

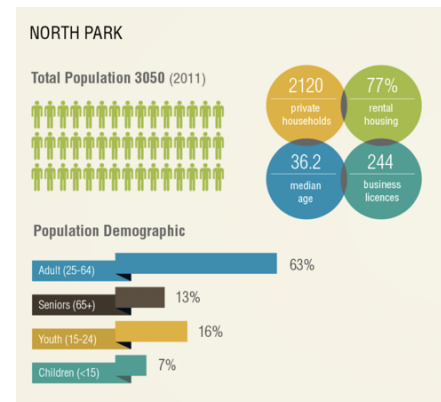
# North Park Neighbourhood Association: Canadian Red Cross Grant Evaluation - Application 1067

*This report was written by D. Holtby consulting in collaboration with the NPNA*

The North Park Neighbourhood Association (NPNA) is a non-profit society that plays an active role in improving the quality of life of our downtown neighbourhood. The NPNA runs a variety of events and services including a free weekly grocery hamper for low-income seniors and families and a monthly food market featuring diverse local food vendors. It engages in City initiatives such as the ongoing Local Area Plan, and is in the process of establishing an active and engaging community association land use committee (CALUC). The events, programs, and activities by the NPNA are made possible through the support of many wonderful volunteers and community members as well as grant funding from funders such as the City of Victoria, Vancouver Island Health Authority, and the Canadian Red Cross.

## About the North Park Neighborhood

North Park is a growing neighborhood located to the northeast of Victoria's downtown core. North Park is largely made up of renters and low-income families. Residents in North Park are the most likely in Victoria to be low income and financially vulnerable. 15-30% of North Park residents live in subsidized housing, and nearly a quarter of North Park residents live in poverty. This is even higher for seniors and children (36% and 28% respectively).



North Park is ranked 78 out of 78 for the most financially vulnerable neighbourhood in the CRD according to Prosper Canada's National Financial Health Index, a composite index of household financial health at the neighbourhood level.

Demographics of North Park and surrounding census tracts:

- 77% of residents are renters
- 57% of residents live in 5+ storey apartment buildings (highest in Victoria)
- 28% of households are considered low income (second highest in Victoria)
- 15-30% of households living in subsidized housing (versus less than 15%, City average)
- 21% of households identify as immigrants (3rd highest in Victoria)
- 4% of households are recent immigrants
- 5% of households identify as Indigenous
- 28% of children (0-17) live in poverty

## Sheltering in parks: What's happening in North Park?

The statistics above paint a picture of the neighbourhood's housed residents. Since the pandemic began, North Park has been experiencing a high concentration of individuals experiencing homelessness sheltering in the neighbourhood, adding significantly to the vulnerability of North Park. The funding associated with this project was used to address the impacts of COVID-19 on those experiencing homelessness who have faced increased challenges accessing necessities due to community organizations adjusting due to public health regulations.

With the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, shelters across Victoria closed their doors and/or reduced their capacity significantly. Shelter users quickly found themselves pushed onto the streets with nowhere to go. With few to no indoor sheltering spaces available many unhoused residents were forced to camp in parks and public spaces. In response, the City of Victoria adjusted bylaws allowing for 24/7 sheltering in parks and worked to open indoor motel spaces to house those in need.

In addition to advocating for increased coordination of services and permanent housing, the NPNA has worked to provide support to those sheltering in the North Park neighbourhood's parks. As per the NPNA's [vision and values](#), the organization seeks to be inclusive, operate with a principle of equity and fairness, and to be sensitive to the needs of everyone living and working in the neighborhood. The NPNA is however, not a service provider and has therefore built relationships with established service providers to meet the needs of those sheltering in the park/parking lot. The NPNA continues to advocate for more and better coordination of services for those living outdoors.

Early in the pandemic, (April-May 2020) an encampment was established by the City and the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness in Topaz Park, a large city park in the Hillside Quadra neighbourhood. However, a provincial order was passed to close down this encampment by the end of May of 2020 due to the overcrowding and increased calls for service to police. By this point, there were nearly 300 individuals sheltering in this one area. This closure resulted in a gradual movement of unhoused residents to Central Park, located in the middle of the North Park neighborhood. From May to August 2020 there were approximately 35 structures in Central Park.

