

Journey HOME

Perception vs. reality when it comes to homelessness

The long-term goal of Journey Home is to ensure a coordinated and easy to access system of care for those in Kelowna who have lost, or are at risk of losing their home. There are many perceptions as to why people do not have homes, many of which are misconceptions.

Perception: Homelessness is a choice

Reality: There are many different reasons that contribute to a person experiencing homelessness.

The top five reasons (i):

1. Unable to afford rent or mortgage
2. Household conflict
3. Addiction or substance abuse
4. Job loss
5. Illness or medical condition

Perception: People who are homeless are lazy and don't want to work.

Reality: People who are homeless face many challenges in getting and keeping a job. Without an address it is very hard to apply for work. (ii)

Survival for someone experiencing homelessness requires a constant search for the basics of life including food, shelter and a source of income. With added barriers such as lack of consistent access to a phone, computer, internet, showers, laundry, transportation, and a permanent address, finding and maintaining a job is difficult.

Keep in mind that having a job does not necessarily mean that an individual can afford a rental home or qualify for a mortgage.

Perception: People experiencing homelessness struggle with substance use, mental illness or both.

Reality: Just like in the general population, some people living without homes may struggle with substance use, mental illness or both, but many do not. People living without homes may be dealing with other issues related to homelessness such as trauma, medical illness and grief. (ii)

"Getting kicked out of family, feeling no sense of belonging, connection or purpose. In seeking community, I found a place where people understood me, accepted me..."

– Lived Experience Circle member

DID YOU KNOW...

- The Kelowna 2018 Point in Time (PiT) count indicates that only a small portion (1%) of individuals indicated that being homeless was their personal choice. (i)
- Local research indicates that there are currently 2,036 households earning less than \$30,000 per year and paying 50% or more of their income on shelter costs. (iii)

Homelessness is often a consequence of FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder).

In a Regina study, **100%** of participants interviewed who were diagnosed with FASD had experienced homelessness. (iv)



Perception: It is too expensive to build supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness

Reality: Supportive housing costs nearly 50% LESS than supporting someone who is chronically homeless. (vi)

When a person's basic need for a secure and stable home is met, they are empowered to address life challenges that contribute to homelessness such as the need for employable skills, addressing physical or mental health issues, or escaping violence.

Perception: All panhandlers are people who are homeless

Reality: While some panhandlers are experiencing homelessness, some do have housing and panhandle to supplement their income. (vii)

Perception: People who are homeless sleep during the day in public places because they are usually intoxicated.

Reality: People who are homeless are often targets for violence and theft. They often choose to sleep during the day in public places because they do not have a safe place to sleep at night.

Perception: Families of youth who are homeless should start taking care of their kids.

Reality: Families of homeless youth may be under strain or poverty and unable to provide assistance or proper care. Some youth may not have any connection to their family at all.

The longer youth are homeless, the more they are exposed to the risks of sexual and economic exploitation and the more likely they are to experience trauma, declining health, nutritional vulnerability and addictions. (viii)

The Bottom Line

What we perceive isn't always reality. Everyone has a different life experience – everyone has their story.

What do we want our community story to be? That we shut out members of the community who need help? Or do we want our story to be the acceptance of those suffering and making an effort to connect and provide supports so that they may tap into their passions and strengths and contribute to our community in a meaningful and fulfilling way?

Change starts with each one of us.

We have the power to dispel misconceptions about homelessness.

"I was tossed around. Different foster homes, shelters, group homes, treatment centres and off and on homeless."

– Youth focus group member

DID YOU KNOW...

- The National Youth Homelessness strategy found that 40.1% of participants reported their first experience of homelessness when they were under the age of 16. Understanding the pathways into homelessness coupled with limited experiencing of living independently are crucial steps toward preventing youth homelessness and ensuring that if it does occur, is short and non-recurring. (v)
- There are currently no youth specific supportive housing opportunities in Kelowna.

Kids with child welfare experiences are **193 times** more likely to end up homeless than those who've never had a child protection file case. (ix)

Sources:

- i. Central Okanagan Foundation Point in Time Count (2018)
- ii. <http://homelessnesshub.ca/blog/myths-and-questions-about-homelessness>; <http://stophomelessness.ca/>
- iii. Journey Home Technical Report (2018)
- iv. Brownstone Consulting. Feasibility Study into Housing for People with FASD (2005)
- v. Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Kidd, S. & Schwan, K. (2016). Without a Home; The National Youth Homelessness Survey. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press
- vi. <http://stophomelessness.ca/haw/the-solution/>
- vii. <http://homelessnesshub.ca/resource/should-i-give-money-panhandlers>
- viii. J.F. Boivin, E. Roy, N. Haley, and G. Galbaud du Fort. The health of street youth: A Canadian perspective. Canadian Journal of Public Health, 96[6], 432-437. (2005)