



# **HERLUMA: A HOMELESSNESS SERVING SECTOR ONLINE WAITLIST APPLICATION – OUTCOME REPORT**

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**Prepared by:**

Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region



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## Herluma: A Homelessness Serving Sector Online Waitlist Application – Outcome

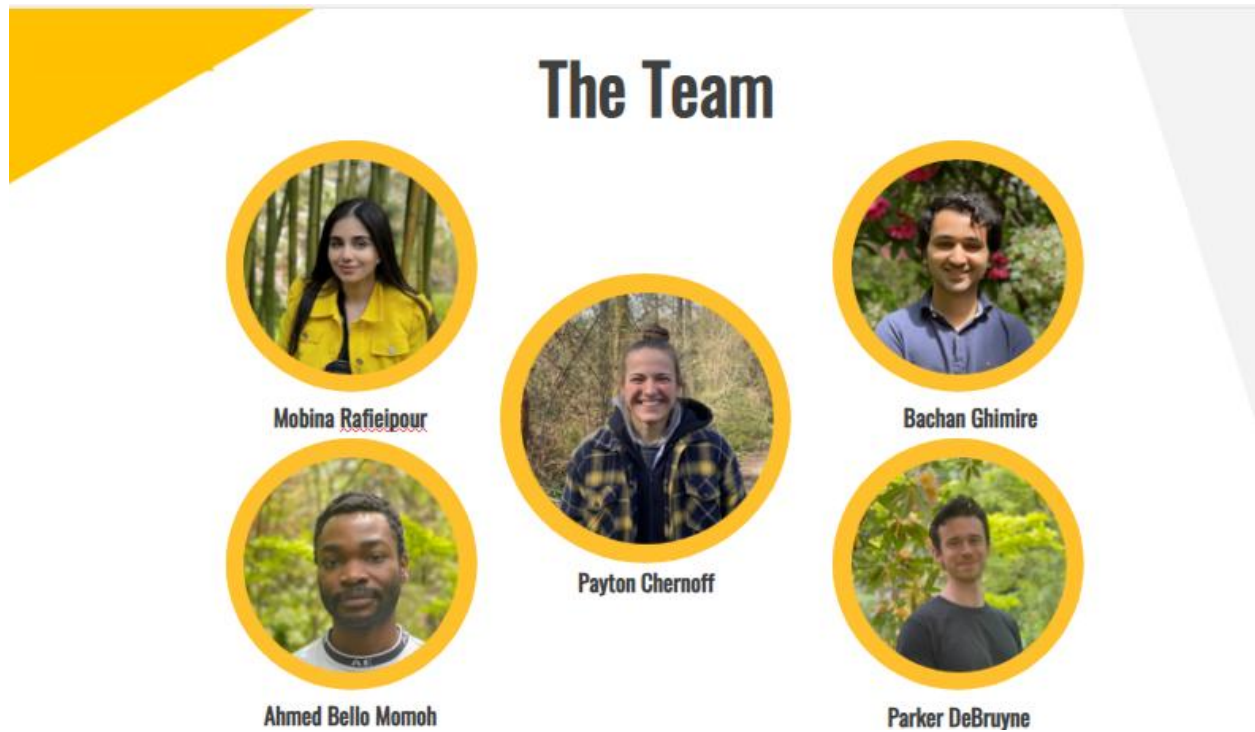
Canada's shelter system often lacks real-time, accessible tools for managing bed availability, waitlists and demographic reporting. As a result, both shelter staff and individuals experiencing homelessness face barriers to efficient service delivery, leading to delays, administrative burdens and missed opportunities for timely support—particularly for marginalized populations such as those identifying as Indigenous, youth, women, and people with accessibility needs.



In April of 2022, the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness, known as the Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region (the Alliance), applied to be part of the first cohort of the University of Victoria's [INSPIRE – STEM for Social Impact](#) program. INSPIRE is a program at the University of Victoria led by the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science in collaboration with the Faculty of Science and Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives (CAPI) with Daniela Damian at the helm. INSPIRE fosters close ties with community, industry and research partners, leveraging the talents of University of Victoria students to solve real-world problems within local communities. The INSPIRE program focuses projects for social good and fosters solutions with positive social impact. By June of 2022, the Alliance began a continuing partnership with the University of Victoria's Computer Science department. During the summer of 2022, Garage Apprentices with the INSPIRE program and the Alliance began work on the herluma prototype application.