However, on August 31, 2020 the City of Victoria closed a downtown sheltering site - Centennial Square - forcing residents there to again seek alternative shelter. In one week the number of people sheltering in Central Park jumped from 35 to 85. These numbers steadily increased through the fall, reaching a total of 122 structures by mid-October.

From June through December, the NPNA repeatedly wrote to municipal and provincial authorities highlighting community concerns regarding the evolving situation in Central Park and the need for indoor housing. Upon witnessing the lack of coordinated services in Central Park, the North Park Neighbourhood Association applied for a second round of funding to fill the void in support and

services available for those sheltering in North Park. In December 2020 the NPNA received this grant from the Canadian Red Cross to support North Park residents experiencing homelessness.

On December 21, 2020, those sheltering in Central Park faced a further challenge – a winter storm, of heavy rain and snow, flooded the park. Many of the residents' tents were destroyed and their belongings ruined by rain. In response to this emergency situation, the City of Victoria announced that everyone from Central Park would be temporarily relocated a block away, to Royal Athletic Park parking lot (940 Caledonia) on December 23, 2020. North Park neighbours and NPNA board members, volunteered en masse to support this unmanaged relocation effort and continued to provide support and coordination assistance until February 19, 2021.

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#### SEE ALSO

- [\*Twitter thread: illustrating the dire circumstances in Central Park on December 21, 2020\*](#)
  - [\*Video: by documentary filmmaker Krista Loughton shot in Central Park on Monday.\*](#)
  - [\*Letter: North Park Neighbourhood Association's Request to Immediately Open Save On Foods Memorial Arena \(SOFMA\) for Indoor Housing\*](#)
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Over the course of the 5 days following the relocation, and with the help of roughly 30 neighborhood volunteers, those sheltering in Central Park were moved over to 940 Caledonia. The Victoria Fire Department provided 36 new tents for the site. Utilizing this grant provided by the Canadian Red Cross, the NPNA purchased the supplies needed to establish a new encampment, and equip residents at 940 Caledonia for the elements. For example, 940 Caledonia residents were supplied with essential items such as a tarps, sleeping bags, totes for belongings, rechargeable hand warmer, battery operated LED lantern, laundry bag, a small fire extinguisher, etc. The NPNA also ensured that water was made available and that First Aid and naloxone supplies were present on site.

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SEE ALSO: ["Lessons Learned - Central Park to 940 Caledonia - Relocation Timeline, Volunteer Impact Statements, and Case Studies"](#)

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The relocation from Central Park to 940 Caledonia was supported by the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness and the Extreme Weather Protocol for one day only - December 23, 2020. Unfortunately, this was an incredibly inadequate response. As a result, at the end of the day on December 23, 2020 only a fraction of the tents were set up, very few had been claimed by Central Park residents, and none of the tents had been secured or prepared for the oncoming rainy and windy weather. The NPNA stepped in to fill a huge void in coordination and support. Between December 24-31, 2020 NPNA, community volunteers, and 940 Caledonia residents set up the encampment. By the end of the day on December 31, 2020 all 36 tents had a pallet and plywood platform, a tent, and a heavy duty tarp - secured and self contained.

After the initial establishment of the encampment at 940 Caledonia, the NPNA worked to coordinate with essential service providers and to support the general functioning of the encampment. For example, through this grant, the NPNA also established roles for park residents to become arms length subcontractors, and in turn contribute to the daily operations at 940 Caledonia. These roles included park liaison, park cleaning team, food delivery, maintenance, and social media. This involved being at 940 Caledonia every day, working with park residents to assign roles, set folks up for the day's work, administer payment, and troubleshoot as problems arose.

In addition, this grant was able to actualize a long standing request of a warming tent. This had been repeatedly requested by the unhoused community since the summer. Those living outdoors anticipated that come winter, they would need a large warming tent to shelter from the elements. After several months of asking the City to look into a warming tent, the NPNA was successful in this request. On December 31, 2020 the City and BC Housing agreed to work together to establish a warming tent. The fact that the NPNA had the ability to immediately staff the warming tent through the \$18,200 allocated in the grant was a significant factor in the success of this request. The NPNA worked with Peers Resource Society who were able to supply the staff to get the warming tent up and running beginning on January 22, 2021.

The NPNA has also attended regular meetings – daily logistical meetings and weekly circle meetings that were also attended by 940 Caledonia residents, Bylaw officers, City staff, housing providers, and by North Park housed neighbours.

