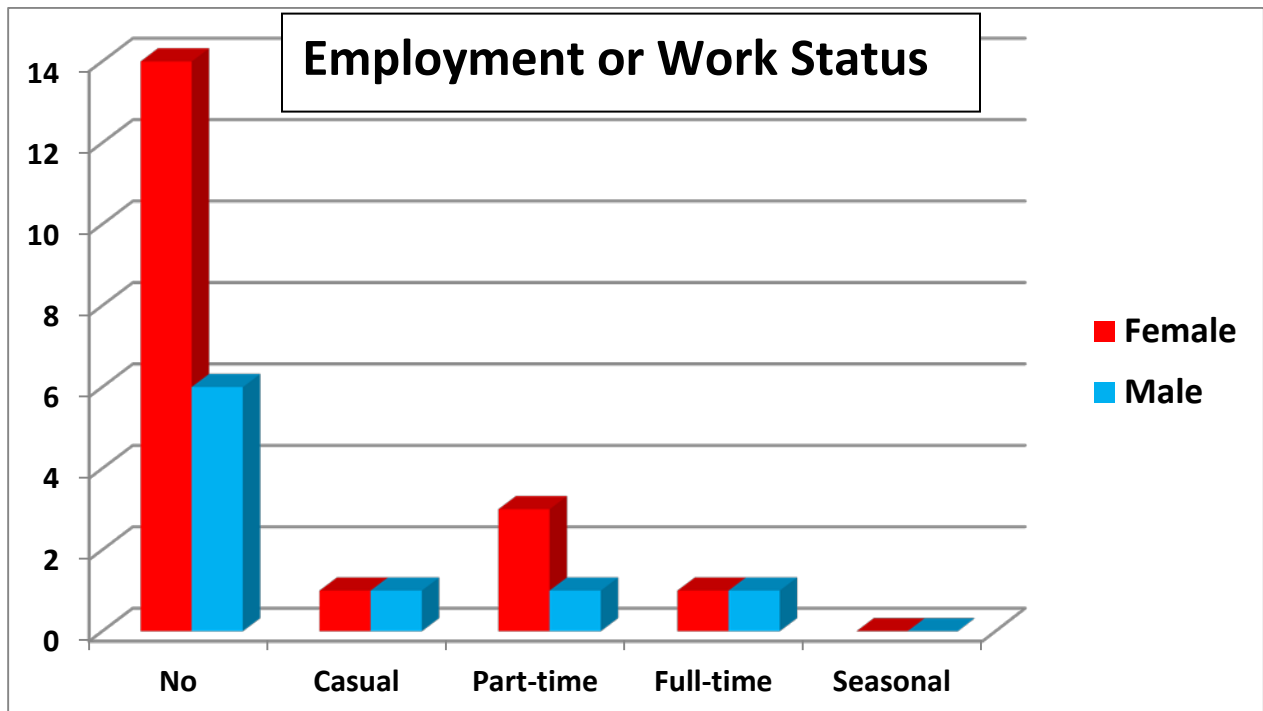
Reasons for Relocation to the Clearwater Area

Job or employment	5
Spouse	3
Cheaper/more affordable	8
Family and/or hometown	13
Other	3