During 2023 two of the Garage Apprentices from the herluma project, Parker De Bruyne and Bachan Ghimire, and Dr. Michelle Vanchu-Orosco from the Alliance, met with representatives from BC Housing, representatives from the Ministry of Housing and Canadian MLA Grace Lore who was Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity at that point in time, with an eye to additional funding to develop a herluma working prototype. While this continued effort did not yield the hoped for results, herluma was again picked up as a project for the 2024 fall INSPIRE program. The new herluma team created a working prototype that fall. Since then, Dale Foerster, a University of Victoria computing science student has continued work on refining the herluma application as part of his University of Victoria Entrepreneurial Co-op, further building and expanding the project with outreach to more shelters and possible expansion of the project to transition houses in British Columbia.

**Figure 1:** University of Victoria 2022 Garage Apprentices – the herluma Team



**Figure 2:** University of Victoria 2024 Garage Apprentices – the herluma Team



Diego Enciso (Victoria Native Friendship Centre Shelter Manager) with INSPIRE Garage Apprentices Michelle Rosenthal, Stephanie Askewe and Dale Foerster at the Victoria Native Friendship Centre

## The herluma Application

The herluma application is a digital platform that enables shelter staff to manage bed availability, waitlists and anonymous demographic data in real time by providing emergency

shelter system-level tracking information and capturing the number of individuals who are in need of emergency shelter on a one-time or continuous basis (see [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#) for herluma FAQs and an overview of the application). It is a platform that has been optimized for use by shelter staff and outreach workers, together with information on existing emergency shelter availability for individuals experiencing homelessness.

During the Fall 2024 semester at the University of Victoria, the herluma team of developers worked in close partnership with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC), applying a User-Centred Design approach to ensure the platform met the needs of emergency shelters in Victoria. The agile process involved meeting regularly with the VNFC shelter manager to gather requirements, develop features in response, and then returning to for feedback. This iterative cycle allowed application refinement based on direct input from the VNFC, ensuring changes addressed real shelter priorities. The herluma application has significantly improved the efficiency of shelter staff day-to-day intake processing, allowing them to better serve individuals in need.

"Herluma has had a very positive impact, it's easy to use and had help us to reduce paper use."

The "[c]lient management, wait list" are working well.

The best thing is "[i]ts easy to use approach."

VNFC, 2025

The herluma team has also looked to expand to transition housing (24/7 housing for women and gender diverse individuals experiencing intimate partner violence) with the BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) and transition houses in the Capital Region District (CRD) expressing interest our web-based product.

## Contribution to Changing the Narrative

Using funding from sparq bc, the Alliance has been able to engage the services of the herluma team, with continued funding for a junior developer who has front end and back-end web development experience. With this support, the herluma team has continued to provide customer support, issue resolution, and address technical issues and improve customer experience.

Many individuals have received assistance with accessing emergency shelter through the process. Starting October 17, 2024, VNFC has used the herluma working prototype to ensure that clients had access to the 50 shelter beds available, using the check-in capabilities of the application. This means that up to 50 people had access every night to shelter for the past 342 days. With 265 emergency shelter spaces available in the Capital Region, this number could increase by up to 215 emergency shelter users per night – if all emergency shelter operators participated and were onboarded onto the platform.

The herluma application provides emergency shelter system-level tracking information, capturing the number of individuals who are in need of emergency shelter on a one-time or continuous basis. Further, this information allows us to highlight policy gaps such as

unaffordable housing and structural inequities that are driving homelessness by capturing the number of nights stayed in the emergency shelters in the Capital Region. This in turn may lead to discussion and possible use of shelter-diversion programs and other prevention initiatives.

It is harder to navigate right now. Harder to find available beds, harder to know what barriers could be there. Barriers are keeping people out of shelter.

Lived and Living Experience Council member, 2025

Lived and Living Experience Council member, 2025 likes that people can see a shelter's barriers up-front on the interface.

Lived and Living Experience Council member, 2025

herluma is in the process of expanding its reach to women's transition shelters across BC, and possibly Canada-wide. The application has the potential to provide a real-time method to track transition housing waitlists and create better real time connection between transition houses across British Columbia. This real-time data collection can change the narrative by providing information collected through this expansion to transition housing having the potential to change policy for women and others fleeing intimate partner or gender-based violence in our province and nation-wide.

If you could create or make something that would support your work, what would that look like?

