

Homelessness in the tri-community – Briefing Notes Make Shift Happen – May 27, 2021



Make Shift Happen (MSH) is a crime prevention initiative focused on community wellbeing through capacity building and mobilization. We've been active in the tri-community (The Pas, OCN and RM of Kelsey) since January 2020 working with individuals, groups and organizations.

We research to assess opportunities, bridge knowledge gaps and collaborate to adapt crime prevention responses to best meet identified needs. Our work has provided lots of factual information about homelessness and we're pleased to share it here with the goal of stimulating productive discussions and effective actions.

TRI-COMMUNITY HOMELESSNESS FACTS

- Homeless population is 35 to 40 people
- 10 are local and 25 are from out of town
- Approximately 20-26 regularly stay at the shelter
- Over half of shelter clients have undergone treatment, some more than once
- The number of people living on the street is increasing, they are younger and growing more belligerent
- Not all people hanging around downtown stay at the shelter or are homeless
- The Friendship Centre uses an online, national system that tracks clients enabling better case management
- RCMP reported approximately 80% of their time is spent on 15 individuals

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

The tri-community has services and programs to deal with issues closely related to homelessness such as addictions, mental health, support services, housing, and employment. Capacity is limited.

The town also has multiple organizations and groups with programs and initiatives designed to indirectly address issues related to homelessness. The programs range from town beautification to addictions treatment and affordable housing to restorative justice. Again, capacity is limited.

Only two organizations are currently operating with a direct and specific focus on providing services to people who are homeless – the Friendship Centre and Oscar's Place.

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods (SCAN) has a committed group of 25 – 30 people from multiple sectors who have chosen to focus on homelessness. Solutions were brought to the table in March 2021 and compiled at the April meeting. The next meeting on June 12 is when the group will decide on what direction to take and build an action plan.

WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE?

Responding to the complexity of homelessness requires a shift in systems, leadership approaches, thinking and action, understanding mindsets and worldviews, with future-focused leadership.

Some areas with opportunities for action that will address homelessness are:

1. Treatment – addictions and mental health services and supports exist but are limited, coordination and access need to be addressed.

2. Transitional spaces – when people get out of treatment, there are few places for them to land so that they won't fall back into addictions and homelessness. Transitional spaces include; housing together with supports for basic needs, counselling and community reintegration at all levels.
3. Enforcement and Justice – consistent enforcement is necessary. Some approaches are short-lived, managing the issue, not solving it. Restorative justice is cost-effective, preventative and long-term.
4. Employment and training– lowering poverty levels through training and employment can pull people out of the cycle of destitution.
5. Environmental Design – planning how the community is designed (e.g., lighting, pathways, access points, beautification) works to create a safer community.
6. Effective strategies -- MSH reports and research has outlined strategies that were shared with the interested public through labs, presentations and reports.
7. Education – homelessness is a complex issue requiring a holistic approach beyond managing the results (addictions, homelessness) of deep-rooted issues (such as trauma and abuse). There are people who work specifically in this area with expertise and insight.
8. Measurement and evaluation plan – there is currently no common evaluation plan to measure impact. Regional, national and international studies identify what works. Models are out there to help guide the journey to ending homelessness.
9. Equity, Inclusion, Racism – rethink how structures and systems can be inclusive.
10. Coordinated, multi-sectoral plan -- the tri-community is in the midst of grappling with how to move forward. The discussion is happening and people are ready to shift into action.

SHIFT OR GET OFF THE POT!

If you're motivated to do something to end homelessness or to take action towards making shift happen for a better, stronger community, contact the Make Shift Happen Coordinator, karendriedger@gmail.com and find how.

To consider for the next SCAN meeting

Big Picture

1. What is the Goal? To end homelessness in the tri-community?
2. What is the price? (Social, economic, environmental)
3. Is the tri-community willing to commit and pay the price?

Specific Action

1. Of the solutions generated '**a place with wraparound supports**' had the most votes (from poll results). Is this what the group wants to proceed with? If so, what does that look like? If not, what direction to take?
2. Is SCAN committed to spearhead a homeless strategy? If not, then who?
3. Who is missing? (Effective practice is to include people who are homeless in solution-building.)
4. How will SCAN measure the impact of impending efforts and track outcomes? Coordinated measurement and evaluation will be necessary.
5. Is there a need for a Northern Homeless Strategy/Community of Practice? (To address the regional scope, learn from each other and collectively rally support from provincial and federal government.)