



# LABOUR MOBILITY IN A RURAL SETTING

Canada



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and the Province of British Columbia.

## FINAL REPORT

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## Supporting Principle

An initial review of literature on unemployment and Labour mobility revealed a recurring issue, one that seemed to mask other concerns. In seeking to uncover a framework with which to approach this multi-factorial investigation, it became evident that the frameworks in which we carry on regular discussion about a given issue were themselves active parts of the issues. This implicated the language we use to understand them. Among other things, that meant that an oblique approach was called for.

It also meant that the community would be participating in a way that many residents would not find comfortable, as it challenged the current dialogues about “community”. These considerations supported the search for a positive lens on the results.

## The Mission

The mission of this project was to create and report on an open-ended dialogue with a rural community about what has held up its progression to a more prosperous economy. The task was to explore the larger issue about Labour mobility within the provincial setting through the lens of a rural setting.

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## Executive Summary

Labour mobility in Canada is commonly thought of as movement between provinces for work, however in the last thirty years, BC's already diverse portfolio of industries has outgrown that 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding. The periodic migration of workers between BC and Alberta is no longer enough to satisfy demands for Labour, or skilled Labour; nor is immigration. The term 'Labour mobility' refers to the ability of workers to move between industries as needed. This usage of the term is congruent with the usage in economics, and is one way to describe the health and productivity of a given economy.

Labour mobility is a means by which an economy remains dynamic and in a state of growth, as opposed to stagnant and unprofitable. Along with innovation, Labour mobility permits wage growth and price stability, which fosters consumer spending among other beneficial activities. The general dynamism that comes with Labour mobility and innovation has another, perhaps more important, effect: It changes the way business owners and consumers evaluate risk. When the economy is vibrant and dynamic, people feel better about switching careers, or exploring new career options. Young people move about more. When the economy is seen as precarious and unstable, businesses and people take fewer risks. People hang onto jobs they might otherwise leave, and businesses spend less money on innovative products or practices. Over time, that lack of dynamism becomes a narrative by which people, companies, provinces or countries are evaluated by others.

Even more problematic, the narratives can take on a life of their own and become a dominant perception, possibly even referred to as "common sense"<sup>1</sup>. When such a narrative becomes the main talking point, it can be difficult to work past, and competitors will take advantage of it. The narratives we use have a reciprocal impact on productivity, creating a 'social mechanism' by which a person, a business, or an entire economy, can either grow or grow stagnant. Labour mobility is a concern central to the BC economy, and the fortunes of the rural city of Castlegar seem to outline both a significant threat, and the means by which the threat is defused.

### ○ **Major Findings:**

- Labour mobility is sensitive to social needs, and therefore to perceptions of risk and economic downturn. This sensitivity appears to be reciprocal in action, and central to productivity.
- Productivity is a mechanism by which economic depression is mediated. This also seems to be a reciprocal relationship.
- Housing shortages play a central role in Labour mobility.
- Housing and Labour mobility are strongly influenced by local and regional policies.
- Policies are reciprocally influenced by perceptions of community dialogues, but not equally so.
- Perceptions of community dialogues tend to be mediated and moderated by the media, but also by dialogues within the community.
- There appears to be a multi-level interaction between national, provincial and local dialogues.

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<sup>1</sup> Globalism, for example.

- **Recommendations:**
- That each community foster and promote a community-centric culture. This idea replaces the out-dated 'every man for himself' narrative that still pervades Canadian culture.
- That each community should alter dialogues of homelessness and poverty to dialogues of productivity and Labour mobility. Removing the stigma makes these pervasive issues into what amount to problem-solving exercises.
- That each community resolve the housing crisis by creating a more fluid and sustainable inventory of rentals and market housing.
- That the research community in general should conduct further inquiries into the global aspects of dialogue in terms of how they impact local economies.

## Introduction.

The process of outlining the activities of a project such as this usually involves a strict reduction to a single activity that may result in an impact on a specific problem. In the case of Labour mobility, this appears, at first, to simply reduce to local housing inventories, but upon further inspection redirects to dialogues about the community. On one level, the dialogue is about why one type of housing gets built and not other kinds. On another related level, dialogue concerns why local regulations about housing and development cannot change, which often reduces to who needs to change their mind about it. On a different but related level, the dialogue may be about who actually gets hired by local businesses, and why some people don't. When seeking the appropriate reduction to investigate, we are presented with a myriad of equally influential factors that are all responsive to the way they are discussed. The dialogue becomes the lowest common denominator, and therefore the factor to investigate.

The City of Castlegar has undertaken to give the community an "open for business" feel for some time, as well as a 'family-friendly' appeal. The City and the community are both anxious to see the growth that, by any estimate, should have been happening. Upon a review of pertinent literature, it seemed that the structural and fiscal factors would not be explanatory for any delay of that growth. For example, the City website makes a solid case for why new people may wish to move to it, and does not require hype to do so, yet the growth has not increased for decades.

Some portion of that issue is a common one all over BC. People are flocking away from rural locations. Castlegar is not unique, in that way. The question of what might be holding this pattern in play, therefore, was a timely one to investigate.

## Background

As both a resident of the community, and Coordinator of the local Homeless Partnering Program, the Author had occasion to question the necessity of many of the issues that were presented. In particular, the number of people requesting resources from the HPP office prompted questions about how so many capable people could be struggling so much. On one hand, all of the usual dialogue about 'these people' was not merely wrong, but inappropriate. On the other hand, as mentioned, there didn't seem to be any structural or fiscal reasons for such common struggles. Again, it seemed to come down to how the dialogue fell out within the community.

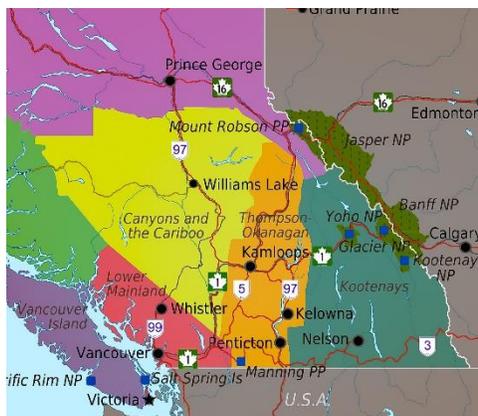
In speaking with long-time residents and community figures, the Author was presented with the guarded reticence to speak about these issues on any level. Such reticence has turned out to be a common finding in social research. A direct inquiry was not indicated, since people were only willing to offer popular, or politically correct, answers. In order to obtain a more useful result, a less direct methodology was undertaken.

In the report that follows will be found a general description of the community as well as the dialogues that appear to be most influential regarding Labour mobility in a rural setting. The results do not reduce to a specific element or dynamic, but are informative, and outline a need for further study.

## Regional and Local Descriptives

### A Community of Contrasts.

The community in which this project took place is geographically central in the Kootenay region<sup>2</sup>. It is comparable to any other rural city in BC in that it is a picturesque location, has good access via highways to most trade routes, enjoys proximity to several popular ski resorts and is well placed for numerous recreational pursuits. A major pulp mill, the main employer, is within sight of the town, and the other main employer, the largest smelting operation in BC, is a twenty-minute commute. Additionally, there is a thriving forestry products industry close by, hydroelectric dams, as well as manufacturing and telecommunications. Due to recent Telus upgrades, this town has state of the art connectivity.



The Kootenay region occupies a less-than-central location in BC. It is tucked into the lower eastern corner of the Province, almost fenced in by the US border and the Rocky Mountains. The population is comparatively small, 143,000, divided into three sections of 58K, 57K and 31K. Each section is separated by mountain passes that are sometimes difficult in winter conditions.

The separation extends further than just the geography. In searching statistics about the cities and the three Regional Districts, it was found that descriptives were mostly available through the Census, such that housing data per city was not

recent, if it was available. BC Housing surveys largely record information regionally. CMHC data was neither recent, nor specific to cities in the region. Even Statistics Canada has limited data on the cities in this region, with a number of tables narrowing down to Nelson, or Cranbrook. Castlegar does not exist on Kijiji, for example. Specific data for housing and other descriptives were derived through local initiatives such as Castlegar’s 2018 Housing Needs Assessment (City Spaces Consulting, 2018). The relatively small population is divided

| Characteristics                               | Castlegar, City |      |        |
|---|-----------------|------|--------|
|   | Total           | Male | Female |
| Population; 2016                              | 8039            |      |        |
| Population; 2011                              | 7816            |      |        |
| Population percentage change; 2011 to 2016    | 2.9             |      |        |
| Total private dwellings                       | 3655            |      |        |
| Private dwellings occupied by usual residents | 3499            |      |        |
| Population density per square kilometre       | 408.6           |      |        |
| Land area in square kilometres                | 19.67           |      |        |
| Total - Distribution (%) of the population    | 100             | 100  | 100    |
| 0 to 14 years                                 | 14.6            | 15.4 | 13.7   |
| 15 to 64 years                                | 62.3            | 64   | 60.6   |
| 65 years and over                             | 23.2            | 20.7 | 25.6   |
| 85 years and over                             | 3.7             | 2.5  | 4.8    |
| Average age of the population                 | 44.9            | 43.6 | 46.2   |
| Median age of the population                  | 46.7            | 45.4 | 48     |

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. 2017. Census Profile, 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Technically, the three cities in this description are “small urban centers” and not rural, but the distinction is artificial from a rhetorical perspective. Speaking rhetorically, they are not urban the way Kelowna is, so qualify as rural.

among a number of cities under 12,000 people. Between them are a myriad of much smaller towns and rural places marked, perhaps, with no more than a local store/post office. Within that general description, each city, town and general location have developed unique characters, even if geographically close to each other. In contrast to what may seem like a forgotten, out-of-the-way region, the roads and highways are in relatively good repair.

In 2020 it is expected that the population of Castlegar will reach 9,000, and is projected to reach 16,000 within twenty years (City of Castlegar, 2018). The population growth between 2011 and 2016 was 2.9%, while for the Kootenay Region it was 1.8% and for BC generally it was 5%. The nearest comparable city, Nelson, was 3.3%. The other comparable city, Trail, was 0.4%. Castlegar has attracted some 230 new residents over a five year period. This is reflected in the number of housing starts reported by the City: 20 housing starts in 2019, which is reported as 100% over the previous year.

Castlegar cannot be described accurately without the contrasts to the nearest towns, Nelson and Trail. All three were settled and developed in the same era but exhibit considerable differences in character. Those differences offer rich details about this city.

*“Today Nelson serves as the busy centre of West Kootenay government, arts, tourism, commerce, small manufacturing and home-based business.”*

*(Lamb, 2020)*

The City of Nelson, for example, inhabits a bohemian character that attracts a lively, bustling business community, and also an unfair share of transient homelessness (BC Housing, 2018). Trail is a “blue-collar” city, as its residents will readily admit, and has an unfair share of criminal activity (Appendix F).



Picture 1: Facebook group meme. No attribution.

*“The city of Trail had become a lasting legacy to the modest visions of E.S. Topping and Frank Hanna in 1890.”*

Trail Historical Society web page

*(Trail Historical Society, 2019)*

Castlegar, on the other hand, comes with no such ready-made character, and its history is made of a loose assortment of individuals, the historic Doukhobor settlement, and the Keenleyside dam on the Columbia River, where the Zellstoff Celgar pulp mill is<sup>3</sup>. It is where the Kootenay River joins the Columbia, and it is where the major highways in the region converge. Castlegar’s elevator pitch is that it is the hub of the Central Kootenay Region. It is also notable that unlike the other two cities, Castlegar has a conspicuous lack of homelessness, transient and criminal presences.

<sup>3</sup> Marketing, from the City as well as the Chamber of Commerce, accurately describes Castlegar as an engaging and beautiful place. Those official narratives correctly ignore the unofficial ones, but the purveyors of the unofficial narratives

Nelson, incorporated in 1897, is where the ornate architecture of previous-era government buildings can be found and naturally has held that unofficial seating in the minds of people in the region<sup>4</sup>. Trail, incorporated in 1901, similarly became the place of industry because of the smelting operation. Castlegar, although settled within the same era as Trail and Nelson, and also bustling with industries, did not incorporate until 1946, and not as a city until 1966.

### Services

Although Castlegar is geographically central, services in the region are not centralized there. Service Canada maintains offices in Nelson and Trail, but not Castlegar. The School District main office is in Trail. The Regional District of Central Kootenays offices are in Nelson. The two main hospitals are in Nelson and Trail, while Castlegar has an Interior Health unit for mental health and addictions<sup>5</sup>.

Castlegar has an array of social services for youth, the unemployed and other demographics. The organizations and non-profits who supply the services have stated that gaps exist; no emergency shelter, and not enough beds for women fleeing abuse, among others. A particular gap which supported the present study was the lack of systemic options for the chronically under-employed, or unemployed. Work BC, through its contracted office in Castlegar, has a wide array of services available to help people find jobs, but as yet there exists no system other than the passive online job listings and in-person coaching. Recently, the Ministry of Advanced Education has put contracts into place with local providers to supply help for workers over the age of 55, as well as people who have suffered trauma. Those programs have been awarded in Trail, and Nelson, but not Castlegar.