**database or access to bed availability would be great so we can send people in the right direction**

Transition house worker, 2025

What would simplify your workday, make things smoother?

**would be great to have access to open beds so that we can make accurate referrals for crisis line callers**

Transition house worker, 2025

If [our] shelters are full, [our staff] phone other shelters to see if they have availability. [The shelter worker] says herluma could be useful in this instance, to quickly see which other shelters have spots.

Transition house worker, 2025

herluma would be very useful for transition house staff, because they currently spend large amounts of time trying to locate a shelter with availability for a caller.

Transition house worker, 2025



## **Contribution to Increased Knowledge and Action to End Homelessness**

Through sparC BC funding, the Alliance has been able to constructively engage with emergency shelter providers, transition housing providers and persons with lived experience of homelessness, particularly experience using transition housing. This is allowing us to shift the dialog in community as the application has the potential to highlight policy gaps such as unaffordable housing and structural inequities that are driving homelessness by capturing the number of nights stayed in the emergency shelters in the Capital Region. This in turn may lead to discussion and possible use of shelter-diversion programs and other prevention initiatives, which are sorely lacking in the Capital Region.

The herluma team has been working to establish partnerships with outreach organizations and local charities to allow them to use the platform for promoting events such as food drives, community assistance programs, and employment workshops through the herluma Community Forum. While this forum has yet to gain widespread traction, these partnerships can help increase platform adoption while offering more value to individuals experiencing homelessness.

### **Future Opportunities and Pathways**

Although the Alliance and herluma team have made numerous connections with emergency shelter and transition house providers in the CRD, connection with these providers is slow, moving at the pace of relationship-building. Numerous attempts to connect in person, have yielded small, but important, gains in trust that allow us to move the project forward.

Unfortunately, the Alliance will be closing its office doors at the end of September 2025 and will be dissolving by the end of the 2025 year so we will not be able to continue this much needed work.

Although we have had very positive feedback from transition house providers and workers, as well as the BC Society of Transition Houses, we are unable to create a working herluma prototype and onboard transition housing operators, as the Alliance is unable to continue working on this project.

While not all emergency shelter and housing providers we have connected with have signed on to using herluma, they are aware of the herluma application and, with time, we expect they would have incorporated the application into their waitlist processes.

We are hoping to pass on the herluma torch to other organizations before the Alliance is dissolved.

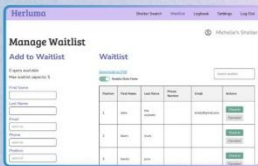
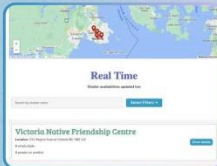


## Appendices

### Appendix A: herluma FAQs


# Did you know?

**Herluma.org** Makes It Simple to View and Share Shelter Availability Across the City



Connecting Every Emergency Shelter in Victoria on One Platform

**Find out more at [Herluma.org](https://herluma.org)**





## About Us:

The Herluma Project is an initiative through UVic's Inspire: STEM for Social Impact program. Partnered with the Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region (AEHCR)

## How to get started:

- 1 Email us at [inspire.herluma@gmail.com](mailto:inspire.herluma@gmail.com) to create an account
- 2 Add your Shelter's Information
- 3 Begin using **Herluma** to manage your logbook and waitlist



## Why Use Herluma?

- Free and easy to use!
- Easily redirect clients when at capacity without having to call multiple shelters to find space.

## Appendix B: The herluma Application

**Herluma**

Community Posts Shelter Search About Contact

### Housing Staff

Login with your shelter's account.

email  
steph.askewe@gmail.com

password  
■■■

[Forgot Password?](#)

Login

Are you a shelter looking to join Herluma?  
[Contact us to create an account.](#)

Want to post on the forum?  
[Create a general account here.](#)

## Features- Emergency Shelter Accounts

### Digitized Waitlist

Add clients to your waitlist, only **their name or alias** is required. Optionally you can add contact information and notes

**Manage Waitlist**

4 spots available  
Max waitlist capacity: 5

[Download as PDF](#)

☒ Enable Data Form

[Clear All](#)

Position	First Name	Last Name	Phone Number	Email	Notes	Actions
1	Client Name	or Alias			Ex: Client has a dog	<a href="#">Check In</a> <a href="#">Cancel</a>

[Cancel](#) [Add to Waitlist](#)

### Optional Feature

Add anonymous demographic information when you check someone in. **Data collected is not associated with any client**

**Anonymous Demographic Information**

Clicking "submit" will add the information stated here anonymously to your database.  
\*You can also close this pop-up to skip this.

