

**CALGARY  
INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE  
FOR THE ABSOLUTELY HOMELESS**

**3-YEAR PLAN**

**FOR**

**COOPERATIVE SOLUTIONS**



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**Prepared by The Calgary Interagency Committee for The Absolutely Homeless and  
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## **INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE FOR THE ABSOLUTELY HOMELESS** **3-YEAR PLAN**

### **Introduction**

This Plan is the result of a collaborative process designed to establish project, research, prevention and advocacy priorities among the agencies addressing the needs of the absolute homeless.

### **History**

The Interagency Committee started in 1996 when Calgary was faced with acute homelessness, growing numbers, and a cold winter. A group including shelters, Kay Wong from the City, plus other levels of government came together to figure out what we could do around homelessness. Agencies, the City of Calgary and the Provincial Government worked together to add beds to existing and temporary shelters that were opened to meet the need.

This collaboration and partnerships continued with monthly meetings and broadened to include discussions, planning and development of major capital projects. These included the new Calgary Drop In Centre, The Centre of Hope (Salvation Army) and the Creative Centre (Mustard Seed).

There also has been extensive collaboration in research projects including the 1997 Calgary Homelessness Study, 2002 Calgary Homelessness Study and International Downtown Association report. The Interagency also conducted research projects on Homelessness and Addictions in Calgary (2003), and 2000 & 2002 Shelter Counts, and participated in the 2003 Community Plan and the biannual Homeless Counts.

The interagency also has collaborated with The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) project with National Homelessness Initiative's for several years and recently is developing an Integrated Guest Tracking System that will be implemented in seven agencies.

The collaboration efforts have also resulted with members of the Interagency participating in many other initiatives and committees including the Connect Calgary through the Smart Communities projects, the Community Action Committee, Calgary Homeless Foundation and Calgary Homeless Awareness Week.

## **Need for a 3 Year Plan**

The need for a Plan has been determined by a number of factors.

1. There is an increased profile and broadening of understanding around homeless populations. Many are relatively homeless: one pay cheque away, women fleeing violence, youth, seniors, and aboriginal. An unanticipated outcome of this broadening spectrum of homelessness addressed by the National Homelessness Initiative's collaborative process was that the voices of the agencies and the Interagency Committee for the Absolute Homeless were lessened. It is important that the Interagency provide a strong voice for the Absolute Homeless and the agencies serving them.
2. There is a clear need for focus and direction that will enable the Interagency Committee to address the specific issues within the Inner City relating to the absolutely homeless. As well, there is a need for strategic planning to prioritize systemic problems and plan ways to address the issues. These fall into three areas:
  - Being supportive of Interagency projects as they are developed and, if/when they encounter blockages from government, the community, etc.
  - Advocacy with government, funding bodies and media to deal with systemic problems
  - To do research within the agency network to discover trends, causes, and issues that need addressing.
3. Funding bodies at all levels and parts of the community are now requiring good planning on the part of agencies and collaborative committees that enables those funding bodies to justify and rationalize the granting on both capital and operational dollars.

## **The Goal of the 3 Year Plan**

To enable collaborative research, advocacy and support in addressing the needs of the absolutely homeless.

## **Guiding Principles (both within the Plan and the Inter Agency Committee)**

1. **Intentional and proactive collaboration** within the Interagency Committee and its participating agencies.
2. **Constant Sustainability** planning to preserve individual agency operations and to collectively advocate for systemic change.
3. **Transparency**, which assures mutual trust and honesty among member agencies, is critical to the collaborative process.

### **Value/Beliefs held to be important to the Plan**

- Shelter alone does not resolve homelessness
- Without operating sustainability real changes are impossible. Current energies and resource dollars are too focused on survival rather than progress
- Services should be delivered where the people are
- Services/treatment should be offered to optimize client autonomy while maintaining required level of support from agencies
- Client self-determination with accountability and with grace and forgiveness
- Consequences for client behavior with continued agency relationship.