### Housing

The City of Castlegar has commissioned two housing reports in the last ten years, one in 2012/13, and one in 2018. The 2018 report outlined gaps in housing and listed some of the differences between the findings of each report. It found that between 2012 and 2017, no new rental construction took place, and that vacancy rates for all types of rentals went down by 1.4%.

Although the report did record an increase in rental rates, it was the case that subsidized rates were included in the calculations<sup>6</sup>. The report suggested that average rentals increased to \$742, but in late 2018, the Homeless Partnering Program office regularly found rates far higher. In 2019, the HPP office reported in its August “Point in Time count” that it was not uncommon to find bachelor suites renting for as much as \$800 to \$1,000 per month. It was found that three-bedroom houses could rent from \$1600 to \$2,000 per month; rooms, in shared accommodations, for \$500 to \$700 per month. As of February 2020, that situation had not changed.

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do not, and that is what this project is concerned with. The meme presented above is a cute, but accurate portrayal of common local dialogues.

<sup>4</sup> Conversation with local residents.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, the local MLA had announced a new emergency and critical care unit, set to open at the beginning of April, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> It could be argued that the report does not separate “market” rates from “non-market”. The difference is that not everyone can qualify for the non-market rates. It was not germane to the City Spaces report, but that breakdown further illuminates the ongoing dialogues reported. A clear result of the apparent lack of housing construction activity was a dramatic increase in subsidized housing.

It was reported that the sale prices of single-detached homes, as well as apartments increased between 25% and 39% from 2016 to 2018. The sale price of apartments went down 14%, but it is reasonable to factor the age of the structures into that calculation. In that time, non-market housing increased by nearly 400 units, and, *“The number of individuals and families receiving subsidies through BC Housing’s Rental assistance (RAP) and Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) has increased from 53 recipients to 385 recipients”* (City Spaces Consulting, 2018).

The 2018 report emphasized “Main Housing Gaps” including independent senior’s rentals, private rental housing and “non-market” rentals (such as subsidized BC Housing apartments), “transitional and low-barrier rental housing”, as well as ownership and general accessible housing<sup>7</sup>.

This description of Castlegar is very brief, and other reports such as the “Community Profile Report” (Applied Research & Innovation Center, 2018) offer a much more detailed look at the community. However, those reports are descriptive in a marketing-driven fashion, and tend to miss a sense of who the community is, or wants to be. Any reasonable and factual analysis of the city of Castlegar will find that it has everything needed to grow in the same fashion that other cities in BC have. While it is true that this community has been affected by provincial and national economic trends, like anywhere, it simply hasn’t grown commensurate with its potential. Just like the analyses of the recession, and the Great Depression (Oulton, 2018), it will be found that the fiscal and structural reasons were not enough to explain the dampened growth. It was deemed worthwhile to investigate other potential contributions to the situation.

## Methods and Rationale

This project was an “inductive” study, embedding in the community dialogue itself, as a subjective element, for the purpose of making observations. A “deductive” study, involving investigation of cause and effect relationships, was not indicated because of the paucity of research on this subject from which to outline a dynamic to investigate. It was also the case that the complexity of interaction between cultural narratives could be viewed as a confound to any narrowly focused deductive framework.

As other research has found, people are reluctant to offer input in any discussion that is not overtly approved in their community. The central question of this project, *“How has the lack of Labour mobility hampered economic growth?”* was not conducive to regular community dialogue, yet *“What is holding up progress here?”* was the kind of question that people would not want to speak directly to. Both questions held the potential to raise historical debates, which carried an unnecessary risk of liability. An indirect approach was needed, but also a very general one. The project could look at dynamics applicable anywhere instead of actual, local events. Therefore, it was expected that the project would generate some interest at first, and then because the topic and the treatment of it had no social safety factor<sup>8</sup>, would cause people to distance themselves from it.

A survey tool was identified as a means by which a dialogue with a community of divergent interests could be carried. A number of authoritative sources identify “workshops”, “stakeholder meetings” and “focus groups” or community forums as a means of conducting such a dialogue. Social

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<sup>7</sup> In 2020, the City announced two new multi-family unit projects totalling nearly ninety new units.

<sup>8</sup> I.e., did not conform to expectations within the community.

media and traditional media are also a means by which a community might address a topic. All of those methods have qualities that may offer a sense of accomplishment, but in fact have negligible effect sizes.

A survey method was familiar, passive, and anonymous, but also had a social safety factor to it, in that respondents could participate without offering any social capital in return. Survey questions were used to prompt dialogue and gather insights about common attitudes in this community. The questions were divided into sections referred to as “Community”, “Housing”, “Employment” and “Unemployment”. The questions and response options paraphrased popular opinions such as “Not In My Back Yard” and offered respondents choices between differing and contrasting options. Questions also posed opportunities for respondents to consider new and untapped aspects of dialogue pertinent to the presented issues. For example, the question of what respondents paid for secure housing contained options such as “relationship” or “chores”, providing a chance to wonder about the real extent of housing issues as others may be impacted by them. Embedded within those questions would be a survey on stigma taken from a study at the University of Western Illinois. It was in these ways that the survey compelled respondents to question the meaning of “community”.

Respondents would self-identify as one of five cohorts: *Youth*, *Property Owners*, *Business Owners*, *Institutional* or *General*. This was not merely for reasons of comparison, but also because many pertinent questions were simply not relevant across cohorts. For example, it was considered important to have business owners question housing issues, but this cohort very likely experiences housing security. Respondents chose *General* if they were residents over the age of 29, who did not own property or businesses. Respondents chose *Institutional* if they were residents, but were employed or managed in a social service capacity, yet did not identify as business or property owners. The survey, from an online platform, offered optimal reach as well as interactivity.

Social media was a chosen medium for this project. Facebook was used as the secondary source of interaction. A business group page was created, on which posts about the project were made, and respondents could ask questions. This town had numerous other Facebook pages, many of which enjoyed prodigious activity, but the project did not attempt to use them, and they did not reach out.

This project made liberal use of in-person meetings with key influencers as well as local media, group meetings when available, and a focus group under the guise of “crowd-sourcing analysis”. It was expected that the sum of these efforts would have a bigger impact than any one medium alone. In addition, liberal use of research data from “EBSCO” online databases assisted in describing Labour mobility, as well as in locating the present dialogues within the global mosaic of them.

## General Survey Results

Respondents were given the following definition of inclusion,

*"A general policy of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of creed, color or status, are able to participate in community, culture and society, that all people are free from social rejection."*

They were then asked several questions such as “Have you ever experienced rejection from local public places?” and “Have you ever felt excluded from a social relationship or social interaction” based on

choices of Mental Health, Age, Social Status, Gender, and Race. Nearly 20% of all respondents reported that they had experienced rejection from public places, and felt excluded based on one or more of the offered criteria. Interestingly, none of the cohorts exclusively chose “No”, and the spread across reasons people felt excluded seems to indicate some comfort with those variations of stigma.

The survey asked about their experiences of physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual harassment and sexual abuse, asking “Experienced”, “Witnessed”, “Both” or “None”. These questions were included to try and get a sense of how dangerous, or hostile, the community was<sup>9</sup>. A positive result would have indicated a source for any supposed toxic dialogues. The results do not support any notion that this community experiences more than other places, or appreciably less. They indicate that a number of residents continue to have negative experiences here, but it is unwarranted to think of Castlegar as a hostile community. However, no cohort exclusively chose “None” as a response.

A sizable portion of respondents from all cohorts reported that they had experienced poverty, homelessness, as well as living in their car, couch surfing, going without food for a day or more, among other things. In other words, the survey results did not validate any consistent differentiating characteristic within the cohorts. No single result suggested it was because of being a business owner, or property owner, for example.

The subject of stigma was approached using a standardized questionnaire, developed at the University of Western Illinois (Zellman, Madden, & Aguiniga, 2014), designed to test the attitudes of social work students toward mental health. The results are hesitantly considered an analog for stigma in general<sup>10</sup>. The respondents in this survey answered in a uniform fashion, indicating that although they tend to think positively about people with mental health issues, concerns still exist. For example, most Respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “*Working with people with mental illness would be rewarding*”, and they strongly disagreed that, “*People with mental illness are not smart enough to do most jobs.*” However, there was more agreement than not that, “*People with mental illness are difficult to work with,*” and “*I would not want others to know I was receiving mental illness services.*”

Respondents who owned businesses were not asked employment questions, but were asked about staff turnover, training procedures and other business-related items. As mentioned above, most respondents of this survey did not express concerns about mobility or the need to move elsewhere for work. However, a considerable portion of them indicated that they could not afford to quit their jobs if they wanted. Asked about the chances of moving to a better job in Castlegar, over 50% indicated “No chance” or “Poor”; the same for the chances of moving to a better position at their present job. Asked to rate the staff turnover at their work, most indicated “Low” or “Very Low”, but a considerable number indicated, “It’s a Concern” or “I worry about this constantly.”

Respondents were asked three “Community” questions, the aim of which was a simple poll of how many residents would actually respond to the common refrain, “Not in my back yard”, which is

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<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada, and the Canadian media typically uses the “Crime Severity Index” for this. The CSI, however, was intended as a survey of what crimes Canadians think are worse compared to others. The information is used by Judges in the sentencing of convicted criminals, so that sentencing is congruent with the values of the people.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix

often shortened to the acronym, “NIMBY”. The questions included, “*How do you feel about the issues of poverty and food insecurity?*”, “*How do people become homeless?*”, and “*What should be done about poverty and homelessness?*”. Very few respondents indicated “Not my concern” for the first question, and equally few indicated “Not in my back yard” or “No fault of mine!” The majority either indicated that they “felt powerless”, or that they “Were not sure but there must be something we can do” in response to the third question.

## Limitations

The main limitations of this project were the timing, and the need for more investigation of this methodology. Ideally this particular survey is best applied between May and October for several reasons. BC Housing is now collecting yearly “Point in Time” Counts all over BC, and these are typically done between late February and Mid April. This activity is a confound, because awareness of the pertinent issues could be attributed to it. Between October and Late February, the national “Coldest Night of the Year” fundraiser is operating, and is a confound for the same reasons. By putting this project between May and October, project organizers can evaluate where respondents are hearing about the issues, and reasonably suggest that the survey tool was the effective messaging agent. The present project started in June, with the survey collecting responses by August, and finishing in October. There remains some reason to suggest that the Survey was the effective messaging agent in this community, but during the operative period of the survey, homelessness became an urgent and continuous message on BC news services, making it tenuous to lay a compelling claim.

It is maintained that this methodology is both effective and warranted when the population surveyed is reticent to speak about an issue. In cases such as bullying in middle schools, or institutional bullying, or immigration issues in non-urban settings, this oblique approach may be the most effective tool for gathering information. However, a more involved approach to the method is warranted; that is to say, more attention should be paid to the overall production in an overt fashion. The suggestion is to ‘double-down’, so to speak, on the display of building the survey on a given topic in a given location. Any use of this method should involve press conferences to hype the value of the survey, along with panel discussions by experts to create a greater ‘buy-in’ from the respondents. A greater use of focus groups and public forums are suspected to promote more involvement from the population under study.

This project was limited by the single researcher, with a very limited budget. While the expected antipathy did attract many respondents, and provided insights, it was felt that a more socially approved approach, with a larger team of researchers, would yield more compelling results. The only caveat to these suggestions, is that they carry a greater risk of socially approved responses, a confound that would require planning for in advance.

Another limitation was not accounting for local community influencers. Even a small project like this one has political value, and people would make use of it if possible. In this case, the observations make up a part of the goal of the project, but it is advisable to spend time illuminating the local political landscape prior to running future projects. This suggestion also holds true for institutional elements at the regional and provincial levels.

## Discussion

A fact that keeps coming up, in research literature as well as outreach projects, and among stakeholders during the processes of LMP's such as this one, is that the social and economic problems that keep cropping up were neither surprises, nor mysteries. It remains true that we have known what to do about homelessness and unemployment, Labour mobility and productivity for decades if not an entire century. It is a point that was not lost on the people of Castlegar either, as they completed the survey.

Poverty and homelessness are not new, but any dialogue that is overtly contrary to the traditional media representation is new. The idea that a homeless individual does not conform to the images that used to be thrown around in the media is new. The recognition that old ideas are not accurate in the context of economics is new. Framing a dialogue is *not* new, but acceptance that it may have a big impact on the fortunes of a rural community, is. The community of Castlegar finds itself in the midst of those major changes.

In analyzing the survey results, it did not seem as though the changes were difficult for the Respondents, but only that many of them hadn't truly considered themselves in a community. They lived in or near Castlegar, but the identification with it was either missing, or had become a "Reverse-identification"; that is, individuals had learned to identify *against* the community. Any direct discussion with people seemed to come around to their personal experiences or those of family or people they knew and described events or instances that validated their perspective. It was one way that dialogue with the community could be accessed.