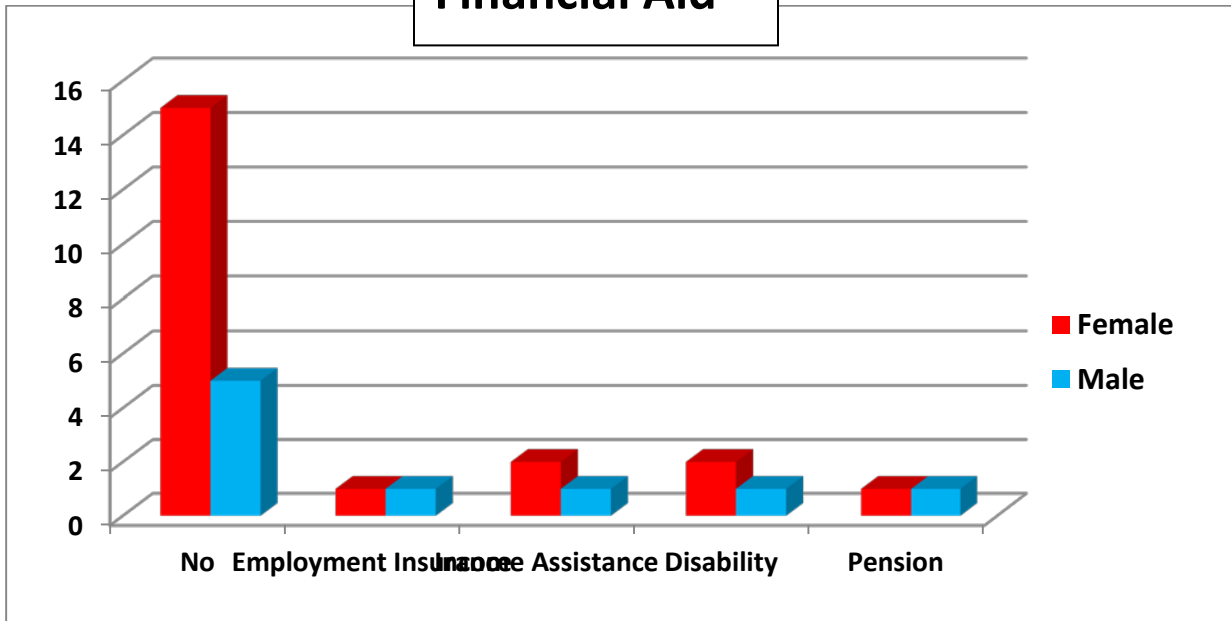


Do you use the local Food Bank?