The encampment at 940 Caledonia remained until March 19, 2021. On January 8, 2021 a proposal was announced for a tiny home village at the 940 Caledonia site.<sup>1</sup> The proposal promises that 30 shipping container homes, managed through a local housing developer - Our Place - will be opened by March 31, 2021 and will remain on site until September 31, 2022. On March 18, 2021 City of Victoria Council unanimously approved the Temporary Use Proposal following an expedited community consultation process. An updated timeline suggests that the Tiny Home Village will be ready to welcome new residents by the end of April 2021.

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*SEE ALSO: Letter: [Treatment of current tenants at 940 Caledonia in relation Tiny Home Village](#)  
The NPNA opposed the lack of proactive communication information provided to the tenants at 940 Caledonia. We summarize the procedural issues surrounding the decampment of 940 Caledonia in preparation for the Tiny Home Village, and made recommendations in the letter above.*

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On January 27, 2021, BC Housing announced that the Save-On-Foods Memorial Arena will be opened to temporary housing on March 1, 2021. It has been promised that the facility will provide shelter and wrap-around supports for 45 people currently experiencing homelessness<sup>2</sup>. The

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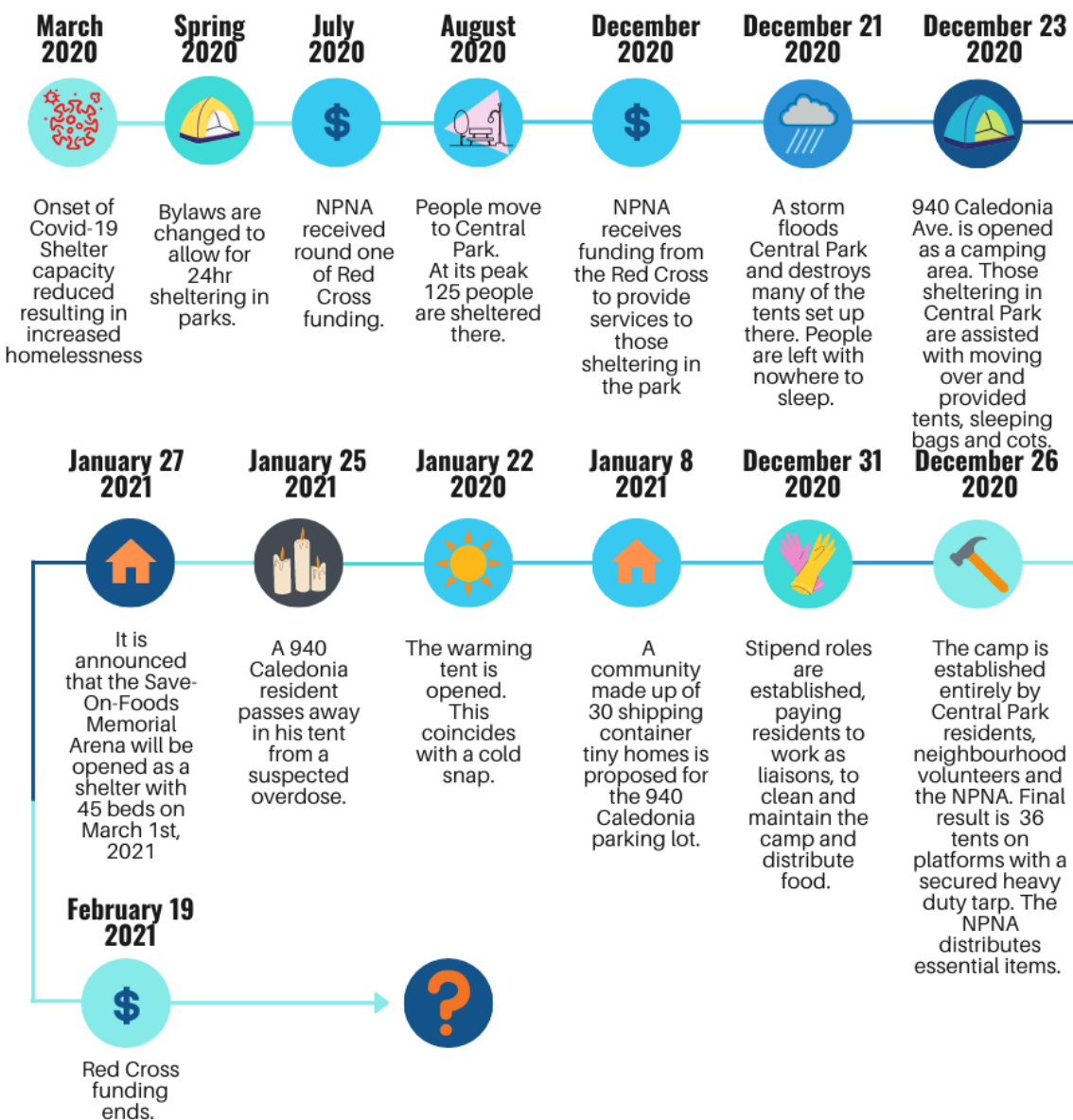
<sup>1</sup> January 8, 2021: <https://npna.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MakingRoom-NeighbourLetter-Final-2-1.pdf>  
March 1, 2021: <https://npna.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Tiny-Homes-Village-21-PRINT-1-1.pdf>, project website: <https://victoriahomelessness.ca/tinyhomes/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bchousing.org/news?newsId=1479156755138>