### **InterAgency Committee Mission Statement**

The Interagency Committee, comprised of autonomous agency-members, will collaborate using its collective influence and front line expertise in partnership with the community, to address the changing needs and issues affecting the absolutely homeless population.

### **Objectives**

- To promote a continuum of services for clients by understanding each agency's mandate, philosophy, focus and programs
- To be proactive in influencing Community Plans, identifying issues and recommending solutions, coordinating integrated multi-agency responses, and expanding the range of services to cover identified gaps.
- To be the voice of absolute homeless serving agencies in the development of strategic and long-range plans across the community
- To establish and form working groups as needed to undertake research, strategies or solutions
- To maintain and develop partnerships to enhance resources for homeless people, both within the existing membership of the Interagency Committee, and with other stakeholders
- To promote services that will assist the absolutely homeless (assist in their development and/or advocate for their funding).

### **Inter Agency Organizational Structure**

A new structure will be developed around a core group and the planning/advocacy functions of the Committee. This structure will be defined as a first step in the process of moving the agenda of the Interagency Committee for Absolute Homeless. This is a work in progress and will be detailed more fully in subsequent documentation. The Co-chairs of the Committee are currently working on this issue.

## **Action Plan**

### **Identification of Inner City Community Needs**

The Interagency has met and collaborated on identifying the issues and projects that will be established as priorities for the Interagency Committee for The Absolutely Homeless to address.

### **Advocacy**

#### 1) Operational Sustainability

This is the most pressing issue on the agenda of all agencies. They are consistently faced with expending a large amount of staff time to find the funds to keep the doors open and projects running. When the need is so great and the number of absolute homeless continues to climb, the development of sustainable funding is crucial.

We need a collaborative strategic process that engages funders in providing long term sustainable funding. When the need is so great and the number of absolute homeless continues to climb, the development of sustainable funding is crucial.

- a) Work with funders as partners to identify and fund core services, building sustainability for unmet needs.
- b) Strongly recommend a return to a central provincial Ministry of Social Services that can adequately deal with social issues, particularly those relating to absolute homelessness. We will develop a strategic communications plan to present the need for services and why they should be kept, followed by meetings with the Province and other advocacy efforts.
- c) Develop an ongoing communications strategy targeted at the funders, media and community.
- d) Utilize our research for advocacy and educating the community to change myths around homelessness.

#### 2) Poverty – as it relates to Absolute Homeless People

- a) Seize every opportunity to challenge community and government to make changes to the existing social safety net that allows people to become homeless and prevents them from moving out of the shelters back into the community. Specific areas that need addressing are insufficient funding for Supported For Independence (SFI), Minimum Wage upgrading to living wage, Alberta Health Care benefits, transit for employment for the first month of work, assistance in moving into transitional and affordable housing, and ongoing counseling support are all contributing factors putting people into homelessness and preventing them from leaving.

3) Other initiatives deserving consideration for action by the InterAgency Committee:

- a) Core standards for providing basic services.  
We will work with funders to develop core standards for service delivery.
- b) Revision of Mental Health Act  
Ensuring appropriate managed care for the mentally ill
- c) Zoning  
The issue of illegal suites would be addressed by the City of Calgary. That new housing developments would include some forms of affordable housing. The City of Calgary would implement a policy that prevents NIMBY from stopping essential services from being developed for the absolute homeless.
- d) Families  
Provincial government policies relating to families need attention. There must be provision for homeless families with children to be supported out of homelessness. This population needs the most urgent help to avoid creating intergenerational homelessness.
- e) Council of Champions/Tipping Point  
We will work to attract high profile individuals that can champion the cause of homelessness. There also will be a continued effort to inform the public about the issues and solutions to homelessness.
- f) Downloading (Dumping)  
There is a continual problem of releasing individuals to the streets or shelters from hospitals, prisons, mental health facilities, group homes and temporary accommodations, and out of the hands of City Police Services. We will work with hospitals, prisons, mental health facilities, group homes to develop a discharge plan.
- g) Addiction Programs  
There has been a reduction of addictions services that can substantially affect the recovery of those needs treatment. In general there are insufficient addictions services for the homeless population. The Interagency will advocate on behalf of aboriginal addiction treatments.
- h) Public education  
Public education will be important to address the above issues. A communication plan will be developed to ensure that the needs of the homeless population are communicated to the community.

