



# 940 CALEDONIA

A Framework for Sanctioned, Self-Managed & Supported  
Encampments for People Experiencing Homelessness

“This is where we start from. All this work.  
We don’t start at the bottom. We have this information here.”

*~Peer Researcher who lived at Central Park & 940 Caledonia*



greater victoria  
coalition to end  
homelessness  
**hope has found a home**

## PURPOSE

June 21, 2019, Bill C-97, containing the federal right to housing legislation, was signed into Canadian law. Currently, there is not enough housing for all people who need and want it. Until there is enough appropriate shelter and housing, there is a need for interim solutions that support people with safe access to basic human needs, shelter, warmth, food, and hygiene.

The documentary *940 Caledonia* highlights the journey of individuals evacuated from an unsanctioned and unstructured encampment in Victoria, British Columbia (BC) to what became a sanctioned, self-managed, and supported encampment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document provides a framework for future encampments, based on participatory action engagement<sup>1</sup> facilitated by the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (GVCEH) and conducted by people with lived experience of homelessness and peers who were living in the encampments. The initial unsanctioned encampment was located at Central Park, and the subsequent, sanctioned encampment was located at 940 Caledonia Avenue, located on the homelands of the Lekwungen Peoples, known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.

This documentary and engagement would not have been possible without the trust, time, patience, and heartfelt work of the folks who stepped into peer researcher roles, and those who participated in the engagement activities. They supported this engagement during an incredibly grim time while experiencing homelessness, stigma, and an unusually cold winter during a global pandemic. They did so with wisdom, kindness, patience, and humour. It is our hope we can reflect their efforts respectfully.

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<sup>1</sup> Engagement to Inform the City of Victoria Policy Regarding Encampments - Engaging People Currently Sheltering Out-of-Doors - Final Report, (Vanchu-Orosco M., Theobald J.) [https://victoriahomelessness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021.04.22\\_GVCEH\\_COTW\\_Report-final.pdf](https://victoriahomelessness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021.04.22_GVCEH_COTW_Report-final.pdf)

## BACKGROUND

Encampments where persons experiencing homelessness shelter are neither uncommon, nor localized to any one community in the province, the country and beyond. Over the years, there have been encampments in Victoria, some clandestine, others more conspicuous, such as the 2016 Super In-Tent City on the grounds of the BC Provincial Courthouse.

In March of 2020, in an unprecedented response to the declaration of a global pandemic, service providers, and shelter operators had to close or reduce the number of people they could serve. People who were couch surfing could no longer stay with friends. We were told to ‘stay home’ and ‘shelter in place’ but because some people had no place to follow these orders, temporary shelters began to pop up in parks and on boulevards in the City of Victoria. Although these locations were unsanctioned, as an interim measure, the City of Victoria paused enforcement of bylaws which prohibit erection of shelters between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. and sheltering on boulevards. Encampments grew and services, such as water and washrooms (portable toilets), food, health care, and harm reduction supports were deployed to the various outdoor sheltering locations through coordinated efforts of the City, the health authority, service providers, community members and grassroots groups.

‘Encampments are touted as sites of increased safety and security by advocates.

As encampments increase in size however, incidents of crime and risk to personal safety can also increase, especially for women and youth.’<sup>2</sup>

*SFU Student Research Series – Homeless Encampments in British Columbia*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as encampments grew, opposition increased. While there were mutual aid, peer support, community, safety, and resources shared and accessible in the encampments, incidents of violence and other crimes were reported within and near the encampments. In an already uncertain time, actual and perceived fears were amplified in community, and through social and traditional media. It became an ongoing challenge to support people to follow public health advice by sheltering in place and to acknowledge the concerns of housed neighbours near the encampments. In response, the City of Victoria passed a Motion to engage people currently sheltering in parks in solution development and creation of encampment guidelines, and to look at the potential benefits of ‘managed encampments.’

GVCEH agreed to facilitate the engagement. Peer researchers were hired and trained, and a plan to engage the approximately 220 people<sup>3</sup> sheltering in the various City parks was created. However, due to team capacity and the November 2020 reinstatement of Provincial Health Orders prohibiting gathering, the focus of the engagement became Central Park, and subsequently 940 Caledonia. The GVCEH did not anticipate this engagement would turn into a case study of a sanctioned, self-managed, and supported encampment.

