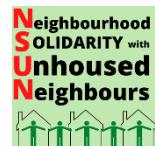


Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours (NSUN) – Year in Review

December 31, 2023



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History

The *Fairfield Gonzales Support for the Unhoused* group (FGSU) was formed at the end of October 2020 by a small group of neighbourhood residents with a shared interest in supporting those without homes camping 24/7 in the parks located in Fairfield Gonzales; Meegan/Beacon Hill, Gonzales, and Hollywood. In June 2021, we renamed our group, *Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours* (NSUN) to be inclusive of the many people who came from other neighbourhoods to join our group.

Size and Function

From our founding in fall 2020 to mid-2021 we met EVERY WEEK on Zoom (we felt that the situation demanded that given the urgency and severity of the need of those living outside). Since mid-2021 until the end of 2023, we've typically met every two weeks on Zoom – though we did take June through August off this year (2023).

All are welcome to attend especially unhoused or those in transitional housing. **If you are reading this (perhaps somebody forwarded it to you) and are not a member of NSUN but would like to be on our mailing list or learn more about joining as an active member** please send us an email (neighbourhoodsun@gmail.com) or go to the contact page on our website (<https://nsun.ca/contact/>).

2023 Activities:

Project with The Shift

The Shift is an organization helmed by Leilani Farha, the UN's Special Rapporteur on Housing from 2014-2020. Farha is a human rights lawyer by training and started The Shift in 2017 with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Cities and Local Government. Farha is also “the central character in the documentary PUSH regarding the financialization of housing”.

In summer 2022, The Shift approached grassroots groups working on homelessness in several cities across Canada about undertaking a project. Here in Victoria they timed their visit to coincide with a visit by the newly appointed Federal Housing Advocate, Marie-Josée Houle. Representatives from The Shift, as well as Houle and local members of her team, met with folks from NSUN, LLEOHN, The Backpack Project, and others with lived and living experience of homelessness.

After several months of planning in late 2022 and into early 2023, we prepared to start asking people with lived and living experience of homelessness to make submissions to the Federal Housing Advocate about their homelessness experiences. We began taking submissions on a small scale, a few people at a time, in March 2023. Our activities culminated with an event on Pandora Green on April 21, 2023 (see image below). By the time the dust settled and all the submissions were scanned and submitted the Victoria team had clocked in at a massive 154 submissions (around half of the national total). The project is now finished (though we are awaiting the last tranche of funds from The Shift) and the Federal Housing Advocate released an interim report in October 2023 (https://www.housingchrc.ca/sites/housing/files/2023-10/ofha_interim_report_on_encampments_en_october_2023.pdf) and the final report will come out in early 2024.



Continued Advocacy for a 24/7 Bathroom on Pandora

In November Heather Murphy got a letter published in the *Times Colonist* and was instrumental in getting the 900 Good Neighbour group (which she is a part of) to ask Councillor Thompson to create a motion to have the City write a letter to the province asking them to provide funding for a 24/7 bathroom on Pandora. The letter is below and the motion passed in Council on December 21, 2023. Fingers crossed (as opposed to legs!) that this will bring some relief in the New Year.

Make sure the homeless have a place to go

Re: "24/7 bathroom needed for Pandora homeless encampment, Victoria councillors say"
Oct. 24.

Whenever I talk to people about the need for 24/7 access to a bathroom on Pandora Avenue the response is inevitably "duh," "no kidding," "yeah, well of course we all have to go to the bathroom." Why is this no-brainer so difficult for the people we fund and elect?

I was very pleased to read Victoria councillors Krista Loughton and Dave Thompson speaking out about this basic human need. They are not alone, but neither are they fully supported in their efforts.

It is highly disturbing to know that Our Place Society thinks that providing a bathroom will further entrench people in homelessness.

No, it is not bathrooms that entrench homelessness. Rather, it is a profound lack of appropriate and affordable housing and the right supports needed to maintain housing stability.

Thompson correctly references the provincial government document, *Belonging in B.C.*, which clearly states that one of its actions is to provide funding for encampment "access to washrooms and showers."

