

# **UNHOUSED CONCEPT**

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## **BACKGROUND:**

I grew up in Ontario after my family emigrated from England when i was a young child. I was an alcoholic from the age of 13, and continued until I ended up in the hospital about 5 years ago (approx. 18 years). During that time I became heavily addicted to cocaine for the last nine years of that. With an added 4 years addicted to mdma, and ending heavily addicted to crystal meth. I was 100 lbs, with severe kidney failure, severe liver failure, severe dehydration, psychosis, and a long list of other issues. Six police officers stopped me from committing suicide. A month later, after spending 8 days in the hospital and receiving zero help, i attempted suicide again only surviving due to the noose breaking when i was unconscious. After ending up on the streets in Ontario, I came to BC for a fresh start. But 9 months later, after a complete mental breakdown and losing my well paying job, I ended up relapsing and becoming homeless again. I quickly became so consumed by my addiction I was injecting almost 4 grams of crystal meth a day. I've spent four years on the streets mainly in West Kelowna. I never stayed in a shelter, even in the winter. I did not enjoy the stories that came from shelters, the theft and drug use in them was enough, and with my high anxiety and claustrophobia, i chose to be outside, cold, and sleep, as opposed to stay in a shelter, warm, but riddled with anxiety and unable to sleep. I ended up in the hospital almost immediately after becoming homeless when I tried heroin that was laced with WK-18, which was enough to stop me from going down that road. Over the next few years I managed to wean myself off of meth. I have not touched alcohol in over four years, and did not replace it with another addiction.

In this time, I spoke with as many other homeless people as I could. I was interested in not only how they came to be homeless in the first place. But also, what their life was like before becoming homeless. What were their reasons behind them not being able to get the help that they needed in order to get off the streets. After speaking to a number of people from various backgrounds and hearing their struggles with the current shelter system, I started to formulate a plan that could work for them and after speaking with so many people I could determine what would not work for them in terms of help and services currently being offered. Whether it be the actual help being offered, or the way the help was offered to them, or something completely different.

As this idea started to develop I began leaning on the knowledge and perspective of an assortment of individuals. From police officers that have regular interactions with the homeless community, to the outreach workers that bring constant help to them. Also members and creators of different

homeless initiatives. I also began to interview and talk more in depth with homeless people to get insight into different perspectives within the homeless community itself.

For example I had spoken at great length with an older gentleman, who once had a wife, and family, and career, and has spent several years on the streets. He is also terminally ill, and didn't know what options were available to him. I spoke to another young woman repeatedly, that has spent half of her life, in some capacity, homeless, whether it was in youth shelters, adult shelters, or out on the streets with nothing. She also suffers from PTSD and is considered by most that know her as one of the many people that fall through the cracks of an already overcrowded system. I've also engaged with the community as much as I can to gain their insight, mostly through one on one discussions, in an attempt to both gain insight into the communities views regarding the homeless, but also to offer advice on how to best get help, if they are open to it.

### **GOALS:**

- To transition individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as mental health issues and addiction into houses of their own by means of tiny homes they are the main contributor in building.
- To get the individual on the road to recovery and give them the tools and insight needed to have the best opportunity at lifelong sobriety.
- Give the individual skills , and understanding and belief in themselves to tackle necessary life skills needed for a stable life they are in control of (opening bank accounts, creating resumes, etc)
- Give them work related experience, whether it be as an introduction to the workforce, or a reintroduction.
- to help the individual build and maintain a balanced, stable foundation to excel in the life they will continue to build for themselves in the future.
- To provide alternative housing to low-income seniors, and military veterans through their integration into the tiny house community
- To continue the individuals education in a beneficial direction using different paths(GED, post-secondary education, trades training/RED Seal, etc)

### **BASIC STRATEGY:**

- The individuals receive a shell of a tiny home on a mobile foundation, and with the help of people with experience, they plan, design, and build their own tiny home as they progress through the program and retain that tiny home after they complete the program
- Each person would have a carefully selected program constructed solely for them and their needs. Cognitive behavioural therapies,

trauma counselling, dialectical behaviour therapy and relaxation therapy sessions. both on an individual basis and in a group environment. as well as other traditional and alternative methods would also be involved.