One interesting result of the survey was that very few respondents indicated a "Not in my back yard" response. Likewise, almost none suggested they did not care about the issues in some way. Rather, nearly all respondents indicated that poverty and homelessness was a failing of society, which is suggestive, if not compelling, that most people think of it as everyone's problem. Given a short list of common explanations about how people become homeless, it turned out almost nobody believed it was about working harder. The respondents may not understand how these issues occur, but they are certain that it is not just a personal failing.

Together, the results of the stigma questionnaire and the inclusiveness questions suggest that this community has suffered from a lack of attention to the factors that maintain cohesiveness. Membership has become a politicized ideal. People are anxious to be on the right side of perceptions. They feel isolated and many are anticipating stigma. Many others are simply reverse identifying, creating a bank of negative perceptions that are easily validated. Polarizing agents have an easy time generating controversy in what becomes an excessively politicized social environment. Again, they are not conclusive, but these results do suggest that those who are feeling stigmatized may be perceiving their social environment accurately.

In a climate of housing insecurity, and price-gouging in the rental market, these survey results become a serious consideration. In a general climate of economic uncertainty, people are going to remain cautious in their movement and spending. The social environment is already carrying a burden

of stigmatized residents. The additional stressors of housing and employment will not be seen as helpful and may serve as validation of stigma.

By itself, a project such as this could be no more impactful than its reach within the community. Even in the best case, however, any further outcomes would be moderated by the resulting dialogue, and by who does or does not feel the need to be persuaded by them. For example, ostensibly any authority would be motivated to alter policy to insure that people could work, or move from job to job as needed, simply to foster a dynamic economy for its own sake. In that way the real issues identified by the community in this survey would cause some remedial response where needed. In the case of this small urban center, the competition between the majority, who wish to become a vibrant community, and the few who benefit from internal divisions, will be played out in community dialogue and reflected in public policy.

### Productivity

Labour mobility in non-urban regions, although it has been identified as an issue before, has not enjoyed major change. The reasons for that would be a matter of speculation except that research in the past century has eliminated the structural and fiscal reasons supporting economic downturns.

The mechanism by which cultural dialogues can harm economic growth is productivity, and it is the case that this mechanism is no blunt instrument. Productivity is sensitive to culture whether the topic is a small business, a large business, an immense corporate edifice, a stock exchange or a community. The discussions about economic depression and recession seem to come down to productivity because it is by the confidence of the average person, in the security of their job and working life, that profits across the economy are realized. It can easily be seen, therefore, how community divisions harm the ability to profit across all demographics, from the impoverished to the most wealthy.

*According to standard growth theory since Solow, in the long run the growth of TFP  
(Total Factor Productivity) drives capital accumulation and the growth of Labour  
productivity.  
(Oulton, 2018)*

The article quoted above suggests that the recession caused widespread lack of confidence, which ultimately caused the business community to reduce the activities that promoted growth prior to the recession. The fiscal reasons, as well as the physical and structural reasons for the long-term slowdown, were not enough to explain the extent to which the slowdown occurred. This suggestion is reflected in similar analyses of the Great Depression of the 1930's. Social considerations, such as perception of events, perceptions of popular narratives, 'herd behaviours', and other phenomenon common to social groups, seem to play a much larger role in economics than is popularly noted.

Nor should it be surprising to find that stigma, whether perpetrated by any loose group of people, or by an institution such as universities, or traditional media, can have a lasting and serious impact on economy. A research study of a district in the city of Limerick, Ireland (McNamara, Stevenson, & Muldoon, 2013), found that the community in question had a well-publicized negative reputation in the local media, which justified the rationale for the study. In British Columbia, the

citizens of Surrey may well have a similar complaint about the local media. As with Labour concerns, there is some question of why stigma persists in spite of the increased awareness over time.

The Limerick Study found that the ability of an individual to identify with a community as a member was a powerful mediator against adversity, and a predictor of personal well-being, while barriers to such positive identification, such as stigma, led to “...*disengagement of identity-related collective action.*” Individuals were less willing to identify as a member of the community, and less willing to associate with pro-community activities, where it could cost them social capital. In that community, the stigma was important enough that residents seeking work commonly told employers and co-workers that they lived elsewhere.

In a study on concealed stigma, participants with a criminal record were shown to anticipate stigma, and therefore withdraw more from “*situations in which there is a potential for discrimination*” (Moore & Tangney, 2017). It was found that pre-release anticipation predicted post-release adjustment up to 1 year. Other studies have shown how the stigma associated with high-profile crimes can affect the identity-formation of a community for decades after the event. Still other research has shown how the perceptions of actual and potential stigma can affect peoples’ evaluations of risk. Considering the potentially widespread negative effects of stigma on a community, social dynamics and community cohesion seem to be a basic aspect of economic policy.

Aside from anecdotal reports, and some historical examples that are suggestive but not evidentiary, there is no record of stigma surrounding the community of Castlegar. Unlike Limerick, Gloucester, or Surrey, there is no media coverage of the relative popularity of Castlegar, or of any issues relating to community cohesion, crime or economic uncertainty. Just as with racism, and other common social issues, the stigma and negative community dialogues here are mainly known by their effects, and those effects are evident in the relative lack of growth.

A new dialogue around the idea of productivity remains a viable solution to the historic dialogues about individual contribution, stigmatization and shame. It is recommended that a comprehensive approach to promoting this new dialogue be undertaken.

### Rural as a Reflection of Provincial

Dialogue is a dynamic, multi-level, on-going negotiation. It is built on perceptions, and discussions about those perceptions, which are subject to comparisons across the city, the country, and the globe. It is also multi-factorial. There are expert voices, as well as facts, statistics, reality, and popular opinions. There are politicians, public servants, and also a mix of special interests that may or may not be open about their agendas. A resident could reasonably describe it all as “politics” and leave it at that, except that doing so dismisses issues now looming over the community.

The Kootenays are not central in the same fashion that Vancouver is, or Kelowna. The separation is social as well as geographical, and loans itself to a rhetorical separation, but it is still a part of the economy of BC. Major urban centers are now facing Labour shortages because of persistent housing issues. Such economic realities challenge the common narratives of urban centers as places to go for jobs and social needs. The pertinent aspect of that negotiation is that it is also going on at the

Provincial level. Alberta once seemed like a bright prospect for work and wages, but now that is challenged by the sector diversity in BC. This mirrors more local negotiations as well.

Labour mobility and productivity are both sensitive to the perceptions of those dialogues. The responsiveness between those levels is reciprocal, but due to rhetorical mechanics, they may not be equally responsive. Industry may be more responsive to government policy than the other way around. The local level may be more responsive to regional and provincial than the other way around. The responsiveness between Labour mobility and housing may not be equal either. The differential responsiveness may operate opportunistically, depending on who is having the dialogue.

Therefore, a rural city could find itself afflicted by the perception that there are more jobs and opportunities elsewhere. Businesses in need of employees may take advantage of that perception and move away for that. The rural city may be just as pleasant and have similar attributes to most anywhere else, but now is known as a place people come from, not go to (even if they tend to come back). A shortage of housing, coupled with unusually high rental rates, would only validate the perception. A small number of restaurants compared to the next place could validate a negative evaluation, such that in practice, it becomes a reality: Customers look elsewhere for restaurants, so businesses go elsewhere for customers. Jobs have rarely been more plentiful in Alberta in reality, but the perception mediated the response. Over time the perception becomes a common reflection, and could create the reality.

The rhetorical mechanics reduce to who is narrating the community, region, or province, or not disputing the narrative in play, or seeking validation by *'doubling-down'* on it. It is also about who needs to be persuaded to make a change. Policy decisions require debates, and the contributions to those debates will involve people motivated to some extent by narratives of the community. *'Castlegar is a town of retirees'*, for example, has a much different play than, *'Castlegar is a hub of tech and innovation'*. One narration will come with concerns of growth and change, while the other will come with plans of how to implement the growth and change. It is in such ways that the dialogues and perceptions of them influence the economic outcomes locally. It is also the means by which a small rural community could avoid poor outcomes, or work its way out of one. Not finally, it is in that way that a rural community could be seen as a reflection of the province-wide issue.

#### Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting.

A common refrain heard in this community is that young people often move away, but tend to come back, and that sentiment matches up with what is reported in research about Labour mobility. Statistics Canada has historical data for immigrant mobility, as well as intraprovincial and interprovincial mobility, but the research focus seems to have been on the extent to which Labour in depressed regions moves to fill gaps in active regions. Other research reveals that both geographic mobility and occupational mobility are strongly influenced by social needs.

A StatsCan report on Labour mobility (Morissette, 2017) revealed that interprovincial mobility had decreased between 1971 and 2015 from over 2% to under 1%. While many influences are suspected, such as Federal/Provincial Transfers and government transfers to individuals, it is hard to avoid looking at the general economic climate during that span of years. The cost of living has increased without regard for the sluggish growth of wages.

The same report details surveys of workers indicating that family and social considerations have a key value in making the decision to move or not. Surveys of unemployed revealed that, by contrast to social and family concerns, the inconveniences of moving were of little influence. “*Stay close to family and friends*”, and “*Spouse and children would not want to move*”, were far more influential than “*Housing would be too expensive*”, or “*Moving would be too demanding*”. Women were more reticent to move than men, married people more so than unmarried, and ages 40-64 more reticent than ages 15-39. It is reasonable to suspect that the economic climate, and potential risks of uprooting family and friends is enough to convince people to remain where they are, but young people may evaluate the risk differently.

Supposing that 1% statistic held true, and factoring in the tendency of youth rather than older workers to move around, the amount of Labour mobility in Castlegar reduces almost to zero. The population of people aged 15-30 is about 1,200, which makes the numbers of mobile workers under 20. Even adding the potential mobility in other demographics, the number does not rise substantially. That roughly matches what the HPP Office in Castlegar reports, and has some support from the local food bank, which reports almost no transient traffic.

The numbers are complicated by the yearly enrollment of students at Selkirk College, and also by the housing situation. Selkirk College reports an increased enrollment yearly, as a matter of course, but only a portion of those students live in Castlegar, or work there. Not only that, but officials from the College<sup>11</sup> report that many of the foreign students room together in larger numbers than domestic students would find comfortable. Regardless, it makes the actual numbers of workers coming and leaving difficult to assess accurately<sup>12</sup>.

The Castlegar Survey results suggest that the employed population in Castlegar is not especially concerned about their job prospects, and anticipates some mobility; however, a noteworthy number of respondents did indicate that they had few choices for work without their present employment. A number of respondents indicated that they would have to travel more than two hours to find similar employment. The concerns that did show in the survey results were spread across the cohorts.

The manufacturing industry in general, as well as the wood manufacturers of BC have reported difficulties finding people with basic skills to hire (LMI Insight, 2013); (Zielke Consulting, 2017). They report that highly skilled workers are not being replaced, and those who remain are responsive to job offers of higher pay. Such complaints are becoming commonplace in forestry, mining and oil and other industries offering good pay (Kootenay Career Development Society, 2019). Without the necessary Labour mobility, the local economy will remain sluggish.

### Crowd-Sourcing Analysis

One of the sub-projects completed was a focus group put together under the overt purpose of “Crowd-Sourcing Analysis”. We established a one-time group of residents of no particular demographic, and offered them the results of the “community”, “experience”, and “stigma” portions of the survey. The plan involved asking them to give a sense of what they thought the results indicated.

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<sup>11</sup> In conversation about housing at a Castlegar Chamber of Commerce meeting, Oct, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> For example, the Castlegar Campus has student housing for 100, but there the numbers of students attending far exceeds that.

Although the group began with that goal, according to the assistant running the forum, it quickly ran into what she described as a fascinating round table discussion about homelessness and poverty.

Some of the outcomes of the discussion included:

- The survey was not what was expected, which was essentially a “PiT Count”.
- Given that we seem to have all of the knowledge and resources required, what remained unknown was why the problem persisted.
- The discussion of potential solutions was not only creative and innovative, but driven by humanitarian concerns and also of a practical nature.

In other words, there was no sense that these issues were beyond anyone’s ability, nor did solutions require unrealistic ideals, undue spiritualism or religious faith, or compromises to anyone’s beliefs within the Canadian political spectrum. It seems that a random portion of the local population could, at any time, independently generate any number of possible solutions to poverty and homelessness, and those solutions would be practical in nature.

The one caveat of that procedure was that the group did express their belief in the necessity of an objective measure of this issue. They suggested that an enumeration of the type done by BC Housing each year was more beneficial than any analysis of local dialogues. This particular discussion seems to be representative of the community’s determination on the issues at present.

The point at which dialogues and action intersect at the moment is “PiT Counts”. There is a strong desire to participate in them along with the rest of BC and Canada, but there is also an impulse- and it is worth taking some care how this is expressed- to approach the issue in the same way that authorities such as BC Housing are. Inasmuch as this community is willing to explore a complex issue, there are few signs that it wishes to go out on a limb for that. No participant has applauded any “outside of the box” thinking, nor have they expressed any appreciation for using community dialogues as a lens. What they have said was that they expected a reliable count of the homeless in Castlegar.