	Female	Male
No	3	1
Occasionally	8	5
Monthly	9	4
Other food programs	5	1

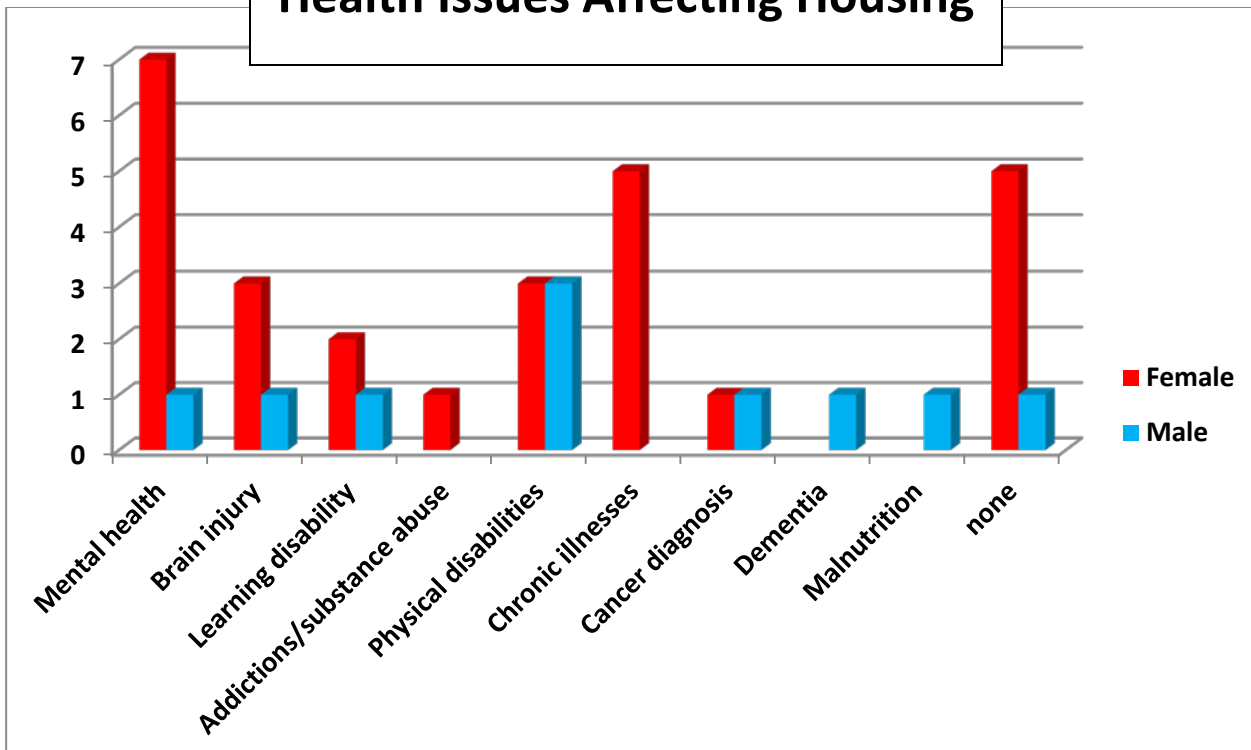


Financial Aid

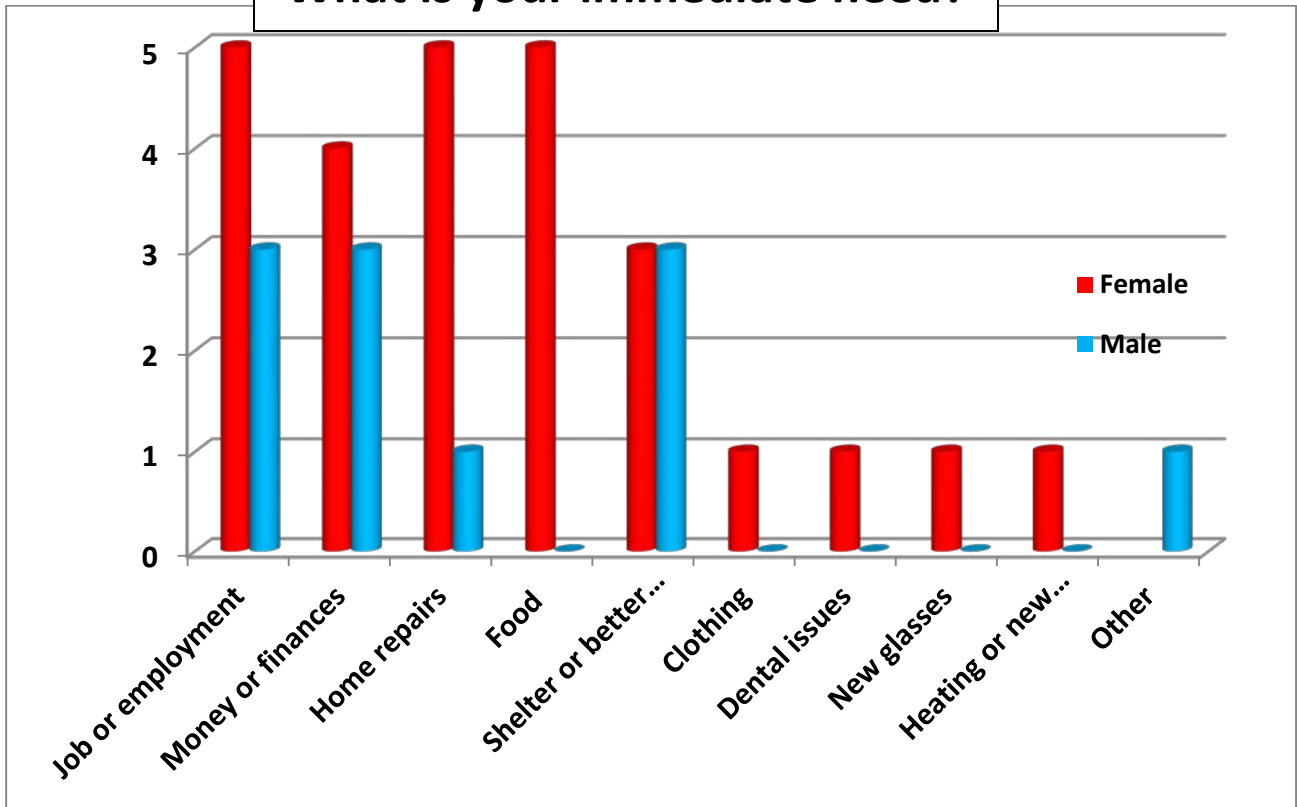


Pensions are not financial aid but the category was added to identify other sources of income