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<sup>2</sup> SFU Student Research Series – Homeless Encampments in British Columbia (Bhatnagar D., Hartmann J., Mozisek R., Neill T., Williams A.)

<https://www.bchousing.org/publications/Homeless-Encampments-in-British-Columbia-Report-Oct-21.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Homeless to Sheltered – Victoria Updates, BC Housing <https://www.bchousing.org/homeless-to-sheltered-victoria>

## CASE STUDY SUMMARY: CENTRAL PARK/940 CALEDONIA<sup>4</sup> (Sept. 3, 2020 – Mar. 31, 2021)

### Data Collection

- GVCEH hired and trained 13 peer researchers including 7 who were sheltering outdoors and 5 with previous lived experiences of homelessness.
- Peer researchers conducted 18 one-on-one interviews and administered 49 questionnaires to persons sheltering in Central Park.
- Peer researchers conducted 4 focus groups (n=15) with persons sheltering at 940 Caledonia.
- Peer researchers participated in 1 Peer Researcher focus group and debrief.
- GVCEH administered an online questionnaire to North Park housed neighbours of Central Park and 940 Caledonia (n=35).
- GVCEH conducted 1 community association focus group (n=4).

### Engagement Activities & Community Support

- The North Park Neighbourhood Association (NPNA) provided a table with a tent and created a message board at the Central Park encampment, and invited encampment residents to speak at NPNA community meetings.
- Weekly talking circles were held in Central Park (Wednesdays) with encampment residents, service providers, peers, neighbours, Peer Researchers, and NPNA members.
  - Talking circles supported relationship building by sharing experiences and information.
- GVCEH and NPNA held weekly engagement meetings (Thursdays) at the Royal Athletic Park, in September and October.
  - These meetings were structured with agenda items and were an opportunity to create a feedback loop and to report on any action items.
- NPNA collected information through the regular engagements and communications with encampment residents which enabled them to apply for and receive a Red Cross grant.
  - The grant was initially intended to support the Central Park encampment, but ultimately became the key vector for supporting 940 Caledonia.<sup>5</sup>

#### 940 Caledonia

A housed senior from the neighbourhood made sandwiches on Fridays and delivered them tent by tent at Central Park and 940 Caledonia.

#### 940 Caledonia

At one of the engagement meetings NPNA offered to supply pallets to help people get their tents off the ground. A camp resident shared the need to have plywood on top of the pallets to ensure safety in the tents.

“We need staffing solutions for our encampments to show we can come up with solutions.

Give us space to do it: i.e., security, monitoring warming tents, safety.”

“[We] need stipends for people to staff – not other people to doing it for us.”

~Notes from encampment residents at engagement meeting, October 29th

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 1 for full report

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Red Cross Grant Evaluation - Application 1067 (Holtby D., NPNA) [https://npna.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Canadian-Red-Cross\\_-\\_R2Grant-0000001067-Project-Evaluation.pdf](https://npna.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Canadian-Red-Cross_-_R2Grant-0000001067-Project-Evaluation.pdf)

## DEFINITIONS

### Sanctioned

- The city, municipality, or property owner agrees to not enforce bylaws or proceed with removal of tents and temporary shelters.
- People are permitted to set up or erect temporary 24-hour shelters in the location.
  - If shelters are not abandoned, conform to the allocated space allowance, and allow for emergency vehicle access they will not be removed.
- The site needs to be respected and protected as part of whatever neighbourhood it is located.

“Ending Street Sweeps [removal of unsanctioned shelters and belongings] will create an opportunity for the City to foster peer-led programming and initiatives that are directed by people with lived and living experiences of homelessness and reliance on public space.”

~2022 Street Sweeps Report<sup>6</sup>

### Self-Managed

- Sites are not staffed 24-hours.
- Site residents work with municipality or service providers to determine roles in the encampment that will meet the safety and security needs of the encampment residents and surrounding community members.
  - Residents can engage to whatever degree they wish.