In that way it seems that the community is willing to respond to the perception of the issue, rather than the reality of it as it is today. The perception of the issue remains contingent upon how the dialogue about it proceeds, and the dialogue is dominated by traditional media sources, authorities and local influencers. The scrum of activity within that sphere of influence is very difficult to tease apart into a coherent narrative, and the average person is reasonable to feel like it’s unfathomable. For that reason, it is understandable that changes will remain filtered through that mix of influences.

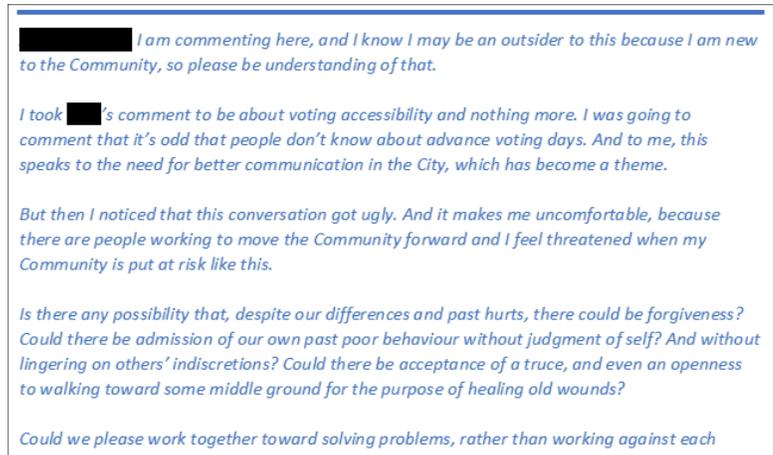
### Toxic Dialogue

The community of Castlegar has been actively debating its future since long before its incorporation. It is noted in the history of the city, on the City’s website, that its sporadic growth pattern was marked by contentious and confrontational debates, such as when the pulp mill was set to be built. Although it is a stretch to pin it on any one influence, it is also hard to ignore the presence of the Doukhobors, a group which was formed around conscientious objection, and exclusion, and which had left its country of origin for another place, one not known for inclusivity. It cannot be helped but to wonder about the impact of their integration over time. Furthermore, any such inquiry forces the questions about urban/rural integrations, city/regional, regional/provincial, national/global into the

foreground of public debate. The dialogue compels people to wonder where the benefit lies in maintaining the toxicity.

More recent events created the same unusual tension and infighting noted in the historical records. Within the last five years a plan was put forth to expand and renew the Regional District's recreations complex (Boivin, 2018). The online debates could only be described as heated, and by most accounts, the debates at city council were no better. That situation resulted in a referendum, with a disappointing turnout of voters, and a tarnished narrative of the process.

Another result was a similar experience of the last civic election, which also had a low voter turnout (Boivin, 2018). In a stellar example of concealed stigma, the overt popular sentiment was that the election represented the positive forward momentum of the community's bright future, while it was hard to find anyone willing to participate. The local Chamber of Commerce held a very tame and well-behaved debate, but few other local groups were willing to assist in the process. The exceptions were an abrasive group of social media voices (Hoggan, *The Only Time I've Been Ashamed of Castlegar*, 2018). One local community group, for example, when asked if they would hold debates "in support of local democracy", informed that they did not want to get in the middle of anything.



Picture 2 Snapshot of 2018 local Facebook Group dialogue.



Picture 3 Unrelated local Facebook Group Admin explaining why group is being closed.

Theoretically, dialogues support a perceived political value in the form of "Crowd-Congruence"<sup>13</sup> (Lemke, 1995). The perception of the crowd and its disposition represents an ongoing negotiation of the individual's relationship to that group. That negotiation is of who belongs and who does not. As other research has indicated, the perception of that relationship to the community mediates adjustment. The expectation of a stigmatizing relationship also predicts future adjustment of individuals and collective participation.

There may be no actual barrier in the relationship between any given individual and their community, but perceptions about a common dialogue are governed by rhetorical rules and crowd dynamics, more than by reason or logic. It may not be a

<sup>13</sup> Crowd-Congruence is just the individual's need to be perceived as congruent with what they believe 'everybody' believes.

conscious evaluation. Rhetorically, the perception of the community's disposition toward any individual does not *require* change or movement without compelling reasons, and so anyone who is 'congruent' with the perceived popular opinion may choose to ignore any petition to alter their view. Since it is accepted that the individual is responsible for themselves, it is logical for many people- the majority, it could be argued- to assume they are not important enough to voice any dissent or alternative views to the body of criticism.

The criticisms signal widely of what is accepted while challenging dissenters stridently enough that most people will simply not dissent. The result is a loose control of any dialogue about the presenting issue. Since there is rarely a single individual who is willing to own the entirety of the criticisms, there is no one to confront about them. Since the criticism challenges the relationship of the individual to the group, the de facto challenge is to the basic value of the person. The criticisms are communicating far more than just complaints, and are communicating far more broadly, in far greater depth, than is assumed.

#### Community Divisions, Barriers to Identification.

Canada still struggles with colonial-era ideals. One of those ideals is that some of us belong and some of us do not. Because that is not acceptable as a belief today; we believe in equality, the energy that would go into expressing it and arguing about it instead supports stigmatization. Stigmatization occurs without any discussion or, if there is discussion, it is behind closed doors or carried on covertly (Burtle, 2013). The stigmatized learn, by observing body language and tone and differences between how one person is spoken to versus another, that they are not welcome, or as welcome as others. They anticipate it and avoid people and places. It is one way that divisions within a community grow, that 'Silos' form.

Such divisions grow to become the ways in which we come to terms with new ideas. Castlegar has a small but vibrant community of people living alternative lifestyles. It was unremarkable until a crosswalk with rainbow colors was proposed (Lafond, 2014). At that point, the "issue" of people living alternative lifestyles became loaded with the previous unresolved issues, and became an item for unusually heated debate<sup>14</sup>.

The Castlegar Study survey asked if respondents had ever felt deliberately excluded from a social relationship or social interaction, with familiar biases listed as options, "Mental Health", "Age", "Social Status", "Gender", and "Race". The majority of respondents indicated "No", but a sizeable portion of each cohort indicated each of the choices offered, especially "Social Status".

The results are suggestive. The choices were not restricted to one cohort, nor did any one cohort exclusively choose "no". The spread of responses across all of the choices suggests this population is at least comfortable with these biases. Given that nearly all of the property owners in the

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<sup>14</sup> The survey results do not validate any perception that this community values hostile conversations of that sort. Nor do they suggest that Castlegar is hostile to the LGBTQ2S+ community.

community are long-time locals, the number of them who indicated they felt rejected based on “social status” is interesting.

The divisions experienced in this community would hardly seem so pressing if not for the opportunistic usage of rhetorical rules<sup>15</sup>. Nor would it be of any interest if a small portion of the population no longer wished to associate with other parts or demographics. The issue is the unusual way that misconceptions about the community are leveraged against its best interests. The stigma, in this case, will threaten the stability of the local economy, while eliminating that stigma will promote growth. At the very least, it seems to have interfered with the natural progression to a cohesive community.

The barriers to identification with the community appear to be rhetorical. It seems to be social status until a closer look reveals that it is just that a small portion of people identify opportunistically as either upper class or middle class. It appears to be racism, until it is revealed that almost nobody cares that much. The barrier appears to be mental health, until it is revealed that nearly everyone in the community has family with a mental health issue. It appears to be cynicism, until it is revealed that most people care. The artificial dampening of discussion about that supports a misperception of what ‘everybody’ believes. Few people want to be seen disputing what ‘everybody’ thinks, and there are a few people who, opportunistically, rely on that to justify their perception. The repressed dialogue supports a misperception that, in turn, has wide-spread effects throughout the community.

### Labour and Contribution

Political debates in Canada have historically reduced to narratives of Labour and contribution, presumably because the largest portion of people, the middle class, typically has been in need of more jobs whenever an election comes up. Job creation is an almost mandatory chant during election campaigns, as are slogans about immigrants and welfare recipients. Such dialogue circles around to who is not doing enough, and the people at the bottom of the earnings ladder are propped up as culprits.

Canada is not immune to ideologies that seem to seep up from the United States, such as ‘trickle down economics’, the idea that the wealthiest portion of tax payers provide greater value than taxes by virtue of their economic activities. It is a dialogue that has been referred to as a “fun house mirror” with a “one-way nature” (Proudfoot, 2019).

In her 2019 article, Shannon Proudfoot notes that Canadian political dialogue seems to use the term “middle class” as loosely as possible to simply allow voters to include or exclude themselves as preferred. Not only that, but it would seem that the voters themselves use it opportunistically to either include or exclude themselves.

*“Then there is the electorally beloved- and conveniently poorly defined- “middle class.” Given all the campaign trail hot air devoted to lauding the values and hard work of this population and lionizing their noble struggles, you would think that at*

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<sup>15</sup> Stigmatizing people and then suggesting a need for proof, for example, is “gaslighting”.

*some point, other corners of the electorate would get ticked off about being ignored by politicians in favor of these golden children.*

*But they don't, because pretty much everyone thinks that's them."*

She notes that "middle class" is a very popular term, while being "rich", unless you actually are among the 1%, comes with negative connotations. The muddled definition of who belongs in that sense is not aided by statistics, since median income is often reported by household and not by individual<sup>16</sup>. It is a coy tactic that alters the portrayal, changes the narrative according to a particular investment-worthy agenda. Proudfoot notes how this polite move allows people to avoid a conversation about a serious national issue. Politicians in Canada are especially anxious to avoid such an issue, since they are focused on votes, and need the most people possible to lump themselves into a catch-all of middle class or, mostly the same as everybody else.

A conversation just such as that happened during this project. One project volunteer happened to be a member of the wealthiest folks in the area. The question- her reason for meeting- was the extent to which wealthy folks in town were expected to pay for any new social programming<sup>17</sup>. There had been no suggestion of that kind, so the odd focus on that from someone in the upper 10% of earners seemed exemplary of that perspective.

The wealthy, who do not identify with the *not wealthy*, are not required to justify an aloof perspective. At least, the rhetorical onus is on someone else to justify their potential involvement, and if the rationale is not convincing, then no movement is necessary. The upper middle class would not identify with the rich because of the imperative to remain a part of "most people", but they are not compelled to identify with everyone. That loose assessment accounts for much of the muddled evaluations of who does and does not belong.

The actual middle class have fewer choices about who does/does not belong, but they are clearly not the upper middle class, as their financial options are subject to limitations beyond their control. That they are not poor has only one qualifier: "Yet". The stress that causes people is of great value in political debates and, that becomes important later when wondering if the benefits of the economic issues outweigh the benefits of solutions.

The line between middle class and impoverished has been moving upward in the last twenty years. The "market basket measure" for "British Columbia: Rural" is now at \$38,584<sup>18</sup>. That number is immediately subject to the caveats of political dialogues, if it comes up at all. As Proudfoot noted in her article, voters are more likely to hear about concessions available if they put more money into RRSP's.

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<sup>16</sup> That is not inaccurate, but does not represent the real spread of incomes. The median income of people in Castlegar in 2015 was about \$34K.

<sup>17</sup> In fact it felt very strongly like I was responding to a conversation she had had with others, and that I was confirming something for those others.

<sup>18</sup> For a family of four.

As of the 2016 Census, about 55% of income earners in Castlegar make under that MBM standard, which means that two incomes are needed to support a family.

Those who earn the least have the fewest choices, and this seems to be the heart of the issues avoided by the focus on the “middle class”. The numbers of those earning less have been growing, while the cost of living has been increasing, regardless of earnings. Labour mobility, ideally, would have the effect of increasing wages, and innovation would drive down prices, but this has not happened in BC. The result is the inequity between the lowest earners and the highest, as well as a squeezing effect on the middle class. Among the shrinking list of choices left to working people, are the choices of narrative regarding their situation.

As the volunteer example above intimated, even the wealthiest portion of the town seems to be unaware of the untapped potential in the numbers of people struggling to stay afloat ‘under’ them. Rhetorically, productivity is still about which group an individual belongs to, and ultimately about one’s own efforts. If a person does not belong to the group with the most options, then the onus is on that individual to do more.

The statistics, and all historical evidence from sources worldwide, indicate that increasing the number of earners, as well as the amounts earned, on the lowest end of earning capability provides an exponential boost to any economy. Since the systemic options for providing such a boost are not difficult to generate, it is reasonable to wonder how they have been avoided for so long. In the national and provincial scales, political dialogue has largely held up any such progress. In the small city of Castlegar, we could suspect the same, for the same reasons.

## Conclusions

The key point in this project remains that the economy is sensitive to social disturbances. It is a point that has not seen much representation as a way for rural cities, or provinces, to boost their economies. What seems evident from this inductive look at community dialogue is that “culture” should be considered a basic factor of economic growth. A community’s ‘internal dialogue’ is a key means of managing the community’s future. Failure to moderate this aspect of city business is equivalent to asking residents to spend their money elsewhere. Failure to create the conditions for success within the lowest earners, is equivalent to asking the wealthiest to spend their money, and political capital, elsewhere.

