ON THE STREETS: A PILOT STUDY ON COMMUNITY INITIATIVES IN DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

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Introduction

Many studies indicate that the provision of services like overnight shelters, “living rooms”, food availability, access to medical and harm-reduction services have positive implications for both individuals and for society. However, few studies look specifically at the effects on local downtown businesses who may be affected by the location of these services to the homeless population.

Research Goal

This project is a preliminary study that will provide a template for conducting a more extensive study that aims to gain a better understanding of the impact of homelessness and community initiatives on local businesses, with a focus on downtown Nanaimo.

Methodology

Local businesses were selected via convenience sampling. Business owners or full-time employees participated in a 10-15 minute qualitative semi-structured interview on their observations surrounding homelessness and community initiatives.

Research Questions

• Do downtown Nanaimo businesses see a change in the number of people sleeping downtown while the cold weather shelter is open?
• Does homelessness impact downtown business? If so, how?
• Do community initiatives make a difference in the downtown business community?

Preliminary results

A major concern was that local businesses would not want to discuss homelessness.

• 5 were approached; 3 participated
• One manager was unavailable but interested; the 5th business manager did not respond

Responses to participation were very positive.

Alterations needed include:

• Information on interviewee including time in employment and Nanaimo should be added
• Clarity is needed on community projects, initiatives, and resources. Respondents may need examples or directed questions
• Asking respondents if they have anything they would like to add or expand on garnered useful answers and results

Emerging themes:

• Little awareness of community projects, resources, or initiatives
• Disruptive behaviours, such as drug use, violence, panhandling, and shoplifting, by homeless individuals effect business practices and profitability

Recommendation:

• The use of focus groups may be a more efficient and fruitful means of gathering data on this topic