

# Finding Our Path

## Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness



## Finding our Path: Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness



People who self-identify as Aboriginal are over-represented among those who use emergency shelters in Greater Victoria. People with Aboriginal identify account for just 3.4% of Greater Victoria's population (Statistics Canada, 2007), yet on average they represent 21.5% of shelter users. Aboriginal leaders in our community suggest that this figure is low and that once the reality of under-housing for Aboriginal individuals and families is taken into account that the Aboriginal housing

and homelessness situation in Greater Victoria is a crisis. The Coalition to End Homelessness has recognized this and has identified the need for a coordinated and thoughtful response to this crisis.

Specific, meaningful and culturally appropriate initiatives are needed to deal with housing and supporting Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. This report sets out the beginnings of an Aboriginal strategy to address issues of housing and homelessness in the Capital Regional District.

*The contributions of Cathy Carphin (forum minutes) and Jordan Parisian (photography) to the completion of this report are gratefully acknowledged.*

## A Stepping Stone

This report emerges from a forum that engaged key members of the Aboriginal community and others in sharing knowledge and strategies to address the housing needs of Aboriginal peoples in the Capital Regional District. Co-sponsored by the Coalition to End Homelessness and the University of Victoria, Faculty of Human and Social Development, the forum particularly sought to respond to the urgent issues of homelessness and under-housing among Aboriginal peoples.



The Aboriginal Housing Strategy Workshop was held at the First People's House at the University of Victoria on January 20, 2010. Invitations were extended to local Chiefs, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal housing and related service providers, academics, activists, researchers and consultants in the field of Aboriginal housing and homelessness. Those who participated in the daylong session are listed in the accompanying textbox.