One recommendation coming from this project is that communities, and the province, should examine the extent to which internal competition is allowed to influence economic activity. It is axiomatic, for example, how companies such as Wendy’s, McDonalds and Burger King compete with each other, but not at the expense of the fast-food market itself. They do not undermine each other’s products or services because that would drive customers away from fast food generally. It is also no revelation that global entities and other countries can and do take advantage of social disturbances here. The interference in US National Elections by other countries seems to make that point well. External competitors would agree that this province can afford to foster intense competition within its own borders, at its own expense.

A second recommendation is that communities should foster a business acumen locally comparable to that of the province’s external competitors. Pleas of “buy local” are not unconvincing,

but not as effective as a common drive to compete with interests external to the community. An 'ethic' of this nature subscribes to a mutual promotion at the expense of outside competition rather than internally.

A third recommendation is that all communities should encourage a fluid labour mobility by managing their local housing and rental inventories. Considering the price-gouging that continues to hamper local markets, it is suggested that some form of price-cap be investigated, as well as quality assurance inspections.

The community of Castlegar is poised to overtake all other cities in its region in terms of economic growth. It has the infrastructure, the fiscal grounding, and a motivated administration. Standing in its way are a raft of problems inherited from a previous century, and an old-world insecurity played out in regressive public dialogue. The majority of the community are ready and able to move past that, but must overcome the unwillingness of the few who do not work well in an inclusive environment. Those few will hang on to talk that implies a distinction between those who belong and those who do not. The majority are bound to keep including them regardless.

In the larger picture, of the Province of BC, the issues revolve around effective management of Labour, and ensuring the best placement of the right people. Labour mobility, innovation, and productivity are the new languages of progress. It is hoped that the dialogue is moved in that 21<sup>st</sup> Century direction.

## Implications and Recommendations

The survey conducted during this project has revealed that the very small core of cynical doubt that pervades public dialogue has been subject to hype out of proportion to its real effect size. Within the community of Castlegar, as well as the provincial and national levels, that disproportionate dialogue has succeeded in repressing more productive dialogue about important issues such as innovation, productivity and Labour mobility. It is suggested that a relatively simple way to overcome that caustic repression is by talking in more detail about how to move economies forward. This project has illuminated how such a dialogue could lead reciprocally from a sense of community to profitability.

It is not a new means of engagement, but just a more pro-social and business-sensible means. To that end it is proposed:

- That each community foster and promote a community-centric culture.
- That each community should alter dialogues of homelessness and poverty to dialogues of productivity and Labour mobility. Removing the stigma makes these pervasive issues into problem-solving exercises.
- That each community resolve the housing crisis by creating a more fluid and sustainable inventory of rentals and market housing.
- That the research community in general should conduct further inquiries into the global aspects of dialogue in terms of how they impact local economies.



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## Appendix A: Employment

|                 | What are your chances of moving to a better position at the place you work now? |      |      |           |     |
|-----------------|---|------|------|-----------|-----|
|                 | No chance   | Poor | Good | Excellent | NA  |
| Property Owners | 27  | 42   | 48   | 10        | 127 |
| Institutional   | 4   | 5    | 11   | 2         | 22  |
| Youth           | 11  | 12   | 7    | 2         | 32  |
| General         | 14  | 7    | 10   | 5         | 10  |

|                 | What are your chances of moving to a new or better job elsewhere here in Castlegar? |      |      |           |     |
|-----------------|---|------|------|-----------|-----|
|                 | No chance   | Poor | Good | Excellent | NA  |
| Property Owners | 34  | 57   | 34   | 2         | 127 |
| Institutional   | 8   | 9    | 4    | 1         | 22  |
| Youth           | 5   | 13   | 13   | 1         | 32  |
| General         | 17  | 21   | 7    | 1         | 0   |

|                 | Could you quit your job today if you wanted to? |    |     |
|-----------------|---|----|-----|
|                 | Yes   | No | NA  |
| Property Owners | 43  | 84 | 127 |
| Institutional   | 7   | 15 | 22  |
| Youth           | 14  | 18 | 32  |
| General         | 8   | 37 | 1   |

|                 | How far would you have to travel for another job like yours? |           |           |         |     |
|-----------------|--|-----------|-----------|---------|-----|
|                 | 30 Min   | 1-2 hours | 3-8 hours | 1+ Days | NA  |
| Property Owners | 64   | 28        | 31        | 4       | 127 |
| Institutional   | 13   | 5         | 3         | 1       | 22  |
| Youth           | 25   | 2         | 3         | 1       | 31  |
| General         | 29   | 9         | 6         | 1       | 1   |

|                 | Please rate you present job in terms of social experience (1-5). |              |             |           |               |
|-----------------|--|--------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
|                 | Very Unhappy   | Satisfactory | Neither/Not | It's good | I love my job |
| Property Owners | 9  | 21           | 11          | 50        | 36            |
| Institutional   | 0  | 5            | 4           | 4         | 9             |
| Youth           | 5  | 5            | 7           | 11        | 4             |
| General         | 3  | 6            | 7           | 20        | 10            |

|                 | Please rate you present job in terms of Vocational Goals (1-5). |              |             |           |               |
|-----------------|---|--------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
|                 | Very Unhappy  | Satisfactory | Neither/Not | It's good | I love my job |
| Property Owners | 13  | 19           | 22          | 47        | 26            |
| Institutional   | 2   | 4            | 2           | 6         | 8             |
| Youth           | 11  | 6            | 5           | 6         | 4             |
| General         | 6   | 7            | 11          | 16        | 6             |

|                 | Has a lack of housing impacted your ability to find employment in |     |
|-----------------|---|-----|
|                 | Yes   | No  |
| Property Owners | 12  | 115 |
| Institutional   | 5   | 17  |
| Youth           | 9   | 23  |
| General         | 15  | 31  |

|                 | Please rate the staff turnover at your work. |     |                              |                |                               |
|-----------------|--|-----|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
|                 | Very Low                                     | Low | Reasonable for this industry | It's a concern | I worry about this constantly |
| Property Owners | 35   | 25  | 43                           | 23             | 1                             |
| Institutional   | 4  | 3   | 10                           | 3              | 2                             |
| Youth           | 9  | 5   | 10                           | 6              | 2                             |
| General         | 8  | 16  | 12                           | 5              | 5                             |

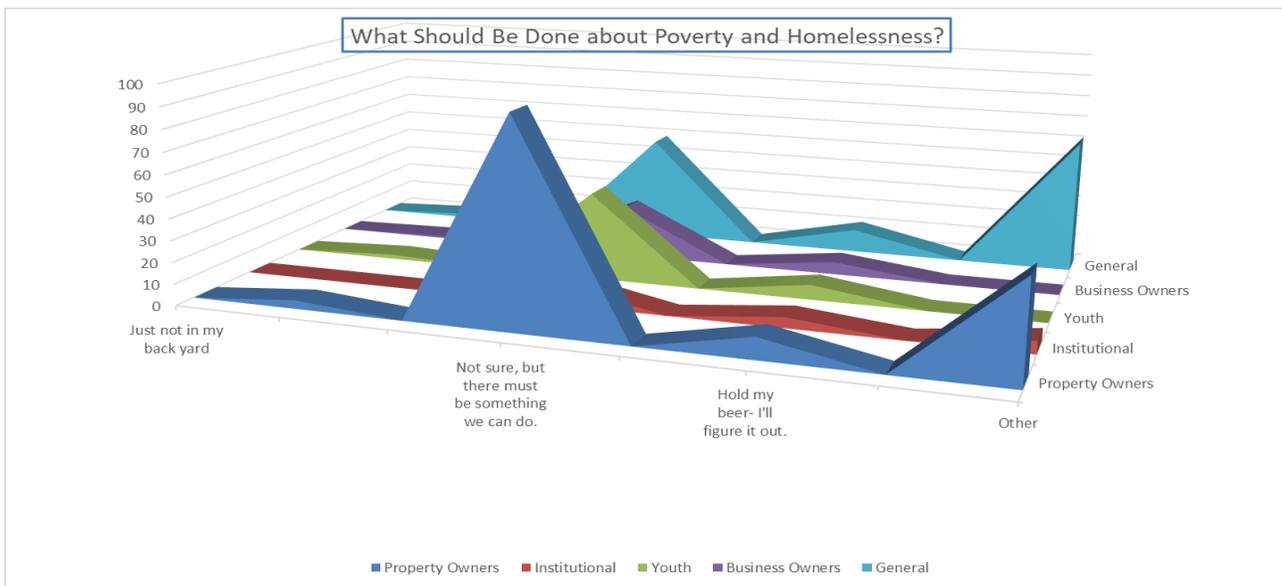
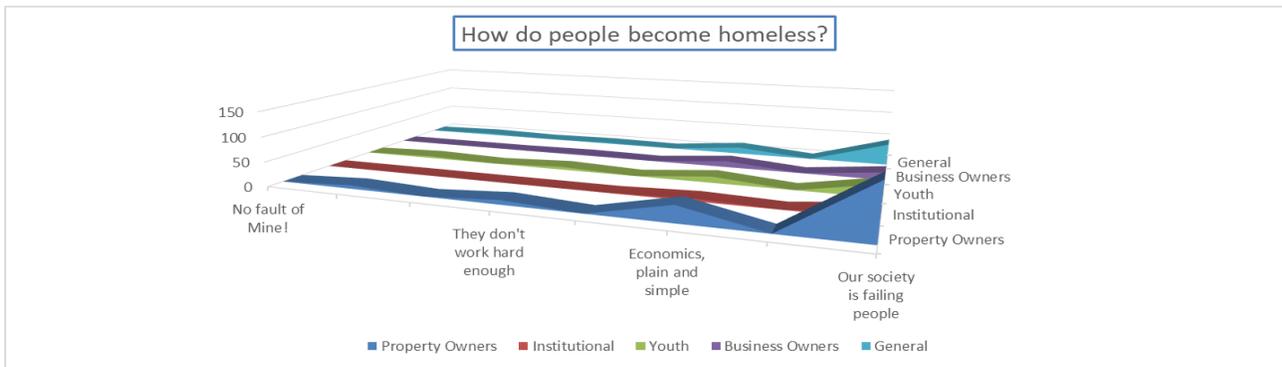
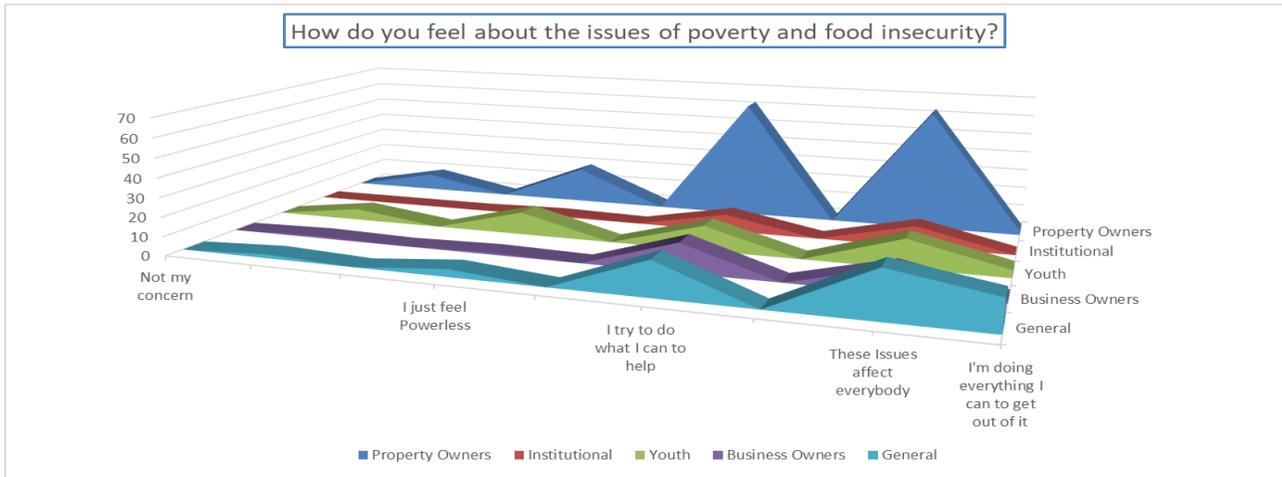
|                 | How many other people could take over your position in a pinch? |     |      |      |     |
|-----------------|---|-----|------|------|-----|
|                 | None  | Few | Some | Many | NA  |
| Property Owners | 11  | 69  | 34   | 13   | 127 |
| Institutional   | 2   | 10  | 6    | 4    | 22  |
| Youth           | 5   | 4   | 12   | 11   | 32  |
| General         | 5   | 19  | 11   | 11   | 0   |

Statistics Canada has a wealth of research about employment and related subjects. Although little can be found specifically to do with rural employment, or about Castlegar, there is no shortage of accurate information from which to garner a reasonable snapshot of rural employment concerns. In the case of this project, it was more important to get a sense of how respondents felt about employment here, and how they assessed their ability to move to another job in the context of the other questions in the survey. A secondary goal was to introduce and maintain the idea that not everyone felt secure about employment as a central component of the dialogue. Posing those potentials as questions was consistent with the indirect methodology.