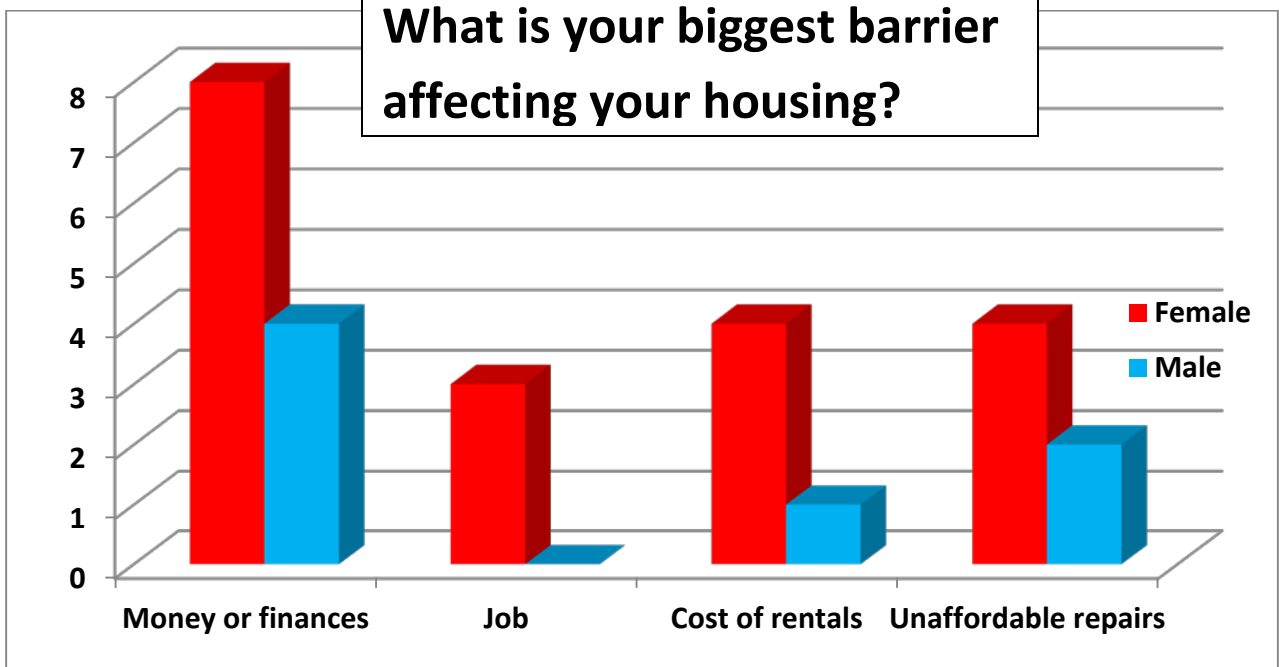
Health Issues Affecting Housing



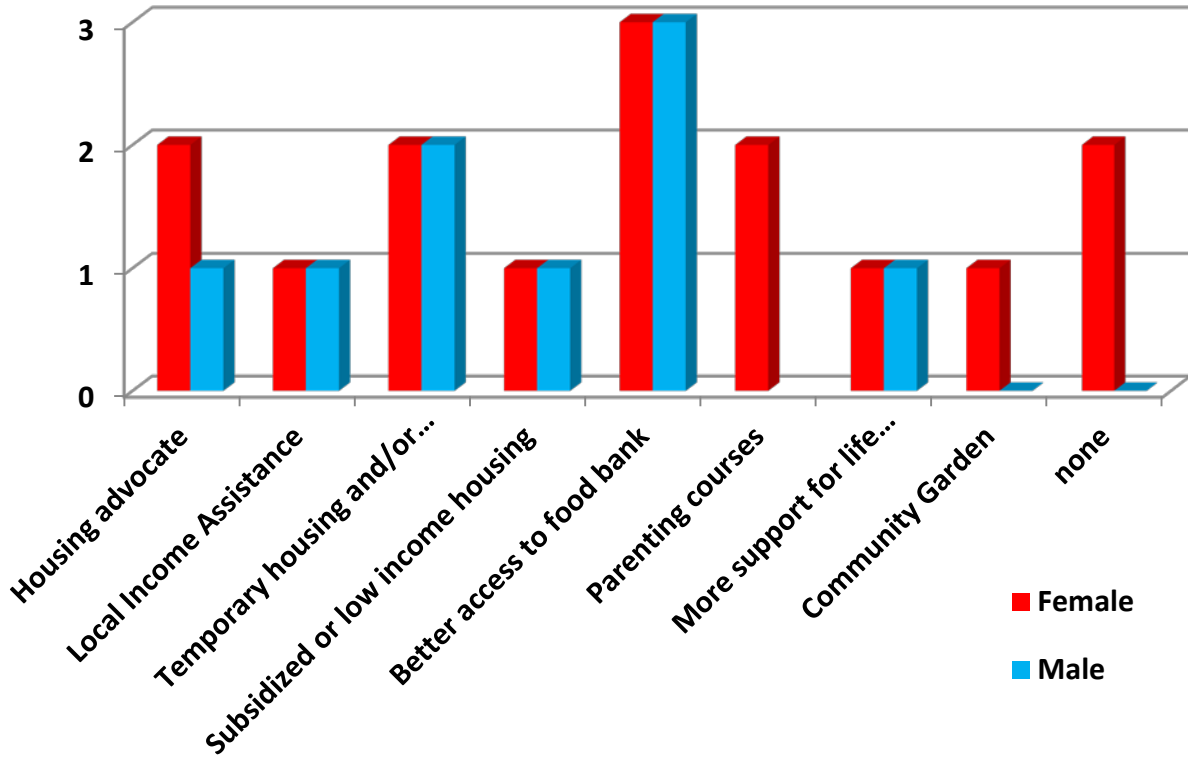
What is your immediate need?



What is your biggest barrier affecting your housing?



What support or service can you *not* access AND what does the HPS Committee needs to know?



Summary of Results

29 questionnaires were completed. Based on the home that they were living in and the condition of that home at the time the interviews were completed (October 1, 2013 to December 15, 2013):

6	Unsheltered (Absolute Homelessness)
6	Provisionally homeless (Hidden Homeless)
15	At risk of homelessness

Only 3 individuals did not indicate at least one condition of their home that put them at risk of homelessness. (These were 3 of the 4 individuals who had completed the questionnaires themselves)

At the presentation of the final results, January 23, 2014, the stakeholders identified an additional 10 individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the catchment area, but who were not interviewed due to time limits and/or their reluctance or unwillingness to participate.

Trends or Patterns

All results or data is important but when developing a strategy and justifying the investment of resources, trends or patterns of concern must be identified and prioritized:

38% of participants identified as Aboriginal or Métis

Almost 45% identified their main reason for relocating to the District of Clearwater and area was due to other family members already living here and/or they were returning to their hometown.

28% said their main reason for relocating to the District of Clearwater and area was that it was affordable or cheap to live here.

