

A Vital Focus on Our Vulnerable Communities

THE SUNSHINE COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PRESENTS VITAL SIGNS 2017

The Sunshine Coast Community Foundation is a charitable organization that brings together people who care about the Sunshine Coast community.

Our mission is "to contribute to the quality of life on the Sunshine Coast by building endowments, making meaningful grants and inspiring community leadership."

The Foundation has published full Vital Signs reports in 2009, 2011 and 2014, bringing community knowledge to life in one location. Each report is a snapshot of the Sunshine Coast that presents our challenges and celebrates our accomplishments.

This special Vital Signs report is focused on vulnerability. Our changing demographics and challenging socioeconomic conditions make this an increasingly critical issue. While vulnerability is difficult to define precisely, it suggests susceptibility to physical or emotional attack or harm. Vulnerable persons may be in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect. Vulnerability does not necessarily relate to poverty.

Thanks to all of the social services and health professionals as well as community leaders who brought this issue to our attention and who helped us tell the story. As communities change, so do priorities, so we will continue to gather information through community dialog and surveys, document data and invite participants to give us their input as we prepare our next full Vital Signs report in 2018.



Keely Halward, Sunshine Coast Community Services' Program Director, worries about the increasingly fragile situation of those who seek SCCSS's services. *"The need has always been there, but the word I always come back to now is desperation. The complexity of needs in the*

community and the lack of choices available to people are different from what they used to be."

"There are more options than there were, more programs and more places to go. But public policy has played a big role in deepening poverty and isolation. The costs of housing and other necessities have increased dramatically while income and disability assistance rates have stagnated. The lack of affordable childcare has become critical"

People who would have gotten by 10 years ago are now at a tipping point. "It is tempting to try to address social issues such as housing, poverty, childcare and health separately, but it is not like that for people in our community. These issues are woven strands. If one strand breaks, it creates a hole that people can easily fall through, affecting many aspects of their lives and the community as a whole."

Many of SCCSS's participants are paying 80% or more of their income on housing. "Almost every day someone comes through our doors whose housing is at threat. People are forced to make difficult choices between

food, housing and health. They may choose to live in unhealthy housing or stay in an abusive relationship so they can feed their children. Having to make these choices further isolates people and contributes to problems such as homelessness, substance misuse, abuse and compromised mental health."

SCCSS struggles to keep up. Funding has not kept pace with increases in operating costs, demand and complexity. *"All of our programs are reporting increased pressure on resources to accommodate the needs. We have to triage far more to ensure that the highest risk situations are receiving support and intervention. This has left us with fewer resources to focus on activities that prevent risk in the first place."*

This increased pressure takes a toll on both staff and program participants. Keely recognizes, for example, that SCCSS may need to impose waitlists for critical programs, but worries *"How do you put a parent whose child needs urgent help or a victim of sexual assault on a waitlist? These dilemmas are painful."*

INDICATORS

Seniors

The Sunshine Coast continues to age. **Between 2013 and 2016, the number of adults under 55 declined, while the number of adults 55 and over increased to 50% of the population. This compares to 33% for BC as a whole.**

Seniors living alone

In 2016, 36% of Sunshine Coast residents 75 years old or older lived on their own. This rose to 46% among those 85 years old or older. During 2016, over half of the clients who received services from the Better at Home program were over 75 years old and living alone.

Assisted living beds

There are 60 assisted living suites (Christenson Village) and 108 intermediate or complex care beds (Shorncliffe and Totem Lodge) for a population of 3,425 seniors aged 75 or older. This is 49.1 long-term care beds per 1,000 individuals. The provincial guideline is 75 beds per 1,000 individuals 75 or older.

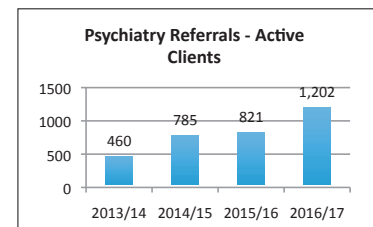
Violence against Women

The call volume to Yew Transition House decreased from 2007 to 2011 but has climbed steadily since that time. There

were 981 calls to the 24 hour access line in 2016 and 993 in 2015. The number of women and children provided with emergency shelter each year has fluctuated between 79 and 113.

Mental Health

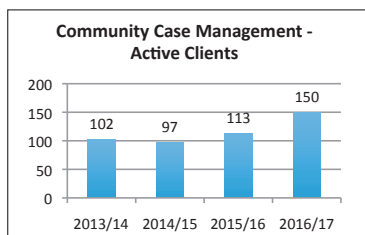
From 2013/14 to 2016/17, the number of active psychiatric clients grew from 460 to 1,202, while the number of active community counseling clients grew from 186 to 346. In part this growth is attributable to Vancouver Coastal Health's growing capacity to engage with clients because of the addition of two new psychiatrists and strengthened engagement practices. However, a VCH mental health and addiction clinical services review suggested that staff and other stakeholders are experiencing higher numbers of people with serious anxiety and depression (both in child and youth and adult populations).