## Service Initiatives

The Interagency Committee priorities are strategic planning, advocacy and support of agencies to deliver a range of quality services at the front line.

An inventory of existing and planned programs/services represented in the Interagency membership, would be valuable. It would serve as an information tool and to identify service/advocacy gaps, so that programs could be developed either by individual member agencies, or where appropriate, by the Interagency Committee collectively. Partnerships and collaboration are strongly desired and recommended. It would be a flagship endeavor if two or more significant players were to partner for a major initiative. Sharing information in the spirit of collaboration and transparency would avoid duplication in program research and start-up efforts.

Priority issues identified by member agencies include:

- 1) **Medical / psychiatric services on site** (including dressings, suturing), and **day beds** for overnight workers, those who are ill on a temporary basis, and the elderly
- 2) **Employment development programs** designed to prepare people to enter the workforce
- 3) Addressing the issue of **families with children** being shuffled from church to church every night. The Interagency Committee wishes to support alternative services developed by Inn From The Cold or any other new service provider that comes forward.
- 4) A better model for **complex clients**, the “hard to house” with multiple problems that consistently fall between the cracks. Special facilities may be required.
- 5) **Legal Services** to address landlord/tenant issues, available to those in trouble while in shelters, etc.
- 6) Programs to upgrade basic **educational** levels

The InterAgency Committee is committed to supporting other initiatives as they arise.

## Research

It is clear that further study and research is necessary to guide the planning and prioritizing processes for the future. Respectful research based on reliable data will drive projects. To this end, the following initiatives will be targeted:

- 1) Smart Card system to understand the utilization patterns of the shelter population is a first step in tracking clients and identifying an accurate census of shelter usage. This project has the potential to generate a common database between the agencies and a way to capture longitudinal data. A complementary element for future consideration might be follow up when clients leave.

- 2) A related initiative of interest is the development of protocols that will identify a) the absolute homeless requiring strong supports b) those who are capable of moving through the system without supports, and c) those who make the transition out of the system.
- 3) Barriers to service for the absolute homeless outside the shelters should be studied and recommendations made to eliminate them.
- 4) Research related to homeless people with mental illness is also required, though it should not fall victim to jurisdictional issues, but rather address the person as a whole. Possibilities include a cost-benefit analysis of different interventions (or non-intervention) for this population or an assessment of the SOS connection with the absolute homeless. An outcome of such research should be a call to the Health Region for a nurse practitioner for every (certain number) of homeless people, based in shelters and other accessible locations.
- 5) There appears to a growth in the number of men who have separated from their wives, lost their jobs because of the trauma and can't get back on their feet because of alimony. New models for support agreements (e.g., payment plans through family court) require exploration. This initiative would require access to the legal system, perhaps through the Faculty of Law or elsewhere at the University.
- 6) Constructive evaluative research into the quality of service provision within our agencies would support quality assurance to best serve the absolute homeless.
- 7) The 2002 and 1997 Homeless Studies have provided valuable insights into the root causes of homelessness, and have enabled the agencies to more accurately address the issues. More research of this nature is welcome, as is the opportunity to develop new/different services that respond.

### **Conclusion**

The Interagency Committee for the Absolutely Homeless is evolving to focus its attention on advocacy, strategic planning and research. With commitment to collaboration, sustainability and transparency, the group will continue to be a voice for the absolutely homeless and the agencies that serve them.