*Paul Lacerte, BC Association of  
Aboriginal Friendship Centres*

*Kevin Albers, M'Akola Housing*

*Mary Ellen Purkis, UVIC*

*Linda Ross, Linda Ross Consultants*

*Bruce Parisian, Victoria Native  
Friendship Centre*

*Ron Rice, BC Association of  
Aboriginal Friendship Centres*

*Maeve Lydon, UVIC*

*Tony Joe, Coalition to End  
Homelessness*

*Leslie Brown, UVIC*

*Kathy Stinson, Cool-Aid Society*

*Rob Mitchell, Coalition to End  
Homelessness*

*Robina Thomas, UVIC*

*Rose Henry*

*Jill Clements, Coalition to End  
Homelessness*

*Al Tysick, Our Place Society*

*Bernie Pauly, UVIC*

*William Ross, Sundog Consulting*

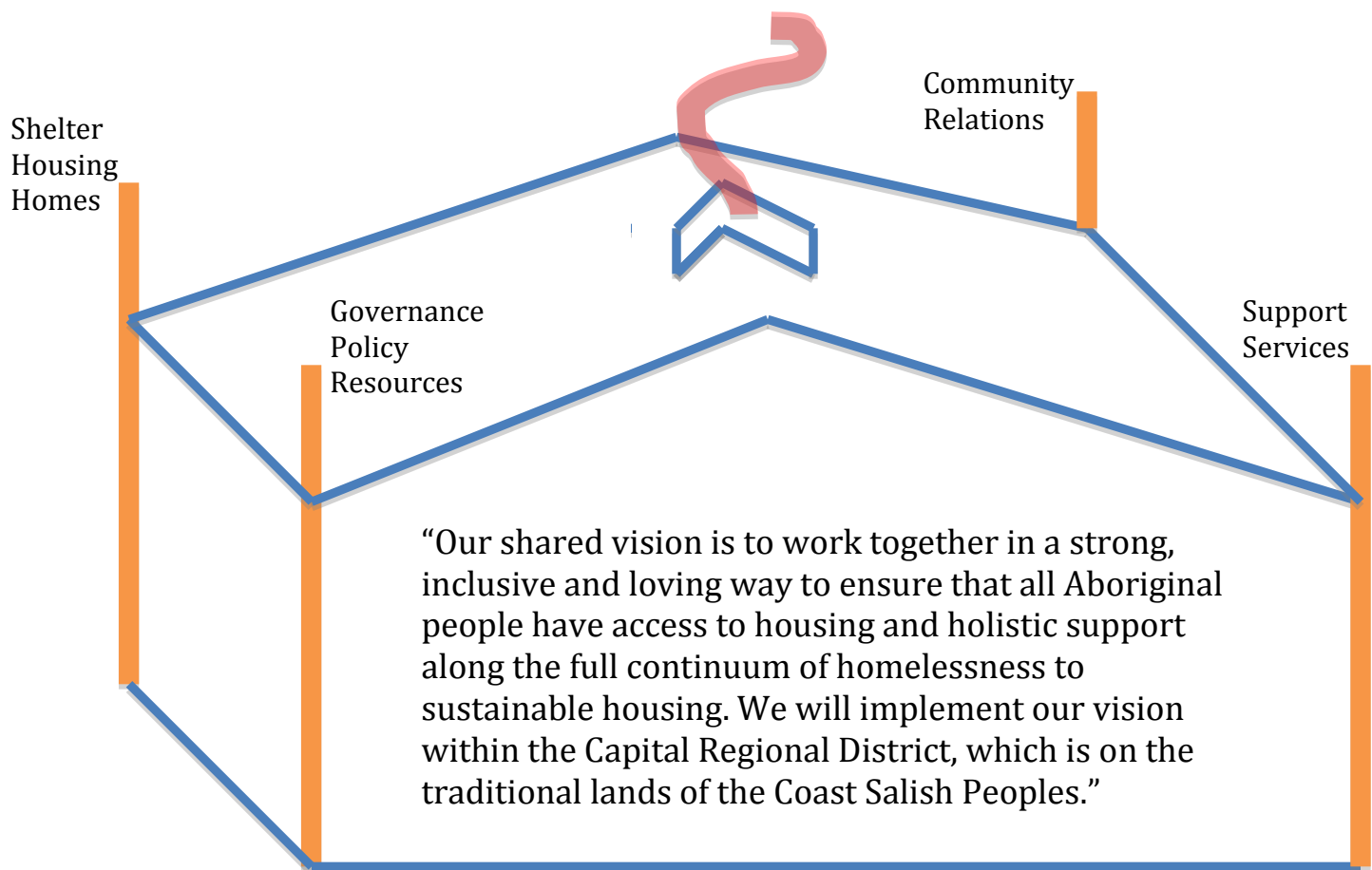
*Jason Morrisseau*

*Andrea Jereb, Victoria Native  
Friendship Centre*

*Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi, UVIC*

## An Aboriginal Strategy – the four posts of the Big House

The image of a Coast Salish Big House provides the framework for the Aboriginal Housing Strategy. Big Houses have 4 corner posts, each providing a different perspective and support to the House. For the Aboriginal Strategy, each post represents one component or strategic initiative needed. All four posts are equal in urgency and importance and together provide the structure for Aboriginal housing in our community. The vision for the strategy that was developed at the forum is at the centre of the House, providing the warmth, the fire that unites us in this work.





## Governance, Policy, Resources

One of the Big House posts is titled 'Governance, Policy and Resources', but it might just as easily be labeled 'Leadership'. Engaged leadership (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), policy changes and appropriate funding are needed to enable a change in mind set around homelessness and housing for Aboriginal peoples and a concurrent system change.

### Desired Major Outcomes (or, we know we've succeeded when...)

- Key leaders (at all levels of government including First Nations) are informed about Aboriginal issues related to housing and homelessness, accept the challenge of engaging in integrated, effective policy change, are prepared to take risks, and have (and are seen to have) housing as a priority (i.e., there are lots of strategic champions).
- A comprehensive national housing policy (which acknowledges the root causes of Aboriginal poverty) is established with clear targets for Aboriginal housing and the provision of resources to achieve these targets.
- Funding is coordinated across funding agencies (i.e., no more funding silos) and supports a holistic approach (i.e., more than bricks and mortar, includes support services).
- A CRD Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness strategy is implemented.
- Jurisdictional boundaries are broken down to effectively address on and off reserve housing crisis.
- Aboriginal specific services are a cornerstone of all agencies.

### Priority Actions (or, what we can do right now...)

- Bring more Aboriginal people into the Coalition and onto boards and committees in the CRD.
- Encourage all levels of government and community leaders responsible for housing and homelessness of Aboriginal peoples to adopt a "Jordan's Principle" type of declaration to assume and share responsibility for ending homelessness.