45% of participants identified mental health issues and/or brain injuries affecting their housing

69% are not working.

In response to the question: "What is your immediate need?"

28% answered job or employment

24% answered money or finances

21% answered home repairs

17% answered food.

Since responses were similar to the questions “What type of supports/service would you like to access that you currently can’t or don’t?” and, “We are part of a committee working on the issues of homelessness in the Clearwater area. What else do you want us to know?” the results were combined in the final report. The most common response was better or more frequent access to the food bank at 21%

When asked to describe the condition of their home, 53% stated that their home was poorly maintained if not unsafe. At least 3 of these individuals were in rental properties but said that they could not complain because their landlord would evict them. To them, an unhealthy or unsafe home was better than no home at all.

Causes of Homelessness

According to Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, (The State of Homelessness in Canada, 2013, page 13):

Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of a number of factors, rather than a single cause.

However the causes can be grouped into three main sources:

- 1) System failures
- 2) Structural factors
- 3) Personal or Relational factors

1) Systems failures occur when other systems of care and support fail. Examples include difficult transitions from child welfare, inadequate discharge planning for people leaving hospitals, corrections and mental health and addictions facilities and a lack of support for immigrants and refugees

Although statistical results were not gathered in this area, many participants indicated system failures or perceived system failures. For most, the applications that must be completed for Income Assistance or Disability are over-whelming and extremely daunting and there is no local representative here (The Community Resource Centre can offer limited support) so all inquiries must be made over the phone. There were also instances where individuals had been repeatedly required to prove their disability (once again reinforcing their disabilities) even when they have had the disability since birth. The overall perception was that the participants had to be totally destitute, completely de-moralized and walking the edge of emotional or mental health before the government was willing to offer assistance.

2) *Structural factors include the lack of adequate income, access to affordable housing and health supports and/or the experience of discrimination.*

69% of the participants were not working. The question arose whether the results would have been different if the needs assessment had taken place during the summer months. The District of Clearwater and surrounding area relies heavily on the summer tourism industry which means that there are many seasonal employees and transient workers. Anecdotal evidence provided by the stakeholders indicated that many of the employees or workers struggle with housing but there was no opportunity to interview these individuals. Interestingly, none of the participants indicated that they worked seasonally which would have been expected in this area. It is unknown whether this response was accurate, or that it was a result of the wording or delivery of the questionnaire.

In addition, 69% were not receiving any financial aid, such as employment insurance, income assistance or disability.

3) Individual and Relational Factors

Personal circumstances may include: traumatic events e.g. house fire or job loss, personal crisis e.g. family break-up or domestic violence, mental health and addictions challenges (including brain injury and fetal alcohol syndrome) which can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness and physical health problems or disabilities.

45% of participants identified mental health issues and/or brain injuries affecting housing

Relational problems can include family violence and abuse, addictions, and mental health problems of other family members and extreme poverty. This is particularly an issue for youth and women, especially those with children.

Although no one revealed an abusive or violent relationship, four women identified the failure of a relationship as one of the main reasons for their housing situation.

ACTIVITY 2

The Strategy

As stated earlier in the report, all results or data is important, but when developing a strategy and justifying the investment of resources, trends or patterns of concern must be identified and then prioritized. Based on the information collected, four major issues were identified: unemployment, mental health, the need for more food and unsafe or unhealthy housing. Although lack of employment is the most obvious issue, (69% of the participants were not working), it is beyond the scope of this project so the strategy was divided into 3 categories: support, food and housing

Support

Goal: to decrease the vulnerability of those at risk

1) Increase community awareness of existing support and services:

a) Coordinated effort through the newly formed inter-agency committee. Through the identification of existing services in the area, it is obvious that there are a number of services, supports and programs already in the community, but some of these could be considered the community's "best kept secrets". Perhaps unintentional, but some groups have become an "island unto themselves" so that more communication and collaboration is needed.

b) Community Resource Guide – It is important that this resource not only remains current, but grows to include the needs of all community groups i.e. Seniors, etc. It needs to be updated at least twice a year with requests for changes being sent out to all the agencies and organizations involved.