The federal housing advocate, in reviewing encampments across Canada, including the one on Pandora, recommends the following: "Address the conditions within encampments and provision of basic services: A rights-based approach requires access to basic services, such as clean water, sanitation facilities, electricity, and heat."

Housing is years away for many of the people living on Pandora; in the interim let us ensure that they have somewhere to go while they await somewhere to go.

Heather Murphy

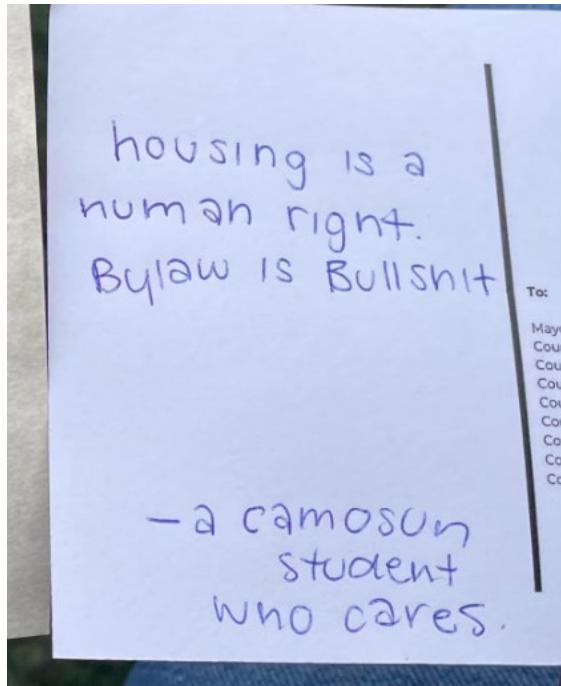
Victoria

Backpack Project Event

On December 21, 2023, instead of having a regular meeting several NSUN members came together with The Backpack Project, SOLID, AVI and the Victoria Downtown Residents' Association to participate in The Backpack Project's pop up donation event (see group photo on final page).



Left: Heather (left) and Susan modeling 'housing hats'
Below: We had postcards at the event addressed to Mayor and Council and encouraged people to fill them out (we will drop them off later – probably in the New Year)



Other Activities

NSUN members took part in the 'Keeping it Human' event at the Victoria Event Centre on November 29, 2023 (this was put on by The Existence Project). Thank to Ashley Chun who incorporated a drive to collect items for unhoused people along with the FGCA's final clothing swap (December 2, 2023). Susan also wrote a short piece that was featured in the December Observer newspaper (https://fairfieldcommunity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Merged_compressed.pdf - page 5).

Donations:

Cash donations for the unhoused continue to be accepted via the FGCA Canada Helps account specific donation line. If you'd like to make a donation or share it with a friend see <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/6848?v2=true> and select option 4 in the fund box (see below).

FUND ?

4. Supporting unhoused people in the community

Online presence

We launched our website in September 2022 so it's not legitimately something we did this year but (<https://nsun.ca/>) more recently (October 2023) we set up a Facebook page. If you are on Facebook just search for Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours. We also have a Twitter account (I refuse to use the name X) nsun_victoria. Please follow us and share our various online platform addresses/handle.

Future Directions

In 2024 we will continue to advocate for 1) 24/7 bathroom on Pandora, 2) sanctioned and supported encampment(s) as an alternative to shelters while housing is being built (typically 2-3 years out even when modular building techniques are used). We will also keep pressing for the City of Victoria to take a human-right-to-housing approach to the homelessness problem rather than the punitive, criminalizing approach they currently seem locked into.



Attendees at December 21 event – NSUN members Sinan Demirel (at the H in Human), Bob Crane (M in Human), Kayla MacKay (G in Right), Susan Martin (to the right of the T in Right), Heather (holding Merry Christmas sign), Martin Girard (kneeling to left of sign), Rowena Locklin (to right of Merry Christmas sign in brown jacket), Kris and Michael – members of Victoria Downtown Residents Association and NSUN members – Kris in red jacket to the left of Heather and Michael in the blue jacket to the right of Heather (both are standing behind her)