The factual and statistical aspects of Labour mobility whether rural or urban, have been addressed and in some cases settled with finality. The idea of Labour mobility, or its impact on economy, is not in question. It does not require more evidence. It is only “new” to the small urban center of Castlegar in the sense that most residents haven’t thought of their local economy in that way before. This survey has merely opened up that discussion, which has historically reduced to the statement that, “Many people move away, but most come back,” and offered new ways to access it.

The next most pressing question about Labour mobility in a rural setting is not to what extent researchers can precisely define it, but how quickly will urban and provincial leaders respond if rural leaders display a better grasp of this issue, and begin profiting from it. The key activities that promote such a profit are no longer just a matter of potential.

## Appendix B “Community Questions”



Many respondents objected, some strenuously, about the lack of response options to these questions. A number less than those who picked it, stated that the “Hold My Beer” option was inappropriate for the subject.

## Appendix C: Stigma

### Stigma

|                 | Working with people with mental illness would be rewarding |                |             |                   |                   |
|-----------------|--|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                 | Strongly Agree   | Somewhat Agree | Neither/Nor | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Property Owners | 35   | 51             | 47          | 11                | 11                |
| Institutional   | 10   | 10             | 1           | 0                 | 0                 |
| Youth           | 15   | 14             | 15          | 3                 | 3                 |
| Business Owners | 7  | 7              | 10          | 3                 | 4                 |
| General         | 19   | 23             | 12          | 6                 | 4                 |

|                 | People with mental illness are difficult to work with. |                |             |                   |                   |
|-----------------|--|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                 | Strongly Agree   | Somewhat Agree | Neither/Nor | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Property Owners | 13   | 63             | 51          | 19                | 9                 |
| Institutional   | 3  | 10             | 3           | 5                 | 0                 |
| Youth           | 6  | 18             | 12          | 11                | 3                 |
| Business Owners | 5  | 16             | 6           | 3                 | 1                 |
| General         | 3  | 24             | 19          | 8                 | 10                |

|                 | People with mental illness often refuse the services they are offered. |                |             |                   |                   |
|-----------------|--|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                 | Strongly Agree   | Somewhat Agree | Neither/Nor | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Property Owners | 16   | 53             | 55          | 22                | 9                 |
| Institutional   | 3  | 6              | 7           | 3                 | 2                 |
| Youth           | 3  | 13             | 24          | 8                 | 2                 |
| Business Owners | 1  | 16             | 8           | 4                 | 2                 |
| General         | 9  | 22             | 24          | 3                 | 6                 |

|                 | People with mental illness are not smart enough to do most jobs. |                |             |                   |                   |
|-----------------|--|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                 | Strongly Agree   | Somewhat Agree | Neither/Nor | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Property Owners | 4  | 7              | 29          | 34                | 81                |
| Institutional   | 0  | 1              | 2           | 3                 | 15                |
| Youth           | 4  | 1              | 14          | 8                 | 23                |
| Business Owners | 0  | 0              | 8           | 9                 | 14                |
| General         | 3  | 3              | 10          | 14                | 34                |

|                 | People with mental illness are able to achieve meaningful goals. |                |             |                   |                   |
|-----------------|--|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                 | Strongly Agree   | Somewhat Agree | Neither/Nor | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Property Owners | 98   | 39             | 13          | 2                 | 3                 |
| Institutional   | 15   | 3              | 2           | 0                 | 1                 |
| Youth           | 25   | 13             | 11          | 0                 | 1                 |
| Business Owners | 15   | 11             | 3           | 1                 | 1                 |
| General         | 39   | 15             | 5           | 1                 | 4                 |

|                 | I would be comfortable seeking assistance with mental illness. |                |             |                   |                   |
|-----------------|--|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                 | Strongly Agree   | Somewhat Agree | Neither/Nor | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Property Owners | 51   | 55             | 36          | 10                | 3                 |
| Institutional   | 7  | 6              | 5           | 3                 | 0                 |
| Youth           | 13   | 12             | 19          | 3                 | 3                 |
| Business Owners | 8  | 15             | 4           | 4                 | 0                 |
| General         | 17   | 24             | 14          | 6                 | 3                 |

**Stigma**

| <b>I would not want others to know I was receiving mental illness services.</b> |                       |                       |                    |                          |                          |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Somewhat Agree</b> | <b>Neither/Nor</b> | <b>Somewhat Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> |
| Property Owners   | 21                    | 46                    | 42                 | 24                       | 22                       |
| Institutional   | 3                     | 10                    | 5                  | 3                        | 0                        |
| Youth   | 7                     | 14                    | 20                 | 7                        | 2                        |
| Business Owners   | 6                     | 13                    | 5                  | 4                        | 3                        |
| General   | 17                    | 19                    | 21                 | 5                        | 2                        |

| <b>I would be less likely to get a job if I had a mental illness.</b> |                       |                       |                    |                          |                          |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Somewhat Agree</b> | <b>Neither/Nor</b> | <b>Somewhat Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> |
| Property Owners   | 29                    | 76                    | 28                 | 16                       | 6                        |
| Institutional   | 4                     | 7                     | 6                  | 3                        | 1                        |
| Youth   | 12                    | 17                    | 15                 | 5                        | 1                        |
| Business Owners   | 7                     | 15                    | 4                  | 4                        | 1                        |
| General   | 20                    | 25                    | 12                 | 5                        | 2                        |

| <b>I have never been concerned about my mental illness.</b> |                       |                       |                    |                          |                          |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Somewhat Agree</b> | <b>Neither/Nor</b> | <b>Somewhat Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> |
| Property Owners   | 33                    | 17                    | 40                 | 37                       | 28                       |
| Institutional   | 4                     | 1                     | 4                  | 5                        | 7                        |
| Youth   | 5                     | 6                     | 16                 | 16                       | 7                        |
| Business Owners   | 3                     | 6                     | 11                 | 6                        | 5                        |
| General   | 6                     | 9                     | 19                 | 14                       | 16                       |

| <b>I am uncomfortable around people with mental illness.</b> |                       |                       |                    |                          |                          |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|  | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Somewhat Agree</b> | <b>Neither/Nor</b> | <b>Somewhat Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> |
| Property Owners  | 8                     | 38                    | 40                 | 42                       | 27                       |
| Institutional  | 0                     | 2                     | 6                  | 4                        | 9                        |
| Youth  | 2                     | 8                     | 18                 | 10                       | 12                       |
| Business Owners  | 1                     | 5                     | 7                  | 8                        | 10                       |
| General  | 4                     | 16                    | 15                 | 13                       | 16                       |

As with other results of this survey, the responses to the Stigma questions are more suggestive than conclusive. Ideally, this particular questionnaire would be qualified with additional research strongly correlating stigma of mental illness with that of random selections of other dialogues prone to it. A strong correlation to a stigma surrounding addictions, medical illnesses, obesity and/or immigrant status would support the use of this questionnaire as an analog for stigma in general.

The limited responses from some cohorts makes it tenuous to assert even a suggestion of any kind, however, the survey took an average of 9 minutes to complete, was anonymous, and in no way asked people to be ‘on the record’ for any subject. A small but persistent crew of volunteers ventured to businesses and agencies all over the city, and the most common response was that “they were too busy”. That would seem to be a poor result, except that in a project investigating public dialogue, what is not said, and who is not saying it, can be just as informative as the dialogue itself. In this case, even if the suspected message is one of participation or not, it offers a great deal to unpack.

## Appendix D: Inclusion

### We define Inclusion or , inclusiveness, as

*"A general policy of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of creed, color or status, are able to participate in community, culture and society, that all people are free from social rejection."*

#### What is your experience of sexual harassment in the work place here in Castlegar?

|                 | None | Witnessed | Experienced | Both |  |
|-----------------|------|-----------|-------------|------|--|
| Property Owners | 107  | 26        | 7           | 14   |  |
| Institutional   | 10   | 5         | 4           | 2    |  |
| Youth           | 31   | 4         | 5           | 10   |  |
| Business Owners | 27   | 1         | 2           | 1    |  |
| General         | 43   | 5         | 3           | 13   |  |

#### Just thinking of the definition above, have you ever felt deliberately excluded from a social relationship or social interaction because of the following:

|                 | MH | Age | Status | Gender | Race | No/None |  |
|-----------------|----|-----|--------|--------|------|---------|--|
| Property Owners | 7  | 15  | 25     | 9      | 3    | 96      |  |
| Institutional   | 1  | 3   | 3      | 3      | 1    | 10      |  |
| Youth           | 9  | 2   | 6      | 1      | 7    | 25      |  |
| Business Owner: | 0  | 0   | 1      | 2      | 2    | 26      |  |
| General         | 10 | 7   | 12     | 7      | 2    | 26      |  |

#### What is your experience of verbal abuse in the work place here in Castlegar?

|                 | None | Witnessed | Experienced | Both |  |
|-----------------|------|-----------|-------------|------|--|
| Property Owners | 69   | 25        | 19          | 40   |  |
| Institutional   | 4    | 5         | 7           | 5    |  |
| Youth           | 18   | 8         | 10          | 14   |  |
| Business Owners | 21   | 3         | 4           | 3    |  |
| General         | 29   | 5         | 10          | 19   |  |

#### Just thinking of the definition above, have you ever experienced rejection from local public places?

|                 | Yes |    | No  |     | T   |
|-----------------|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|
|                 |     |    |     |     |     |
| Property Owners | 14% | 21 | 86% | 134 | 155 |
| Institutional   | 10% | 2  | 90% | 19  | 21  |
| Youth           | 32% | 16 | 68% | 34  | 50  |
| Business Owners | 10% | 3  | 90% | 28  | 31  |
| General         | 23% | 15 | 77% | 49  | 64  |
|                 | 18% | 57 | 82% | 264 | 321 |

#### What is your experience of physical abuse in the work place here in Castlegar?

|                 | None | Witnessed | Experienced | Both |  |
|-----------------|------|-----------|-------------|------|--|
| Property Owners | 126  | 18        | 1           | 9    |  |
| Institutional   | 15   | 3         | 3           | 0    |  |
| Youth           | 42   | 1         | 3           | 4    |  |
| Business Owners | 28   | 3         | 0           | 0    |  |
| General         | 54   | 4         | 1           | 5    |  |

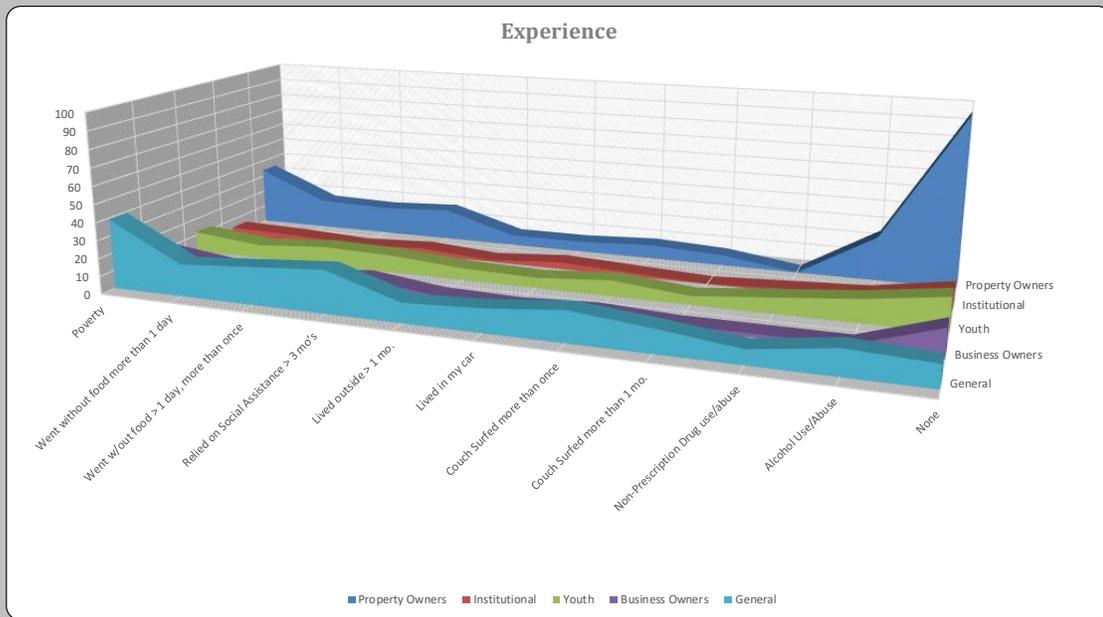
#### What is your experience of verbal and/or physical abuse at a local authority or institution here in

|                 | None | Witnessed | Experienced | Both |  |
|-----------------|------|-----------|-------------|------|--|
| Property Owners | 114  | 27        | 4           | 9    |  |
| Institutional   | 10   | 7         | 1           | 3    |  |
| Youth           | 39   | 4         | 5           | 2    |  |
| Business Owner: | 24   | 4         | 3           | 0    |  |
| General         | 48   | 6         | 4           | 6    |  |

## Appendix E: Lived Experience

**Do you personally have any experience of the following:**

|                 | Poverty | Went without food more than 1 day | Went w/out food > 1 day, more than once | Relied on Social Assistance > 3 mo's | Lived outside > 1 mo. | Lived in my car | Couch Surfing more than once | Couch Surfing more than 1 mo. | Non-Prescription Drug use/abuse | Alcohol Use/Abuse | None |
|-----------------|---------|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|------|
| Property Owners | 34      | 17                                | 16                                      | 18                                   | 6                     | 6               | 8                            | 6                             | 0                               | 25                | 96   |
| Institutional   | 5       | 4                                 | 2                                       | 4                                    | 1                     | 4               | 2                            | 0                             | 2                               | 4                 | 11   |
| Youth           | 12      | 8                                 | 11                                      | 10                                   | 7                     | 6               | 9                            | 5                             | 9                               | 13                | 19   |
| Business Owners | 11      | 6                                 | 5                                       | 8                                    | 3                     | 2               | 4                            | 2                             | 2                               | 2                 | 16   |
| General         | 39      | 18                                | 21                                      | 24                                   | 11                    | 13              | 17                           | 13                            | 8                               | 14                | 12   |



The question above offered some interesting contrasts to the Stigma questions. The reticence to answer the Stigma questions seems remarkable considering the honesty offered when it comes to lived experience. The author notes that any objective observation of this community can't fail to note a basic humanitarian ethic. The source of that motivating principle seems evident in the chart above.