- The individual takes part in a community garden, where they would grow most of the produce that they would consume. As well as have an opportunity to be part of prepping and cooking meals though this would not be mandatory.
- they would also have time throughout the program where they would not be required to be part of anything. allowing for time to unwind, process and collect themselves and begin to put into practice the skills and knowledge gained throughout the program.
- To build additional tiny homes whether its from individuals going through their program, after they complete their home, or hiring some individuals after completion of their course for paid work building tiny homes as a team, to be used as housing for low income seniors and those unable to physically or mentally build themselves
- The individuals will be shown how to cook simple meals for themselves from items they grow in the garden, progressing until the community can successfully launch a restaurant using the same principles and methods they have learnt. The staff would be paid a living wage, and all the profits earned would be dumped back into the program.

### **GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES:**

- We will encourage and promote a life of sobriety. But if an individual does relapse they are not immediately banned. As many of them use their drug use as a way to push others away immediately from their life to protect themselves from once again opening up and being let down, abandoned, or hurt in the future after more of an effort has been made on their part which results in more pain for the individual. Instead there will be a discussion with the individual, and if all involved feel the individual's goals are aligned with getting better, they should be allowed to continue in the program. As we understand stumbles are a part of the recovery, and for some happen more frequently than others but do not determine the aspiration of the individual to remain sober.
- As each individual struggles, state, and abilities are as wide and varying as the paths that lead them to us, we will not have a static program duration. the individuals would stay for as long as needed until both us and the individuals are confident in their abilities to successfully move on from the program.
- Separately there will be created, a small tiny house community, on the property as well. as the individuals complete the program, and

retain their tiny home to help stabilize their foundation, and remove another major barrier they have faced until then, they are given the option to reside in this community. which would be a dry facility. the individual would be required to pay some rent, whether it be through a disability program or alike, or from work the individual gains. they would also have constant access to any services we have available to those in the program, on a lesser frequency. we are aware that the majority of people that complete the program would still need to make use of the help offered, at less frequent rates, but the possibility that for some they would require help throughout the remaining life. The individuals that do not continue to reside on the property still have the same access to the services as those that do stay. Believing that when an individual gets placed in the old surroundings, whether by choice or not, the likelihood of regress heightens, and the need for continued access to services rises.

- if it is achievable, once the individual is finished the program and seek employment, we would look at programs supplied through the government, and we would recommend that potential employers subsidized wages for a limited time to help ensure the individual continues to progress and not fall victim to their past, or the stigmas of society.
- Seniors living in the community would also have to live a life of sobriety so as not to be a negative force but a positive one, to those that are beginning their own life of sobriety

### **ADDED BENEFITS:**

- Having the individuals design and build their own home gets them looking at their future in a positive manner. as well as allowing them to see first hand the results from their efforts on an almost daily basis. Plus instills in them a sense of accomplishment, and boosts their self-worth dramatically. They also gain working relationships of sorts, with individuals that have the ability to hire them once the program is complete if they so wish.
- offering the tiny house community, if they stay, wouldn't strengthen their foundation they have built and relieve much of the stress, and worry, and panic many have in other community settings. plus with the knowledge and understanding of those that have had the same struggles, they can turn to any neighbour for help knowing there will only be understanding.
- Integrating low income seniors into the community gives the individuals in recovery the ability to learn from the experiences of the seniors through higher interaction rates than having the seniors reside in a senior only facility
- it would allow more involvement in the community for the seniors increasing overall mental state and wellbeing. (more of an active

member of society and not feeling like they are a burden on society or at the end of their road)

- The community growing as much of their own food as possible cuts down massively on daily expenditure for the program, and when the restaurant is stable enough to launch we will use the same mentality from the program and are utilizing the produce we grow ourselves which keeps the restaurants overhead low.
- Near the end of the individuals program, we will begin to aid the individual as they begin to plan the direction they chose to take their life afterwards. If the individual has put thought into the direction, the program staff will work with the individual and any means the staff have available to aid the individual, they will use. Staff can offer advice or suggestions, but must not try to change the individual's decision and direction. For someone that has spent their entire lives doubting themselves and questioning their own decisions repeatedly, having people in your life try to change the first big decision you make once finishing the program, could ultimately make the individual begin to regress to their old thought patterns especially ones regarding his value and self-worth.