Arena, which was also operated from May-August 2020 was successfully integrated into the community and provided a fast-track pathway to permanent housing for those who accepted this offer of temporary housing.

## NPNA ENGAGEMENT

### Key events related to sheltering in North Park neighbourhood parks



## Who is this report for?

This report is intended to demonstrate to the Canadian Red Cross how funding was employed, the impact of the services provided, and areas of remaining need. We also intend to share this report with BC Housing, City of Victoria staff, City of Victoria Mayor and Council, and Provincial elected leaders (MLAs, MPs, Cabinet Ministers) to provide insights into the impacts that sheltering in parks has had to both housed and unhoused residents of North Park and to highlight the need for longer-term housing solutions, and better coordination of services and on site wraparound supports.

## Evaluation Objectives

This evaluation will examine the implementation and impact of the funding that the NPNA received from the Canadian Red Cross in December 2020. The funding associated with this project was used to address the impacts of COVID-19 on those experiencing homelessness who have faced increased challenges accessing necessities due to community organizations adjusting due to public health regulations.

### This evaluation aims to:

- Evaluate the impact of the services, programs, and support provided by the NPNA from the perspective of both housed and unhoused residents of North Park
- Improve understanding of current service provisions
- Provide a better understanding of the needs of North Park's unhoused residents
- Increase understanding of this complex problem and the systemic barriers which perpetuate and deepen homelessness
- Identify areas for improvement in systems change and processes relating to homelessness prevention and support
- Advocate for increased service provision for the unhoused residents of 940 Caledonia.

## What are we evaluating?

This evaluation explores three key components:

1. The implementation and delivery of services to the residents of 940 Caledonia.
2. The impact of these services to the well-being of the residents of 940 Caledonia and to the housed residents of North Park.
3. The impact of this project on systems change: the self-determination of the residents of 940 Caledonia, shifting relationships and mindsets between the unhoused, housed, service providers, and civil servants and elected officials.

## Evaluation Methodology:

### How did we do the evaluation?

The research methodology and interview questions were collaboratively developed by an arms length subcontractor and members of the NPNA. From February 4 to February 11, 2021 qualitative interviews were conducted between the researcher and relevant parties.

Interviews were conducted with:

- 16 unhoused residents of 940 Caledonia
- 5 North Park housed neighbours
- 1 Service Provider
- Written comments were also provided by the NPNA

The age range of the sixteen unhoused residents interviewed at 940 Caledonia ranged from 22 to 53; ten were male and six female. All identified as experiencing homelessness and living in poverty, six identified as Indigenous. The majority (11) of those participants arrived at 940 Caledonia immediately following the flooding of Central Park. All participants had at one point in time resided in Central Park.

The five housed residents of North Park that were interviewed live on the street adjacent to the encampment. They ranged in age from 30 to 66; four identified as female, and one as male. None of the housed respondents identified as being low-income, living in poverty, or as a person of colour.

Standardized interview questions were used, with targeted questions developed to address the different concerns and needs of the involved groups. The interviews varied in length from twenty to sixty minutes, with the participant leading the pace of the interview. The responses have been anonymized to protect the identities of those participating in the evaluation.

## Evaluation Results

### How was the funding used?

The grant provided by the Canadian Red Cross allowed the NPNA to deliver a number of direct services to those sheltering at 940 Caledonia and to coordinate the involvement of essential service providers in the park.