### Supported

- Basic needs (24-hour accessible washrooms, handwashing and drinking water, garbage and recycling containers and removal, electrical access or lighting), if not already at the site, are brought to the locations through the city, municipality, or property owner.
- Funding is allocated for stipend or honorarium-based roles.
- Funding is allocated and managed for supplies and in-reach service provision, such as warming tents.
- Service provision is coordinated for in-reach harm reduction, health, social, and peer supports.
- Fire prevention education and supplies are provided.
- Site is attended regularly and consistently by ‘decision-makers’ or their representatives to ensure voices of encampment residents are included in any plans or decisions being made about the location.

#### 940 Caledonia

Resident roles included park liaison, park cleaning team, food delivery, maintenance, and social media.

Warming tent was staffed by a service provider 8 hours a day.

<sup>6</sup> #Stop the Sweeps: Ending Cyclical Displacement & Criminalized Poverty in Vancouver (Mannoe, M.)

[https://assets.nationbuilder.com/pivotlegal/pages/3632/attachments/original/1651281879/2022\\_Street\\_Sweeps\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/pivotlegal/pages/3632/attachments/original/1651281879/2022_Street_Sweeps_Report_Final.pdf)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Advance Planning

Whether encampments for people experiencing homelessness arise out of an emergency, such as a global pandemic or extreme weather, or as an interim response to lack of adequate shelter or housing, strategies need to be developed prior to such events. Many individuals and organizations came together to support the evacuation of Central Park. This was reactive and difficult work. The efforts of community members stepping up in the absence of a coordinated response cannot be understated. It is recommended that:

- All levels of government review current emergency response plans and ensure they include supports for individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Municipalities and regional authorities create planning committees, which include people with lived and living experience, to review existing resources and practices and develop localized plans for interim sheltering locations.
- A coordinator is designated (similar to the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation’s Director, Urban Relationships position <sup>7</sup>) to be responsible for oversight and communication of the ongoing process to set up, maintain and support an encampment. This is best done in collaboration with the service providers, community members and encampment residents; however, one position or body must hold ultimate accountability.

#### 940 Caledonia

Although the NPNA stepped up as good neighbours to support the people initially camping at Central Park, and eventually 940 Caledonia, and even with access financial resources through the Red Cross funding, this was an incredibly taxing effort for this volunteer organization. The efforts were reactive to an emergency and there was not any one agency or organization as a key point of contact for the encampment (refer to footnote 5 for full report).

“Sometimes it feels like the solutions were too late, like the permits for the warming tent, or waiting until after Central Park flooded to move people.”

~GVCEH Peer Researcher

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-vancouver-appoints-official-to-manage-homelessness-in-city-parks/>

## Size and Scale

Only individuals who were residing at Central Park within days of the flooding on December 21st, 2020, were permitted to move to the 940 Caledonia site. This limited the number of residents to approximately 30 people which was serendipitous. It is recommended that organizers keep encampments smaller in size:

- It is easier to make relationships, ensure everyone is safe and accounted for, and to facilitate a rotation for stipend-based roles.
- Allows for adequate spacing in between individual structures and enables access for emergency vehicles.
- Neighbourhoods are (potentially) more welcoming of smaller encampments.

## Communications

A communication structure should be set up with people sheltering at the site to ensure they have the information they need to make informed decisions and are aware of when and how to access supports and services. Recommendations include:

- Weekly (at minimum) camp meetings in a facilitated circle with honoraria and nutritional snacks provided.
- Install a weather-proof message board and calendar for information about service providers and schedules, posting mealtimes and locations, and for message sharing.
- Handbills with upcoming events, contact information, or other information are distributed a week or a few days in advance of an event.
  - Follow-up the day before or day of the event may be necessary.
- Identify messenger residents to ensure relevant information is accurately shared because not everyone will attend circles or receive handbills.

### 940 Caledonia

Residents were asked to maintain a 10-foot by 10-foot footprint for their personal space, as well as pathways that would be wide enough for emergency vehicle access. This reduced the number of visits from bylaw officers which can be disruptive for residents. As time went on, bylaw officers were accompanied by a camp resident who acted as an intermediary and was able to deescalate difficult interactions.

### 940 Caledonia

At 8:30 a.m. there was a daily logistics huddle with camp representatives, Bylaw, NPNA, Victoria Police and service providers. Encampment residents communicated regularly in peer only meetings and noted appreciation for non-resident support and facilitation of the weekly meeting.