Age Range:

Ethnicity:

Gender:

Veteran Status: ☐ Yes ☒ No

Refused/Protected Person: ☐ Yes ☒ No

[Submit](#)

You can enable/disable this form any time by checking/unchecking the "Enable Data Form" checkbox at the bottom of the Manage Waitlist window.

## Features- Emergency Shelter Accounts

### Digitized Logbook

Easily check clients in and out of your shelter

### Manage Logbook

2 of 10 spots filled

[Checked-In](#)
[Checked-Out](#)
[Canceled](#)

[Download as PDF](#)
[Download Anonymous Data Report](#)

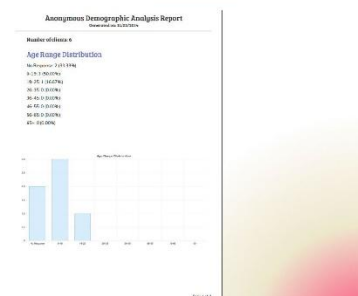
Search for occupants

<input type="checkbox"/>	#	Check-in Date	First Name	Last Name	Phone Number	Email	Duration of Stay (Nights)	Notes	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	Nov 18, 2024	Client 1	Name or Alias			4	Notes transfer from waitlist to logbook	Check-out
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Nov 22, 2024	Client 2	Name or Alias			0	Notes and names are editable	Check-out

Optionally, download an anonymous data report for specified time range

[Download as PDF](#)
[Download Anonymous Data Report](#)

**Start Date:**  
 2024-11-01   
**End Date:**  
 2024-11-30 
[Download PDF](#)
[Cancel](#)



## Features- Shelter Search

### Public Page

Accessible to the public, **no account required**

**Real Time**

Shelter availabilities updated live

#### Victoria Native Friendship Centre

Location: 231 Regina Avenue Victoria BC V8Z 1J6

30 empty beds.

22 people on waitlist.

[Show details](#)

**Updated Daily**

Shelter availabilities updated by calling. Last updated: Nov 22nd, 9:30am

#### Sandy Merriman

Location: 809 Burdett Ave, Victoria

0 empty beds.

2 people on waitlist.

[Show details](#)

### Optional Feature for shelters

If a shelter does not want to digitize their availabilities, they may **modify them on the Shelter Search page** instead

[Waitlist](#)
[Logbook](#)
[Settings](#)
[Log Out](#)

### Modify Your Availabilities

Not using the waitlist or logbook? You can update your availabilities here!

Skip this section if you are using the waitlist and logbook. These numbers will be automatically updated if you start using the waitlist/logbook at any point.

# on Waitlist 
 # of Empty Beds

[Update](#)

## Features- Community Forum

A public page where service providers can post services/clinics/events for the community. These posts are sorted by category. Option to add location, dates, and links to websites.

### My Posts

#### Public Posts

Filter by...

- ✓ All
- Youth and Family
- Food
- Employment
- Health/Hygiene
- Announcement
- Social/Drop-in
- Addictions/Substance Use Services
- Other

**Every Mon/Fri Free**  
Red Cedar Cafe | Food  
Red Cedar Cafe | 1900 Day  
Every Monday and Friday  
offers produce, bread,

**Every Mon-Thurs Quadra Village - Clothing Room**  
Quadra Village Community Centre | Hygiene  
Quadra Village Community Centre-901 Kings Rd, Victoria, BC V8T 1W5 | 2024-12-02  
Monday-Thursday, 9am-3:30pm  
Friday, 9am-1:30pm  
browse free, gently used clothing, shoes and small household items. For everyone, sizes from infant to adult.

**Daily Drop-in space**  
SOLID Outreach | Social  
1056 Heath Park | 2024-12-01  
A safe quiet space that provides refuge from the elements (hot or cold).  
Offers daily groups, harm reduction supplies, health Education, and peer support.

**Every Tues: Food Pantry**  
Quadra Village Community Centre | Food  
Quadra Village Community Centre-901 Kings Rd, Victoria, BC V8T 1W5 | 2024-12-03

< > today

November 2024

month week day

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Daily Drop-in s Weekdays: Ra	Every Mon-Th Every Mon/Tu	Every Tues: F-				