*The Jordan's Principle declaration calls upon all provincial and territorial governments as well as the government of Canada to immediately adopt a child first principle to resolving jurisdictional disputes involving the care of First Nations children. Under this principle, where a jurisdictional dispute arises between two government parties (provincial/territorial or federal) or between two departments or ministries of the same government, regarding payment for services for a Status Indian child which are otherwise available to other Canadian children, the government or ministry/department of first contact must pay for the services without delay or disruption. The paying government party can then refer the matter to jurisdictional dispute mechanisms. In this way, the needs of the child get met first while still allowing for the jurisdictional dispute to be resolved.*

# Shelter, Housing, Homes

There is a continuum of housing needs for Aboriginal peoples, and any strategy has to address the range of needs. From shelter to temporary housing to permanent homes, there is a shortage of available housing for Aboriginal peoples in the CRD. Any strategy must therefore include the building and maintenance of new housing opportunities for Aboriginal youth, adults, elders and families.



## Desired Major Outcomes (or, we know we've succeeded when...)

- Creation of a new housing project that is culturally holistic
- Targets of 100 new units set by each municipality
- Aboriginal people who wish to return to or remain in their home communities have the housing there to accommodate them, and the means to pay the costs.
- Aboriginal people are welcomed in all neighbourhoods and have equal access to new and existing housing
- Survey conducted of actual aboriginal numbers of homeless in the CRD area
- Program exists to move people up the housing continuum facilitating constant turnover of bottom end housing

## Priority Actions (or, what we can do right now...)

- Investigate grassroots innovation and strategic resource sharing (without waiting for government approval or additional funding)
- Advocate (build a collective case to put forward) to government to prioritize Aboriginal housing
- Undertake legal advocacy around the right to housing.

# Community Relations

It will take the whole community of the Capital Regional District to make effective change for Aboriginal housing. A community that is inclusive and cooperative is a new paradigm that has the potential for meaningful change.

## Desired Major Outcomes (or, we know we've succeeded when...)

- An public understanding has been created which recognizes the needs of Aboriginal people
- Housing solutions are integrated throughout the CRD which avoids gaps in demographics as people move along the continuum – for individuals, families (including multi-generational families)
- All people in the CRD recognize and respect that they live in Coast Salish territory
- On and off-reserve Aboriginal people work together, collaboratively, through partnerships
- All social housing providers in the CRD are intentionally housing aboriginal people
- All housing and homeless committees represent the diverse populations that they seek to represent



## Priority Actions (or, what we can do right now...)

- Immediately use existing collective resources to build an intergenerational long house.
- Develop and implement a strategic communication/public education plan to inform governments, business and the public about the crisis (and root causes) of Aboriginal homelessness, and the solutions to overcome it.

## Support Services

Responding to the housing needs of Aboriginal peoples means more than simply constructing new housing units. There is a concurrent need for holistic and culturally safe support services to assist Aboriginal individuals and families to secure housing, maintain housing and to transition along the continuum of housing opportunities. Support services that are culturally relevant to Aboriginal peoples are not just 'extras', but are integral to any housing strategy.

### Desired Major Outcomes (or, we know we've succeeded when...)

- Funding for support services is automatically included in all housing projects
- Aboriginal elders are engaged in the design and implementation of support programs
- Supports are provided along a continuum of housing in response to the needs expressed by Aboriginal peoples
- The approach to housing is holistic, encompassing the spiritual, physical, mental and social needs of the diversity of Aboriginal peoples
- Community agencies are committed to educating staff and community on the history and cultures of Aboriginal peoples to ensure that their services reflect Aboriginal peoples' experiences.
- Bridges and pathways between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers are effective to expand culturally appropriate service capacity



### Priority Actions (or, what we can do right now...)

- Listen to people with past experiences, which might otherwise get lost
- Establish culturally safe support services



## Recommended Next Steps

### 1. Establish an Aboriginal Housing Committee of The Coalition to End Homelessness

In order to provide leadership to the continued development of an Aboriginal strategy and for its implementation, it is recommended that a dedicated committee be formed that consists of key people and organizational representatives in the Aboriginal housing and larger Aboriginal community. The Coalition would ensure that this committee has access to other Coalition committees and leadership, has clear guidelines for decision-making authority and has appropriate resourcing (i.e., Aboriginal staff support). Indeed, the Coalition may consider the establishment of an Aboriginal co-director.

### 2. Build on this report to develop an Aboriginal Housing Strategy for the CRD

Building a community strategy involves ongoing consultation with a variety of people and interests. It is recommended that proper protocols be followed in undergoing this consultation. That will require seeking advice and direction from local Chiefs and elders. Further, it is recognized that consultation with non-Aboriginal agencies who may be serving Aboriginal peoples and with governments (at all levels) is important to building a shared strategy, while retaining Aboriginal knowledge, experience and advice at the centre of the consultation and development of a strategic plan.



