

## Invisibilizing Our Vulnerable Won't Work This Time

Increased visibility of our most vulnerable citizens in Comox Valley is a daily reality. One local professional told me that when driving through Courtenay his wife asks to take an extra long route, one that won't upset her. For if you have a heart, or have experienced any hardship in this life, you will be re-traumatized by what you see in the Comox Valley. Depravity, brokenness, and strife are constantly on display. The re-traumatizing is furthered by the fact that we all know it is everywhere, not just in our community, and the reality that the same 'systems' that created this situation are the ones empowered to fix it. Systems expressed as governments, agencies, and municipalities. And if you are prone to thinking, even more depressing is it to realize that our municipality is employing the same historic tactics against our vulnerable.

The historic method used by most municipalities is render our vulnerable invisible by regulating the space they use (thereby regulating them), encourage movement out of the municipality, mobilizing them to isolated areas of the municipality, while utilizing pervasive penalties (Martino, 2022). Police presence, the increase of bylaw officers and new bylaws (city laws) were tools that served prioritized citizens historically well (Martino, 2022). The prioritized citizens can not be feasibly served any longer as the numbers of our vulnerable are too great, there is nowhere to push them onto too, and space where they can exist is rapidly shrinking.

Our municipality is over-run, all the shelters everywhere are brimming with vulnerable persons. Adequate or affordable shelter simply doesn't exist. As our brothers, sisters, and grandparents find themselves chained to a backpack roaming streets and parks with little to no hope of housing or community, why are no measures created beyond historical practices? (Olson, Pauly 2022). Does someone think this will end well? That policing vulnerable persons works?

The practice of policing our vulnerable, whether it be increased patrols by police or the hiring of more bylaw officers (enjoying increased power since COVID-19) to enforce 'city laws' only facilitates

forced migration and involuntary displacement (Kaufman, Drew 2022). A result that hopes for what? Another city to become mecca for the vulnerable, a place we can send them all for compassion, real aid, and solace? Sorry. That place does not exist.

So, here we are. Viewing a swelling population of vulnerable persons that will not go away. A problem that punitive measures won't solve or any 'business-as-usual' approach won't touch. Any solution beyond what is the current practice of coerced mobility would be welcomed. Any idea outside what has already been implemented would be celebrated. Ideas not hard to find as they are contained locally in the hearts of all who make it their business to tend to the needs of our vulnerable. Solutions that can be tabled that are not more expensive than current practices.

A challenge to our elected municipal agents of policy: Stakeholder/Citizen input on How to Help Our Vulnerable in Comox Valley 2024. Or a simple google search of other municipal approaches and pick one, there are many. We have the space, wealth, benevolent citizenry, community partners, skills, and resources. We can create municipal work projects, a basic tax revenue flow from simple housing, while putting walls and supports around our vulnerable. All we need to do is throw out the old rule book, and face the facts: Our vulnerable cannot be made invisible this time.

## References

- Kaufman, Drew. "Expulsion: A type of forced mobility experienced by homeless people in Canada." *Urban Geography* 43.3 (2022): 321-343.
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