At present, the Yellowhead Community Services has accepted responsibility for the maintenance.

2) Develop or explore programs that encourage self-sufficiency and independence or provide support and community attachment such as:

- Community Garden - has been in existence for a number of years but has not reached its potential. A new volunteer coordinator is stepping forward.
- Neighbourhood Kitchen - an excellent but limited program. Perhaps a different approach needs to be initiated to increase awareness and participation. As a result, more instructors need to be recruited so that the program can expand.
- Job Creation Partnership (JCP) – more projects need to be pursued.

- Homeless Outreach Program - a BC Housing program that was initiated in 2006 and is currently offered in 47 communities across the province. In each of these communities the outreach worker “engages individuals who are homeless and helps them connect with housing, income assistance and social and health supports which stabilize lives and regain independence”. Initial contact has been made with a representative at BC Housing but follow-up is needed.

3) Encourage MP and MLA to implement or extend funding programs e.g. Homelessness Outreach Worker and the original RRAP (Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program)

4) Create a position for a community coordinator (part-time paid position)

Existing agencies and service groups are already working at capacity. An individual is needed whose responsibility it would be to bridge the gaps in services identified until they can perhaps be filled by other agencies or services. Possible duties to include:

- Assist and support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness - funding applications, advocacy, finding and maintaining appropriate housing, etc.
- Inter-agency liaison - ensure exchange of information and resources between agencies and between the agencies and the community
- Develop or support programs that encourage self-sufficiency and independence or that provide support and community attachment
- Initiate and guide partnerships
- Research potential funding for new programs or services
- Support implementation of the local Homelessness Partnering Strategy

Food

Goal: to increase the quantity and quality of food for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Due to the scope of this goal, a coordinated community initiative is needed to provide:

1) Expansion of existing food security programs such as the Community Garden and Neighbourhood Kitchen which appear to be under-utilized. A new volunteer is stepping forward to coordinate Community Garden Program. Additional instructors/leaders need to be recruited for Neighbourhood Kitchen program so that more people could participate.

2) Increase Food Bank hampers to 2 per month – all participants who mentioned the Food Bank expressed their gratitude for the assistance they already received but stated a need for more nutritious and more frequent food. To many the Food Bank is their only source of food and it is difficult to budget or plan for an entire month. A bi-weekly hamper would also allow for more nutritious (fresh) food to be provided.

It is important that this recommendation not fall solely on the backs of the existing Food Bank program and their volunteers. They are already doing an amazing job, but they are working to their capacity in all areas so other community support is needed.

Housing

Goal: to improve or explore housing opportunities with limited financial investment.

- 1) Increase community awareness of government funding that is available (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters, Home Adaptations for Independence and the Rental Assistance Program) and offer assistance in completing applications
- 2) Letter to Member of Parliament and Member of the Legislature requesting the restoration of the previous Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) which assisted low income with energy-saving upgrades to home but also provided increased employment for local contractors which is invaluable in smaller, rural communities that are struggling. The program is currently only available in the Yukon Territories.

Those requiring emergency shelter may represent only a small percentage of the homeless in the area. (Further study is needed to verify demand) Although numbers may never allow independent emergency housing, such shelter and a support system need to be made available.

- 3) Initiate an inter-agency tracking of requests for emergency shelter for the following 12 months
- 4) Initiate the development of an emergency shelter system. Although numbers may not justify the building of an independent emergency facility, some type of shelter and a support system are needed in the area for those who may require it.

In Summary

Homelessness is expensive because we cycle people through expensive public systems and increasingly costly and uncoordinated emergency services systems. By shifting focus to permanent solutions, we have the opportunity to reduce the long term cost of homelessness and make more efficient and effective use of our existing resources.