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION, PARTICIPATION & AGENCY

“Nothing about us without us”

### Peer Support & Safety

Care for each other and the most vulnerable who are sheltering outdoors is consistently demonstrated in outdoor sheltering locations. The unsheltered community often experience violent bigotry and aggression from housed people in community. They may also experience incidents of lateral violence and predatory behaviours. People who shelter together build community which can protect against incidents of bigotry and aggression. This was demonstrated repeatedly in information collected throughout the engagement and in discussions with the Peer Research Team.

### Security

Lack of nighttime security was an ongoing topic of discussion with the Peer Research Team, as well as a common theme seen in the engagement activities. Peer researchers indicated they would like to have security and de-escalation training to support safety and security in outdoor sheltering locations. After the relocation to 940 Caledonia, 24-hour security was put in place. Additionally, at night, one of the two points of entry to the site were locked. This was met with mixed reviews, while some people sheltering at 940 Caledonia reported feeling more secure as a result, others reported feeling trapped.

### Site Maintenance

Individuals indicated they had a desire to live in and maintain clean sites. Many at Central Park undertook these activities, without being funded or resourced to do so. Consistent requests for more garbage receptacles were brought forward at community circles. Site resident cleaning crews at 940 Caledonia kept the location clear of garbage and cleaned the portable washrooms. Two Site Maintenance positions were created through the Red Cross funding provided by NPNA. Every shelter was elevated on pallets and plywood and were secured against the weather. Shelters were regularly maintained and repaired by people in these positions, including during windstorms, rain, and snowstorms.



## **Contributing to Community**

When asked what skills or talents community members could contribute, answers ranged from hard skills (i.e., carpentry, hair styling, and cooking) to peer and moral support (i.e., making people laugh, and skill sharing). There was a demonstrated desire to contribute to the outdoor sheltering sites, as well as participation in the broader community.

Fifty-five percent of those responding to the Central Park survey indicated they would be willing, with adequate training and resources, to provide services. In fact, two park residents addressed City of Victoria Council on Thursday, November 12th, 2020, and offered to be trained to support facilitation of services in outdoor sheltering locations.

## **Community Events**

Although Provincial Health Orders and the COVID-19 Pandemic were prohibitive for facilitating community events, Peer researchers were keen to hold ongoing activities that welcome all members of the community, whether housed or unhoused.

The NPNA, GVCEH Peer Researchers, and Central Park residents planned and hosted a 'Friendship BBQ' at the Royal Athletic Park on October 22nd, 2020. The event included a panel discussion about collaborative solutions to end homelessness. The panel included two people living at Central Park, an NPNA Board Director, and one person who was living in another City of Victoria park. Most housed neighbours who attended the Friendship BBQ and responded to the online questionnaire agreed it was an important event.

## BASIC NEEDS

### Shelter/Warmth

- Individuals should be able to leave their shelter with the expectation it will be there when they return.
  - Mechanisms to ensure shelter owners can confirm their occupation of a shelter should be created and agreed upon.
  - Items should not be removed or impounded when it is raining or snowing, or when items are wet, due to concerns of them developing mold.
- Individuals should be supplied with adequate materials to protect themselves from cold, wind, rain, sun, and snow.
- Tents and tarps are not sufficient to protect individuals from more extreme weather events and drops in temperature.
- Warming tents are recommended for sites in cooler weather.
  - They serve additional purposes acting as a gathering space and a communications/services/distribution hub with a location for signage and message boards.
  - They can be a location for electrical access.
  - Shading, cooling tents and misting stations should be considered for hot weather.
  - Can be a base for service providers to deliver in-reach supports.



#### 940 Caledonia

Two site maintenance positions were created.

### Water (Drinking & Handwashing)

- Handwashing stations should be installed with enough stations to adequately serve the number of individuals residing at the site.
  - Stations need to be regularly cleaned and stocked with soap.
- Bottled water or cisterns of drinking water need to be available if potable water is not available on site.
  - Potable water stations must be clearly marked as such, as well as marking the non-potable water sources.

## Food

- Provide communal cooking areas with adequate sanitizing and fire safety resources.
- Provide adequate garbage and recycling receptacles to reduce food waste in tents and deter pests and vermin.
- Deliver food to locations where people are sheltering.