**Do you personally have any experience of the following:**

|                 | Mental Illness | Chronic Physical Illness | Physical or Mental Disability | Violence/ Trauma/ PTSD | Victim of Crime |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Property Owners | 45             | 32                       | 24                            | 31                     | 22              |
| Institutional   | 7              | 9                        | 0                             | 8                      | 4               |
| Youth           | 19             | 4                        | 4                             | 11                     | 4               |
| Business Owners | 4              | 2                        | 2                             | 9                      | 7               |
| General         | 26             | 23                       | 17                            | 32                     | 14              |

**Do you personally or professionally know of anyone who has experience of the options in the previous question?**

|                 | Yes |     | No  |    |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|----|
| Property Owners | 77% | 119 | 23% | 36 |
| Institutional   | 95% | 20  | 5%  | 1  |
| Youth           | 78% | 39  | 22% | 11 |
| Business Owners | 87% | 27  | 13% | 4  |
| General         | 86% | 55  | 14% | 9  |
|                 | 81% | 260 | 19% | 61 |

What is suggestive about the responses in the two questions above is that the issues listed are very much a shared experience. The generally quoted incidence of mental health issues is about 20% of a given

population in Canada. It seems from these questions that less than 20% of respondents do not know of someone in their milieu who has experienced one or more of the listed issues. It is hesitantly suggested that lived experience offers a far more effective means of evaluating ‘who belongs’ than the traditional dialogues of possessions, land ownership, and money.

## Appendix F: Crime Stats Comparison

Crime Statistics by Incidence, Trail, Castlegar and Nelson. 2014-2018.

|                            |                             | Trail | Castlegar | Nelson |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------|--------|
| 2014 Total, all violations | Actual incidents            | 784   | 303       | 1002   |
| 2015 Total, all violations | Actual incidents            | 628   | 339       | 979    |
| 2016 Total, all violations | Actual incidents            | 733   | 309       | 1086   |
| 2017 Total, all violations | Actual incidents            | 871   | 244       | 1081   |
| 2018 Total, all violations | Actual incidents            | 888   | 214       | 953    |
| 2014 Total, all violations | Rate per 100,000 population | 10035 | 5016      | 9465   |
| 2015 Total, all violations | Rate per 100,000 population | 8019  | 5449      | 9015   |
| 2016 Total, all violations | Rate per 100,000 population | 9179  | 4910      | 9840   |
| 2017 Total, all violations | Rate per 100,000 population | 10805 | 3821      | 9710   |
| 2018 Total, all violations | Rate per 100,000 population | 11006 | 3260      | 8331   |
| 2014 Total, all violations | Percentage change in rate   | -8    | -1        | -19    |
| 2015 Total, all violations | Percentage change in rate   | -20   | 9         | -5     |
| 2016 Total, all violations | Percentage change in rate   | 14    | -10       | 9      |
| 2017 Total, all violations | Percentage change in rate   | 18    | -22       | -1     |
| 2018 Total, all violations | Percentage change in rate   | 2     | -15       | -14    |
| 2017 Total, all violations | Unfounded incidents         | 131   | 41        | 20     |
| 2018 Total, all violations | Unfounded incidents         | 100   | 39        | 13     |
| 2017 Total, all violations | Percent unfounded           | 13    | 14        | 2      |
| 2018 Total, all violations | Percent unfounded           | 10    | 15        | 1      |

Statistics Canada. Table 35-10-0184-01 Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, police services in British Columbia  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/3510018401-eng>

## Appendix G: Unemployment Statistics as Narrative

Like the housing numbers and the reporting of median incomes, the employment statistics may obscure important dynamics. For example the unemployment rate is an often-reported statistic, but may not accurately describe the region. The unemployment rate does not include a number of the residents, does not describe any variations in the employment needs between industries, and does not offer any sense of how productive a given region or city is. The generalization offered by the unemployment rate may offer a sense of security in terms of how ‘busy’ a city is, but obscures some potentially illuminating economic factors.

|   | Castlegar |      |      | British Columbia |         |         |
|---|-----------|------|------|------------------|---------|---------|
|   | Total     | M    | F    | Total            | M       | F       |
| Total - Population aged 15 years and over | 6615      | 3265 | 3345 | 3870375          | 1882770 | 1987610 |
| In the labour force                       | 3980      | 2085 | 1900 | 2471665          | 1285835 | 1185830 |
| Employed                                  | 3675      | 1900 | 1770 | 2305690          | 1194455 | 1111240 |
| Unemployed                                | 305       | 185  | 125  | 165975           | 91385   | 74590   |
| Not in the labour force                   | 2635      | 1180 | 1450 | 1398710          | 596935  | 801775  |
| Participation rate                        | 60.2      | 63.9 | 56.8 | 63.9             | 68.3    | 59.7    |
| Employment rate                           | 55.6      | 58.2 | 52.9 | 59.6             | 63.4    | 55.9    |
| Unemployment rate                         | 7.7       | 8.9  | 6.6  | 6.7              | 7.1     | 6.3     |

Included in “Not in the Labour Force” are people who are institutionalized, either in a hospital or the criminal justice system, people employed in the armed forces, and government workers, full-time students, home-makers and people over the age of 64. In the case of Castlegar, in 2016, that number was approximately a third of the population.

For the Central Kootenay Region that number is nearly half. These numbers inform that only 60% of the population participates in the work force, but more importantly that only 56% of them are productive; that is, are earning money. The unemployment rate then, of just under 8%, only portrays a time in which a higher than usual number of people were not employed. The participation rate, and the number of people not in the labour force, are the more concerning statistics.

The relative lack of participation stems from the rising numbers of people reaching retirement age. It is of no small concern because, as the 2018 BC Labour Market Outlook describes, that trend of aging out of the work force is expected to continue with inadequate additions of new or immigrant workers. In order to remain compensatory for the shrinking participation rate, those retirees and others not in the Labour force would need to have accumulated significant cash savings or other resources, such that recreational or other spending could reasonably keep a local economy viable<sup>19</sup>. Without a regular and consistent flow of money through a local economy, the growing demand for assistance can be expected to outstrip the productivity of the remaining labour force. The growing calls for innovation and business/corporate leadership, across Canada, reflect that impending threat to the economy.

Castlegar is perhaps threatened less than the Central Kootenay Regional District generally, and less than the Kootenays overall, but the same dynamics in play across BC are also in play here. The key difference between Castlegar and other cities is that it displays positive signs of working past its economic downturn, while others may be resting on past successes. A secure reassurance to potential

<sup>19</sup> The HPP office reports that it is retirees, and those on disability or income assistance who are most affected by the present housing squeeze. Since it is well-known that these cohorts spend money locally, it seems in the best interests of the community to promote housing security for them.

investors, or even families seeking to move here, is a richly detailed dialogue about the employment numbers, suggesting that a community has effective management of Labour productivity.

## Preliminary Report: Point in Time Count

### Introduction and Summary

It is axiomatic that small towns such as Castlegar, British Columbia, a town of just over 8,000 people, are different in many ways from the urban centers in which homelessness is usually investigated. Differing geographical areas, differing populations, differing histories, differing industrial bases, and more, all create solid reasons to investigate issues that seem to prevail across those differences.

Unlike Toronto, or Vancouver, Castlegar has no pressing immigration problem- at least, nothing of the kind that Toronto would consider problematic. According to the 2018 “Street Needs Assessment”, Toronto’s homeless numbered greater than the entire population of Castlegar. In fact by direct comparison, Castlegar would not seem to have a “problem” at all; yet, the amount of money spent in providing services seems to indicate that, not only is there a problem, but it is a problem not entirely understood.

Even a passing glance at homelessness in a rural area, could reveal that homelessness and poverty occupy an intersection of different issues. It is certain, therefore, that an investigation would shed light on more than just homelessness, poverty and Labour mobility. We could discover what is holding these issues in place.

In conjunction with the online survey on homelessness and Labour mobility, the “Point in Time Counts” were initiated to provide the basis for a meaningful public dialogue about these inter-related issues.

### Methods

Following the release of “the Castlegar Study on Homelessness and Labour Mobility”, in August 2019, volunteers were recruited to complete a physical survey of the downtown area as well as several other key areas of Castlegar for homeless camps and signs of activity of unsheltered residents. Three teams investigated designated zones and documented signs of unsheltered activity.

Simultaneously, key stakeholders were consulted to obtain information of residents accessing shelters and services. Data collected from the office of the Homeless Partnering Program in Castlegar, as well as survey results from The Castlegar Study, and interviews with local authorities informed the following report.

### Key Findings

- 1) Unlike other small towns, and unlike larger urban centers, homelessness in Castlegar tends to occur just outside of public perception.
- 2) The relatively small number of chronically homeless in Castlegar occupy a niche that is tied to the town’s social fabric.
- 3) Unlike surrounding towns and other cities, Castlegar has avoided the attention of most transient homeless traffic.
- 4) The current trend of housing/rental price increases is squeezing people out of housing who would otherwise be secure.
- 5) In terms of percentages, the Castlegar numbers of homeless are in line with larger centers such as Toronto, about 0.3%.

| Castlegar 2019: Summer Count |             |           |                 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------|
|                              | Unsheltered | Sheltered | Hidden Homeless |
|                              | 11          | 7         | 3               |
| M                            | 8           | 2         |                 |
| W                            | 2           | 3         | 3               |
| Children                     | 1           | 2         | 10              |

**Unsheltered or Inadequately Sheltered**

As of the day of the Count, 11 people were known to be sheltered inadequately. The HPP office reported 2 people who were camping at local campgrounds, and 4 people camping in other locations in and outside of town. The HPP office reported at least 1 senior citizen living in her car for more than 60 days, and a single mother living in her car with her child. The local food bank reported 3 people tenting in various locations in town. A health facility reported 1 adult male living in his vehicle.

**Sheltered**

One shelter consisting of two rooms is run by the local food bank. At the time of the Count both rooms were occupied.

The HPP office at the time of the Count was subsidizing 3 adults, 2 in motels, 1 in a local campground. The HPP office also subsidized 1 transitioning individual in low-income housing.

At the time of the Count, a local housing coordinator secured 1 single parent and child in emergency housing. Also, 1 single mother and child were negotiating a spot at a local low-income housing unit.

Individuals sheltered in Trail, Nelson, Grand Forks or Salmo were not counted, although it is known that residents of Castlegar have made use of shelters elsewhere from time to time. At the time of the count, no residents of Castlegar were known to be sheltered in other towns.

**Hidden Homeless**

At the time of the Count, the HPP office reported 3 adult women couch surfing at friends.

The Castlegar Study preliminary results indicated that, at the time of the Count, 3 respondents were “Couch Surfing/Living at friends” . Interestingly, none of the youth respondents reported being Unsheltered, Couch Surfing, or staying at a shelter, however, when asked “Do you personally have experience of:”

- 10% had couch-surfed for more than a month
- 18% couch-surfed more than once
- 13% had lived in a car
- 16% had lived outside for more than 1 month

## Demographics

At the time of the Count, no discernible trend or pattern of demographics could be gleaned from the known cases of homelessness. No youth were reported, or reporting, as homeless or provisionally sheltered in Castlegar, but as other cities have related, an accurate count of youth homelessness has proven difficult to be certain of. In Castlegar, the student population fluctuates with the Selkirk College school year.

