

greater victoria
coalition to end
homelessness

hope has found a home



**Engagement and
Language Protocol**

This is a living document. It will be updated regularly as people with lived experience provide continued input.

Approved December 13, 2016

The solutions to homelessness are as diverse as the people who experience it, and we all have a role to play in ending it. The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society (the Coalition) was formed in 2008 with a mission to end homelessness in the capital region. The Coalition consists of service providers, non-profit organizations, all levels of government, businesses, post-secondary institutions, the faith community, people with a lived experience of homelessness, and members of the general community. This diverse membership is referred to as Coalition Stakeholders

Our Vision

A Region Without Homelessness

Our Mission

1. To ensure appropriate solutions are in place to serve those individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the capital region.
2. To ensure all people facing homelessness in the capital region have access to safe, affordable, appropriate, long-term housing.



Background

The meaningful inclusion of people who have experienced homelessness (past or present) is critical in co-creating a clearer understanding of the issues related to homelessness and the possible complexity of solutions. The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (Coalition) began working with people with lived experience of homelessness in 2012 through the development of the Social Inclusion Advisory Committee (SIAC). This initiative came out of a recognition that efforts to end homelessness cannot be pursued without the input of people who are experiencing, or have experienced, homelessness, and that engaging with people with direct experience is foundational to ending homelessness. Committing to fostering meaningful engagement of the experiential community is a fundamental operational value of the Coalition and must be accomplished in respectful and responsive ways that reflect the diverse capacities and realities of people with lived experience of homelessness.

Through this document we hope to identify inclusive ways of engaging and working towards creation of Coalition tables, events, and materials that are safer, accessible, and inclusive for all individuals and communities, most notably those experiencing marginalization due to race, class, gender, housing, disability, Indigenous identity, age, immigrant status, and other factors preventing full participation.

The Lived Experience Advisory Council (LEAC) 7 principles of leadership and inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness states “the people who are living it usually have the best understanding about what the problem is and what needs to be done to address it. Inclusion is especially vital in the context of homelessness, though, because being excluded and silenced is a huge part of the experience of homelessness and poverty” (LEAC, 2016, p.1). According to the World Health Organization Europe “Social inclusion/exclusion as a process influences access to rights, capabilities and resources at individual, group, community and societal levels impacting the resources for health (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; World Health Organization Europe, 2015 in Norman, T., Pauly, B., Marks, H., & Palazzo, D. 2015, p.2). In such an approach, inclusion in social, political, cultural and economic decisions that affect you, are central to achieving social justice and equitable health outcomes (Norman, et al. 2015, p.2).

The Social Inclusion Advisory Committee created this framework in order to promote meaningful engagement and safer inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness in Coalition meetings, events, research, policy, and program initiatives in the community. This was accomplished through the following processes:

- Contacting organizations made up of people with lived experience for input on their practices
- Held 3 focus groups: one with long time SIAC members and two focus groups at local service providers that work with people experiencing homelessness and poverty.
- Reviewed the document with the SIAC working group

1. Lived Experience Advisory Council. (2016). Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership and inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press. www.homelesshub.ca/NothingAboutUsWithoutUs

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Inclusionary Practices

The focus groups revealed that trauma deeply influences feelings of safety. Therefore, experiences of trauma should be considered in all aspects of planning for and engaging with people with lived experience of homelessness and/or poverty.

Advertising

- Information is written in a way that puts the reader first. A straight forward format is best and less is more.
- Some people may have low levels of literacy. Ensure that opportunities are presented in plain language, verbally, and with visual aid.
- Colour posters with high visibility placement and a recognizable logo
- State free food, stipend, bus tickets in a clear and large font
- Internet is not accessible to everyone (some locations do not have a computer room or the space is crowded). Also, the library can be a place where people experience discrimination.
- Make additional information available for those who want it and ensure information is easy to access on the internet/website or that information is available in printed form in advance of the meeting.
- Word of mouth and hand-sized flyers are an effective method for getting information out

Appropriate Supports

- Childcare subsidy is provided to those that need it
- Snacks and beverages provided that accommodate dental conditions and different dietary restrictions.
- Stipends that are more than a minimal honorarium (LEAC, 2016). The Coalition currently provides a \$15/hour stipend. This amount should be reviewed annually.
- Bus tickets and disability transportation available as needed (PAC, 2016). Carpooling was also encouraged.

Location

- Consider locations that are accessible to people both emotionally and physically; community centers in the downtown core were identified as a safer, known, and accessible locations. Bus stops and wheelchair accessibility are two examples of considerations.
- Not in locations that are institutional such as hospitals and police stations.
- Space for pets should be considered as needed
- Be aware that certain service providers may be uncomfortable or inaccessible for some people while feeling safe and accessible for others. Provide location options to increase the potential for people to engage in full participation For example, hold one meeting at a location where people access services and one nearby for those who may not want, or be able, to participate at the service location for various reasons such as not feeling safe, being banned, or red zoned.

Time

- Meetings and events should not interfere with meals offered in the community or bed sign-up at shelters and should not fall on the social assistance cheque issue date or Canada Pension Plan immediately after either of these dates. If a meeting does interfere with a free meal then organizers should provide a meal.
- Breaks should occur regularly, every 45 minutes-1 hour, to allow people to attend to matters (YES2SCS, 2016).
- Schedule meetings and events in the afternoon. Mornings may be a difficult time for people currently experiencing homelessness or extreme poverty as people may be lacking sleep.
- Ensure that projects are given sufficient time to engage with people in a meaningful way and at a mutually driven pace (LEAC, 2016).