### 940 Caledonia

Meals were delivered twice daily to the site and encampment residents were provided an honorarium to deliver meals tent to tent.

## Washroom Facilities (24-hour)

- If 24-hour accessible restroom facilities are not located at the encampment site, enough portable washrooms to adequately serve the number of individuals on-site should be brought in and serviced regularly.
  - Residents should be resourced and supported to do basic cleaning maintenance and stocking of washrooms.

### 940 Caledonia

Residents took care of the washroom. They were reported to be well maintained, cleaner, and had less incidents of graffiti than the portable washrooms at Central Park.

## Shower Access

- If showers are not available within immediate proximity to the encampment, mobile or temporary units will need to be facilitated.
  - If mobile shower units are attending the site, schedules should be posted and shared in handbill form.
  - Temporary units can be maintained by encampment residents through stipend-based programs.

### 940 Caledonia

A mobile shower unit was brought to the site and residents were able to access showers at two nearby service providers.

## Laundry Access<sup>8</sup>

- Laundry access is a key consideration for encampments.
  - Provide supports to transport residents to nearby laundry facilities.
  - Set up a laundry service for residents whereby dirty laundry is picked up, laundered, and returned.

### 940 Caledonia

Residents were able to access laundry facilities at a nearby service provider. When they noted some of the machines needed replacing, they started a gofundme and were able to raise over \$2400 to purchase a new laundry set (see footnote 8).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gofundme.com/f/anawim-house-new-laundry-equipment>

## Health and Harm Reduction

- People with lived and living experience (peers) of substance use are very often the first, and only, responders to overdoses in encampments.
  - Peers need to be resourced and supported to continue to do this life-saving work.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic health outreach teams were developed and deployed to provide health, harm reduction, and mental health supports in the encampments. This collaborative service delivery model was effective and appreciated.
- Static encampments facilitate consistent and ongoing health care access for individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Through the participatory action engagement, people residing at the encampments indicated a desire for ongoing counselling, dental, and medical supports.

“It’s a health condition...44 to 49 years of age, that’s the life expectancy of someone experiencing chronic homelessness in the Province of British Columbia. 44 to 49.”

~in documentary film *940 Caledonia*<sup>9</sup>

## Safety Measures

- Share fire prevention education with residents that includes the rationale for spacing between structures and the need to not have tarps bridging multiple structures.
  - Provide fire extinguishers for every tent and common area.
  - Place sand buckets for extinguishing lit materials, such as cigarettes, around the site.
  - Identify and provide non-combustible heating sources.
- Designate first aid responders and supply them with ample first aid kits.
- Provide encampment leads with cell phones that are regularly charged and pre-paid.
  - Set shifts for key contacts on site.

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<sup>9</sup> Dying on the Streets – Homeless Deaths in British Columbia [https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/megaphone/pages/7/attachments/original/1415231881/Dying\\_on\\_the\\_Streets\\_-\\_Homeless\\_Deaths\\_in\\_British\\_Columbia.pdf?1415231881](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/megaphone/pages/7/attachments/original/1415231881/Dying_on_the_Streets_-_Homeless_Deaths_in_British_Columbia.pdf?1415231881)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The GVCEH is deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to facilitate a community-based participatory action engagement in the encampments in Victoria, BC, in 2020-2021; however, this was not a groundbreaking participatory action engagement. Basic human needs are easily understood. Emergency response plans for extreme weather, fires, or other disasters must include a plan on how to ensure basic hygiene, nutrition, first aid, and medical care are deployed to people who are displaced by these events.

“Like Abraham Maslow said, if the basic necessities are shelter, security, warmth  
– we have none of those, zero – all of our energy is spent just surviving. Period.”

*~Darrin, former resident, Central Park & 940 Caledonia in documentary film 940 Caledonia*

Residents from previous encampments, such as Super InTent City<sup>10</sup> at the Provincial Courthouse and Beacon Hill Park/Meegan in Victoria, and Anita Place in Maple Ridge, BC, have shared their experiences of living in encampments and the contrast between that and the experiences of street homelessness or within some of the temporary sheltering locations. Community-based researchers, activists, health providers, legal advocates, and grassroots organizations have documented these experiences to great extent.

We appreciate and hold up these voices.

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<sup>10</sup> Super Intent City Society <https://intencity.ca/>

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