The few chronically homeless in Castlegar are adult males between the ages of 45 and 70.

Of the inadequately sheltered on the day of the Count, all but two were adult males. Of the two females, 1 was a senior citizen, and one was an adult in her early thirties. Of the Hidden Homeless reported by the HPP office, two were single mothers with more than 1 child, and the third was a female in her late 40's.

## Vectors of Homelessness

As other cities have reported, there seems to be no one path to homelessness. While mental health was sometimes a part of the picture, it had little or no determining value, but only contributed among other issues. Alcohol or substance abuse was not more prevalent than other health issues in the known cases. There were not more parents than single individuals. There were not more uneducated people than educated, nor more unskilled than skilled.

*“I don't even need the money, but there are so few places to rent that I can charge whatever I want.”*

One finding did seem to have greater potential impact than most other findings: The price of housing. Even the youth completing the Castlegar Study survey reported paying upwards of \$1,000/month or more for rentals. The impact on this for parents, especially single parents, has proven to be clear and present at the HPP office. It has proven to be the case that houses, which would be considered sub-standard elsewhere, have risen in price to upwards of \$1,800 to over \$2,000/month. At the time of the Count, Bachelor Suites could be found renting for as much as \$800-\$1,000/month. Quality apartments, condos, or houses can ask even more.

The quote above is from a local landlord, explaining the price to a prospective tenant. As if to confirm that attitude, another local property owner charged \$500, plus a \$250 damage deposit, for a mouse and ant-infested trailer which had sections of the bathroom floor missing.

Likewise, landlords have taken on a correspondingly narrow standard for who they will rent to. For example, otherwise good renters have been turned away because of an intolerance for even a single pet. Single mothers have been rejected as applicants for “Not keeping their kids in line”, even though the children were not present, and the conversation was over the phone. While landlords are not exclusively narrow in their judgements, it is a trend with a potentially adverse effect on housing.

Common factors leading to extended unsecure housing included a combination of high rent prices and relying on disability pension. Most disability pensions amount to no more than \$1100/month, while rents, even for just a room, have reached over \$800/month. It is an untenable situation, for people who may not have the resources to find solutions.

Also common was a combination of poor wages and high rents. Lack of available work was a common thread. Less common was an erratic lifestyle leading to repetitive struggling for resources. While two such cases

were present at the time of the Count, they were, ironically, the most capable and skilled people among all known cases. It was they who had been without secure housing the longest, 6 months.

### **History of Homelessness**

Four of the chronically homeless in Castlegar at the time of the Count roughly correspond to what may be called “square pegs”. They are individuals who do not fit in any standard niche. They have rarely held any job for any length of time. One of them will tell you that a job is simply not for them. They have been too erratic in lifestyle, in the past, to have held on to a residence independently. However, aside from that loose description, they are in no way similar to each other.

Two of the unsheltered individuals were originally from Castlegar but had moved around as industrial workers. Both were highly skilled, and bright people.

Three of the female unsheltered were homeless after unfortunate breaks with family or spouse. One of them, after leaving her husband, had been couch surfing for four years. The other had been in her car for months with her elderly cat because a rental could not be found which would accept the pet.

At the time of the Count one individual remained homeless partially due to mental health issues.

At the time of the Count, two single mothers with multiple children were arranging rent subsidies to ensure secure housing with friends. One had modified a trailer for temporary housing on her friend’s property, while the other was at her friend’s 3 bedroom home. In the latter’s case, she and her friend had 7 children between them in that place. Both of the displaced mothers had secured jobs in order to make ends meet.

A third single mother, living in her car with her child, was negotiating a spot in low-income housing locally at the time of the Count.

During the week that the Count took place, the HPP office negotiated rent subsidies with an additional 4 individuals who were threatened with losing their secure housing. Two of those cases also were single parents.

### **Length and Frequency of Homelessness**

Of those cases not considered chronic, the average time without secure residence was less than 6 months. In many cases, such as parents with children, unsecured residence lasted not more than 3, and frequently less than 1 month. Most cases known to the HPP office in Castlegar were not repetitive, or chronic.

The chronically unsheltered in Castlegar had been living outside for decades, with sporadic efforts to maintain an apartment or room. One had maintained a camp just out of sight near a local shopping center for years until the property was purchased. Others stayed periodically with friends or family. Some locals had permitted camping temporarily on private properties. At least one habitually moved between several ad hoc camp sites near town.

### **Service Use Patterns**

In Castlegar, most service for homeless individuals was accessed through the local food bank. The Harvest Food Bank is administered by a local advocate who has been a fixture here for the past 30 years. Her non-profit keeps 2 small rooms, and is known to house people in local motels as needed. This food bank, open 3 days per week, is often the first stop for people in need. The non-profit estimates a weekly reach of 150 people.

A second resource has been an Interior Health facility. Open from 8 am to 8 pm daily, it runs out-patient programs for medical help and some programming for addictions and substance abuse. The facility's catchment area includes a much wider base than The Castlegar Study. The IHA facility is a main point of access for people suffering mental health issues. The Homeless Partnering Program office sees approximately 1-3 referrals per month from there. No residential facilities exist in Castlegar except for 1 dry residential unit run privately for addictions and substance use. The private addictions facility has referred 3 people in the past 12 months to the HPP office.

Castlegar has a local Work BC office, run by the Kootenay Career Development Society. There is a substantial amount of cross-referrals between KCDS and the HPP office. Finding work is often a key element in clients' presenting issues.

Additionally, several youth-oriented agencies run local outreach programs. There are occasional referrals between them and the HPP office. ARC made 3 referrals to HPP in the last 12 months for youth in need of housing.

The HPP office, at the Castlegar and District Community Services Society, opened in April of 2018. Following a local advertising blitz in October 2018, accessing of services increased from 40 clients in the first 6 months, to upwards of 47 per quarter. Repeat clients represented as many as 5 visits per month altogether.

### **Mental Health**

Of the clients completing Intake forms at the HPP office in the 12 months leading up to the Count, a significant number reported anxiety and depression as a key part of their situation. Six clients reported a diagnosis, of which PTSD featured prominently, as well as Bipolar Disorder. Two clients had Borderline Personality Disorder, and several more were suspected to. One client had a stable, persistent paranoia.

One client had a limited IQ, and very limited education, but functioned at a high level within those limitations.

Seven clients were known to have persistent drug and/or alcohol abuse issues. Two were in treatment.

The vast majority of other clients, those who were not malingering, suffered from high levels of stress due primarily to their situation, and the need to ask for help. Single parents especially, and those who were fleeing violence, were affected to the point of dysfunction. Parents faced with immediate concerns such as physical safety, food, and shelter have difficulty working out the larger concerns, or even what is going to happen to them. At the time of reporting, one client had succumbed to stress and required a visit to the mental health unit.

### **Transients and Malingering**

A very small portion of HPP clients exhibited varying levels of malingering; that is, lying about their situation in order to gain funding. Of those cases, only two were known to be transients, and they were originally from Castlegar. The others were comprised of people, mostly men but not exclusively, who had grown up here or moved back many years previously. They lived on what may be loosely termed "the fringe" of Castlegar community, where any illegal activity or drug use/abuse was less noticeable. They ranged in ages from 18 to 50+. They may all be known to each other, but not necessarily associate, or get along. Except for those similarities, each is quite unique. One case was a man in his early 40's who had lived in Castlegar for years.

The general description above differs from common expectations. Local people have expressed that transients and criminal elements are responsible for a portion of the homelessness issue, but thus far, no confirmation of that has been found. The food bank, which is consistently the first stop of transients through Castlegar, firmly estimates that 99.9% of their clients are locals. The local RCMP detachment backed up that estimate with their own observations, revealing that the majority of files opened by them- generally speaking- were local offenders.

### **Physical Health**

Reports of physical health issues were sparse, and varied in nature. In one case a client presented with an extensive history of alcohol abuse, leading to medical concerns consistent with that issue. In one case, complications from a workplace accident had caused a couple's life savings to evaporate. In two other cases, work injuries persisted because the clients could not afford to stay home, even with Employment Insurance. Few other physically disabling conditions were presented by the time of this report.

### **Sources of Income**

The overwhelming majority of clients completing Intakes at the HPP office were on disability pensions. A small number were on Social Assistance, followed by Employment Insurance. The smallest number of clients were working, and struggling to make ends meet. The food bank similarly estimated that 5% of their clients were employed.

Of the clients who were single mothers, and who sought housing through the HPP office, only 1 out of seven received enough benefits, subsidies, or other monetary supports such as child support payments, to keep their children comfortable. All but one of those parents worked. The parent who did not work was on maternity leave.

### **Lifestyle**

The picture of homelessness confronting the small BC town of Castlegar, thus far, is not one that conforms to any single narrative. Single mothers, leaving either voluntarily or by threat of some kind, or even because of tragedy, are doing as parents have always done: whatever was necessary to raise the kids. Even families with no dysfunction, other than economic downturns out of their control, find themselves visiting the food bank or seeking financial help. While it is true that a small portion of people remain locked in cycles of self-destruction, occasionally spilling outward, they are neither numerous enough to call a trend, nor problematic enough to call a crisis. They certainly do not define this community, or even this community's homelessness issue.

An accurate, general statement about the lifestyle of the homeless in Castlegar would be that a lack of secure housing is exacerbating problems in their lives that they would otherwise be able to handle with some dignity. Drug and alcohol abuse issues could be rendered little more than medical concerns, but for the emergency of no housing. Domestic issues could be mitigated into legal disputes except for the overwhelming panic over having no place to go. Poverty itself could be reduced to a vocational concern, but for the crisis of housing. Otherwise capable people are being crushed by an artificial reduction of options.

### **Review and Recommendations**

A great deal of activity and funding in response to homelessness is offered because of the sense that the problem is overwhelming. In the cases of popular centers such as Kelowna, Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto,

there is no argument that the issue is overwhelming, but in small rural settings, the issue may not appear to be so urgent. In spite of a similar scope, homelessness in a rural setting just presents differently. It is still the same issue, with the same constellation of causes and victims. Accordingly, the following recommendations were considered appropriate.

**Opportunity to Act:** The absence of an overwhelming and visible homelessness issue in Castlegar offers a quality, and perhaps fleeting, opportunity to attempt remedial measures without the risk of wasted funding faced by larger cities. Testing remedies on the small scale is both fiscally and practically sensible. Castlegar represents an ideal place and time to discover what works and what does not.

**Critical Change of Perspective:** The issue of homelessness remains tied to a social genesis outlook. This outdated view insists that homelessness and poverty happen because of character flaws in the individual. However, if this were the case, we would expect much greater consistency between incidences. For example, Mental illness would nearly always lead to poverty and, by association, poverty would then lead to mental illness. The view is not backed by any evidence.

In fact the evidence clearly shows that homelessness and poverty are systemic issues. Rather than facing character flaws, we are instead facing a problem-solving exercise. Without the social aspect, we remove stigma, and simply resolve economic concerns.

**Systemic Solutions:** As with a Housing First-type initiative, the solutions to homelessness and poverty will address aspects of the problems where multiple issues intersect.

**Dynamic Real Estate Market:** The City of Castlegar's city planners have done their diligence and plotted spaces within the city for a variety of housing options. However, construction of new housing continues to center around large houses and mature buyers; that is, buyers who have been in the market for a long time and have significant purchasing power. Since many of those buyers work for the two major employers in the area, the market is left vulnerable to any and all economic downturns in those industries.

Inability to replace those mature buyers year over year will render the market moribund, at 1% growth or less. At such a pace, almost any market disruptions or layoffs could have significant secondary or tertiary effects. Castlegar simply cannot afford a real estate market that is less than dynamic.

A significant bank of housing, aimed at first-time buyers, would provide a dynamism in the marketplace which would create secondary and tertiary benefits to the city's economy. The first time buyers, over time, would mature into second and third time buyers, creating a self-replenishing market. A functional alliance of banking, real estate and development professionals could make this a reality.

**Innovative Housing:** The current market trend of large houses for mature buyers will prove overly, and artificially, restrictive. One of the clearest effects of this trend is the growth of "tent cities". The artificial restriction of types of housing has created a free-forming expansion of squatting residents. People with fewer choices, in other words, will create unwanted options regardless of market restrictions.

In contrast, a focus on innovation in construction, sales and financing would create the market conditions for dynamic and multi-lateral growth. Providing options for a multitude of housing needs would control that growth in acceptable ways, rather than forcing cities and residents into unnecessary clashes over the lack of options.

There is no question that small rural towns will develop their own homelessness problems, tent-cities and the crime that comes along with them. Even now, Castlegar's issue is only just out of sight. It is not invisible. With nothing more than a shutdown of a facility in another town, homelessness and poverty could be splashed across Castlegar as it is in Nelson, and Kelowna, or even Grand Forks.

It is not a question of "if", but a matter of when. Attempting solutions today could successfully mitigate the problem, but doing nothing will guarantee one.

### **Contributors and Community Partners**

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