Relationship Dynamics

- Police and security should not attend meetings and events as they have been identified as triggering for many people with lived experience of homelessness, who have experienced violence, criminalization, harm, and other wrong doings by police. If police do attend they should state who they are and why they are there.
- Make it an organizational goal to have people with lived experience equally represented in all areas of the organization: governance, staff, and committees. (LEAC, 2016).
- Build authentic relationships, where unequal power is recognized and addressed through ensuring that people with lived experience are equal partners throughout the organization (LEAC, 2016).
- “Break down ridged roles such as ‘service provider’ and ‘service users’” (LEAC, 2016, p.6).

Format

- Every meeting and event will begin with an acknowledgement of the Traditional Indigenous Territory that the meeting/ event is taking place on.
- Group guidelines will be reviewed and negotiated at the beginning of the meeting.
- Check-in at the beginning to ground the group and ensure everyone knows each other's name
- Check-out at the end of the meeting to provide everyone with an opportunity to comment and debrief on the meeting or event.
- Create new ways of doing business (not bureaucratic, long, and with rigid ways of engaging) (LEAC, 2016).
- A member of the event or meeting will be responsible for taking minutes and distributing these to every participant.

Safer Spaces

- Emotional support and understanding; these issues have a real impact on people who have experienced them. Peer support and resources should be presented and available to those who need it.

- Provide anti-oppression training, cultural competency training, and capacity building to all members of the organization, including those with and without lived experience of homelessness.
- People attending meetings and events support the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience and are aware of this framework and those listed in the resources section (YES2SCS, 2016).
- Promote a non-judgmental shared space for gathering.
- Language and terminology should address people with respect rather than terms that perpetuates stereotypes or marginalizes people experiencing homelessness (YES2SCS, 2016).

Literacy and technology

- Information and training offered and provided as needed. Capacity building opportunities should be provided to members with or without lived experience.
- Exclusive, bureaucratic language and Acronyms should be avoided
- Documents should be a reasonable length with key information made easy to find.
- “Accommodation of differing levels of literacy and learning abilities including documents and handouts being read out-loud as needed” (YES2SCS, 2016).

Engagement Practices Context

We recognize people may have experienced poor engagement or involvement with The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness and we commit ourselves to working towards repairing and strengthening the relationships between the Coalition and members of the community, including, but not limited to, people with lived experience of homelessness, people who self-identify as Aboriginal, front line workers, and people living in extreme poverty.

Present and historical experiences of stigma and discrimination due to poverty, racism, dis/ableism, and colonialism contribute “to feelings of being ‘unwelcome’ and...to an overwhelming feeling that they and their input are neither valued nor appreciated. Not surprisingly, participants felt a lack of trust that their feedback would be heard and that offers of participation were genuine. Such feelings of distrust are borne of life experiences and therefore, trust must be earned (Pauly, 2014). Mutual respect is the foundation for building trust and developing relationships with people who have experienced homelessness (Pauly, 2008).” (Norman, et al., 2013, p. 28-29).

Additionally, it is important that we recognize that SIAC is one group of experiential people and does not represent everyone who has experienced homelessness (past or present). It is important that we continue to engage with a variety of other groups in order to gain a more complete understanding of the individual lived experiences of people.

Resources

In order to continue to improve the ways in which we engage with the community we will continue to seek out resources, training, community partnership initiatives, and other opportunities to broaden and deepen our understanding of the socio-economic issues experienced by marginalized and disadvantaged individuals, families, and communities. Below are some of the guiding principles and practices that we have referenced in creating this document. We encourage people engaging in work with individuals who have lived experience to review the following documents:

- Consulting with people who use drugs: Do's and don'ts (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2005, p15).
- Checklist for planning inclusive and accessible events (Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016).
- Taking a leap of faith: Meaningful participation of people with experiences of homelessness in solutions to address homelessness. (Norman, T., Pauly, B., Marks, H., & Palazzo, D. 2015).
- The Social Inclusion Advisory Committee Core Principles. (SIAC, 2012).

Improvement and Evolution

The Coalition recognizes this document will be missing information due to the fact that we have only worked with 30 individuals to create this document. It is our belief that ongoing meaningful community engagement will inform a continuously evolving knowledge base that make this a living document. We strive to continue to work with people with lived experience towards creating more equitable participation and leadership opportunities within the very structure of the Coalition. As suggested by SIAC, an updating session will take place annually at one of the Mixed Tables Dinners. We will continue to hear the challenges spoken by people experiencing homelessness while on outreach, at the monthly lunch, and during focus groups. The document, along with the opportunity for evaluation and feedback, will be available online.

References

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. (2005). Nothing about us without us: Greater, meaningful involvement of people who use illegal drugs: a public health, ethical, and human rights imperative. Retrieved from www.aidslaw.ca

Lived Experience Advisory Council. (2016). Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership and inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press. Retrieved from: www.homelesshub.ca/NothingAboutUsWithoutUs

Norman, T., Pauly, B., Marks, H., & Palazzo, D. (2015). Taking a leap of faith: Meaningful participation of people with experiences of homelessness in solutions to address homelessness. Journal of social inclusion, Vol 6, No 2. Retrieved from: <https://josi.journals.griffith.edu.au/index.php/inclusion/article/view/500/715>

Peer Advisory Committee (2016). YES2SCS's Peer Advisory Committee (PAC) Framework for Drug User Involvement in Harm Reduction.

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