



# Bringing Stone Soup

TO MISSION, BRITISH COLUMBIA

**THE FRAMEWORK FOR RECREATION  
IN CANADA GOALS AND PRIORITIES:**



**SUPPORTIVE  
ENVIRONMENTS**

## CHALLENGES ADDRESSED

In the summer and fall of 2014, communities in the Central Fraser Valley began to engage in a conversation about how best to manage the growing problem of homelessness. In Mission, both social and traditional media began to take note of issues such as visible poverty and behavioural confrontations in the downtown; homeless encampments and tragic deaths near the CNR tracks; open drug abuse and the discarding of bio-hazardous needles in the vicinity of the Mission library and museum; and a growing problem with drug-related crime, coupled with an under-resourced RCMP force. The subject of homelessness became a hot topic in the fall election.

Homelessness has a diverse range of causes, but at its root, it is largely an issue of poverty, which is a lack of resources of every kind. Those resources, or assets, include a supportive social structure around the person; employment and education; physical and mental health services; creative, spiritual and physical opportunities; life and coping skills; and timely access to crisis response services. While the most prominent resource needed is a safe and stable home, a significant number of homeless people have difficulty maintaining a home even when one is available, largely because of converging deficits in these other areas. In Mission, it became apparent that no single agency could be blamed for homelessness or charged with the responsibility of reversing the problem. It was apparent that effectively managing homelessness would demand the will of the community as a whole.

# IMPLEMENTATION

Kirsten Hargreaves, Mission's Manager of Social Development, was seen as a "hub person" with meaningful connections to many of the concerned constituent agencies and community groups, such as the Downtown Business Association, the District of Mission council, the RCMP, and many service agencies. Kirsten was directed to develop a "made-in-Mission" strategy for addressing homelessness. She successfully applied for a small grant and working with Bootstrap Consulting, the concept of Stone Soup was born. The plan was approved by Council in the fall of 2014.

The story of Stone Soup (written by Ann McGovern) is based on the metaphor that we all produce something better by contributing a little to the larger pot. This story captured the idea behind Mission's approach to reducing homelessness, and represented two social development tools: community development and case management.

The Stone Soup initiative involved three phases:

1. Information-gathering and analysis (day-long session with service providers, workshops and interviews with homeless persons and recently housed, public forum, Facebook page)
2. Development of an implementation plan based on City Council's decisions of activities to pursue for final approval by Council
3. Implementation of approved strategies.

One of the activities was a preventative strategy in which recreation, education and leisure programs are designed explicitly to create connections between seniors and adolescents. Both of these groups are particularly at risk of homelessness and alienation. Efforts to create stronger social connections can help people build resilience in the face of a crisis and develop social assets who can help them in times of trouble.

Because Mission does not have a youth centre; the leisure/recreation centre became the one-stop shop. People experiencing homelessness come to the facility. Because mental illness is such a prominent issue, we had to be sure to create a welcoming environment for all people using the recreation centre. All staff were trained in de-escalation, conflict resolution, and with knowledge about emergency contacts if and when necessary.



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It has taken a lot of education for staff because many come with a specific parks and recreation lens. We spent time training staff to think about how we work with others in the community. They are still working on connecting recreation in a more comprehensive way. As a start, when folks come to the recreation centre to get a free meal and resources, they have access to board game tables and they learn about opportunities to participate in free and low cost recreation, including opportunities for funding through KidSport and Jumpstart.

## OUTCOMES

One end result of this was that we were able to determine a very high-level of support from within the general community. A very common response was that people wanted to help - contributing their time, skills or money - but that they did not know how and where to begin. Time and again, people were eager to learn the facts behind homelessness, and people who experienced homelessness demonstrated an eager willingness to share their stories and to dispel the myths that caused them to be stigmatized.

As a result of the Stone Soup information-gathering phase, we were able to acquire a lengthy list of potential approaches, some of which are immediately attainable, while others will require a longer-term strategy.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- The Stone Soup experience is not a template. Every community is different. Find out what is happening in your community, where people are coming from in terms of their understanding and attitudes toward homelessness. Design solutions that work, based on the information you gather.
- Don't be afraid to put the time in. It is a long process and difficult to do when working with politicians who want quick solutions.
- The community development approach gives people hope. Engaging in community development is sometimes seen as "soft skills", but the activities undertaken are important.
- Have the courage to listen to and collect people's stories, and engage them in the process. It isn't just about facts and stats.
- Find ways to share your story across the country at conferences, speaking engagements, etc. Others want to learn about how you did it.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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<b>Framework Goal and Priority</b>	Goal 4: Supportive Environments
<b>Population Addressed</b>	Individuals experiencing homelessness
<b>Community</b>	Mission, British Columbia (population 40,000) Located in the Fraser Valley on the mainland; 70% of working residents commute outside Mission (70 km to Vancouver) 5 Reserves; Mission is the site of the last residential school in Canada (1980s)
<b>Setting</b>	Suburban
<b>Lead Implementer and Organization</b>	Kirsten Hargreaves, Manager of Social Development, Parks, Recreation and Culture
<b>Key Partners</b>	Community NGOs, municipal government, social services, public health
<b>Activity Focus</b>	Dealing with homelessness, a strategy involving recreation
<b>Stage of Development</b>	Ongoing