Homelessness

Homelessness is an increasing concern on the Sunshine Coast, as residents face mounting housing pressures due to high rents and low vacancy rates. **The Shelter at St Hilda's Anglican Church served 31 individuals over a period of about 5 months in each of 2013/14 and 2014/15; and 38 individuals in the same period in 2015/16. In 2016/17 this nearly doubled to 72 individuals. With an expanded shelter capacity of 15 (over 10-12 from previous years), the shelter was at or over capacity 175 nights out of 202, often holding 20 individuals in a space intended for 15 or fewer.**

While the housing crisis appears to be affecting almost everyone, at the Sunshine Coast (Sechelt) Shelter and the Homelessness Outreach Program, clients are predominantly middle-aged men, elder men and women, and people



INDICATORS (CONT.)

with persistent trauma-related mental health and addiction issues. An increasing number of families are living in campgrounds, staying with friends or leaving the Sunshine Coast because there is no affordable housing.

Housing

The Canadian Rental Housing Index ranks the rental housing situation on the Sunshine Coast as severe. **According to the 2011 Census, more than half of rental households are paying more than 30% of their income toward shelter costs, and more than a quarter are paying more than 50% of their income toward shelter costs. 12% of renter households are overcrowded.**

A survey of online rental listings on the Sunshine Coast showed the following average costs by units for rental housing:

- 1-bedroom: **\$1,085/month**
- 2-bedroom: **\$1,625/month**
- 3-bedroom: **\$1,885/month**
- 4-bedroom: **\$2,667/month**

Typically, these rents do not include utilities and other associated shelter costs (e.g. phone and internet).



Below are the median incomes of various Sunshine Coast household types, and the monthly shelter payment they can afford in brackets:

- All households **\$60,279 (\$1,507)**
- Couples with children: **\$104,144 (\$2,604)**
- Couples without children: **\$74,598 (\$1,865)**
- Lone-parent families: **\$46,048 (\$1,151)**
- Individuals: **\$29,341 (\$734)**

Both individuals and lone-parent families face a significant affordability gap in housing, with median-earning individuals unable to afford even a 1-bedroom unit and lone-parents unable to afford a 2-bedroom unit.

CHILD CARE

On June 29th Nikki Esty closed the door to her Home Daycare after 4 years, leaving her without a livelihood or, a home and 17 families without child care.

Last year, the owners of the home she was renting advised her they would be selling the house and with increasing real estate values, the cost far exceeded her available income. Having separated from her husband, she was already at the top of her budget but homes were now renting for over \$1000 more per month than her previous rental. "Every time a property came up for rent, there were at least 50 applicants competing for the home. I ended up renting 2 bedrooms from friends so my business was basically at an end."

Nikki would receive calls daily for people searching for child care. At the time of a recent survey by Sunshine Coast Child Care Resource and Referral Program (CCRR) **there were only 2 child care openings out of a potential 158 spaces. Of the 132 families who contacted the surveyed child care workers, 98% were waitlisted or just turned away.**

"I have worked with families who have had to quit their jobs because they cannot find childcare. In addition to taking away provision for the family, this causes great stress affecting family relationships important in the early years of a child, effects that stay with them for the rest of their lives." stated Beau Slade of Sunshine Coast Community Services.

Also, according to the survey, there is equal pressure on the child care providers themselves. Many are close to burnout, working longer hours and having to complete paperwork in the evenings at home as they just have no time during the day or the staff to support them. Parents in turn are becoming angry and desperate as there is nowhere to turn for help.

When asked if she would continue searching for a home to reestablish her daycare, Nikki Esty was uncertain. *"I just need to take a break. It's obvious I won't be able to afford a suitable home in the near future. It's so sad but it's just the reality of it all."*



IMMIGRATION



Rizalino Valdez Jr. and his wife Sheryll Mae were living in Dubai. They both held good professional jobs. Having

grown up in the Philippines and then relocated to Dubai, their thoughts turned to Canada for a safe and welcoming place to raise their son Julian. Sheryll began searching for work and found that the hospital in Sechelt had an opening in her field. *"She was fortunate that her credentials transferred here to Canada," Rizalino remembers. "I worked at a grocery store, a fast food restaurant and gas station until I was able to get back into the Financial industry. I needed to finish some online course upgrades and then it became a bit easier."*

Newcomers are most vulnerable to social exclusion or isolation due to the many challenges they face in their integration process. *"Newcomers face other systemic barriers such as lack of affordable housing, childcare and employment opportunities, increasing cost of living, limited public transportation services, just to name a few,"* explains Maria Giltrow, an Intake and Support worker. *"Welcoming Communities is usually the first point of contact for new immigrants in building relationships, developing social networks and learning or improving their English language skills."*

Language and cultural barriers can also impact a newcomer's ability to successfully access information, community and government services and form supportive social networks. **In 2016-2017, 38 new immigrants participated in Conversation Circles and 21 received one-on-one tutoring support through the Welcoming Communities program.**

Finding a home was a bit of a challenge for the Valdez family, it took 3 months to find a suitable place. Juggling child care responsibilities between both their jobs continues to be the main struggle. *"We have drop-in spots at 2 daycares however many times still have to rely on new friends when the facilities are full. We just have to hope that both our jobs become permanent and that one day we can afford to buy our own place. The constant threat of an owner selling a property and having to uproot our son again isn't something we want to do. We want our son to grow up feeling secure and happy in his home and community. We really hope that place is here."*

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