Red Cross funds were used to finance the following initiatives, supports, and services:

- **Arms length subcontractors:** The grant funding allowed for roles to be established for clean team, park liaisons, park maintenance, food distribution, and social media. Residents from the 940 Caledonia encampment filled these roles on a daily basis.
- **Speakers Corner "Video Village":** Included a two day event involving a video village set up with sound production & crew inviting 940 Caledonia residents to tell their story.
- **Warming tent:** staffed during daytime hours with extended hours during extreme weather.
- **Direct aid to 940 Caledonia residents including:**



- o Large 5 gallon bottles of water for drinking, refilled near daily by volunteers with houses nearby.
- o Flashlights, first aid supplies: including headlamps, lanterns, batteries, etc.
- o Hygiene products: clean socks, laundry bags, mold spray for tents, clean team supplies, etc.
- o Winter weather supplies: tarps, pallets and plywood for elevating structures, vapour barrier to insulate tents, maintenance supplies, replacement tents, sleeping bags, toques, gloves, hand warmers, etc.
- o Bus tickets
- o Food for weekly meetings: food also supplied to the warming tent (high energy snacks, and hot water based drinks and snacks such as coffee, hot chocolate, oatmeal, noodles, etc.)
- o Food for weekly grocery hamper distribution

## What was the impact?

### A new location – the move from Central Park to 940 Caledonia

It is important to note that when this grant application was submitted on October 30, 2020, we could not have foreseen the devastating flood that caused an emergency evacuation and relocation from Central Park to 940 Caledonia. Not to mention that this would take place just days before the Christmas holidays when City, service provider, and nonprofit staff were running at reduced capacity, or closed altogether. The greatest impact of this funding was that it allowed the NPNA to step in, resolve gaps and deficiencies, and respond immediately to the many needs arising from the flood damage, relocation, and an entirely new encampment set up.

For the majority (60%) of 940 Caledonia residents the new location 940 Caledonia has been overwhelmingly positive. As one resident noted: *“The flood [at Central Park] ruined everything I owned. I was floating in water... I was badly infected all over my body after that. I ended up in the hospital. When I moved to 940, I was connected to medical services. [Being here] helped me get new clothing, new bedding and all of that.”*



100% of interview participants received a tent platform made of pallets and plywood, access to a new tent, and the majority received new sleeping bags and cots (others brought their own supplies with them). 940 Caledonia residents noted that the new site was dryer, closer to services downtown, and provided a greater sense of community. The move also meant greater consistency in access to service providers – organizations like Peers Resource Society, were on site daily, and the site was

visited on a regular basis by organizations like the SOLID Outreach Society (providing Naloxone, harm reduction), and AIDS Vancouver Island (administering the SAFER program)



For some, the move has also meant increased stability – they have access to a tent and place to sleep every night. It has also meant greater visibility to organizations like BC Housing. As one interviewee stated: *“For five months we basically felt invisible. Until that flood happened ... It took something disastrous to happen to show all the discrepancies and to show the disastrous conditions we were living under.”*

For four respondents the move was not an improvement. At Central Park they enjoyed more space, freedom of movement, and felt less scrutinized by Bylaw officers and neighbours. As one respondent shared, *“I'm also quite concerned by the attitude of the bylaw officers. I get along with them fine. But it feels like we're being imprisoned by them.”*

A staff member of one of the service providers shared concerns around how the move occurred, *“The move was necessary, but there needs to be acknowledgement of displacement and impact to mental health and their connection to land and community.”* The service provider suggested that a trauma-informed approach should be taken to ensure people who are in a precarious situation are not harmed through unnecessary disruptions or abrupt changes.

The move has brought forward a number of concerns. Several 940 Caledonia residents commented that living in close quarters comes with its challenges – there is a high level of noise at night, interpersonal conflict, and drug use. Many respondents noted that a high percentage of the encampment struggles with mental health and addiction issues that can lead to arguments: *“It's chaotic. Everybody tattles on each other. Everybody's in it for the drugs. It's a drug-y place. And everybody's together trying to be friends, but it's not going to work ... I want to move but I'm okay, for now. I'm not going to change what I can't.”*

These concerns were shared by housed North Park residents. All of the housed neighbors that were interviewed expressed concerns about increased noise levels at night, had witnessed arguments, and were concerned about drug use and the presence of drug dealers on their street.

#### **The impact of essential goods and services to the well-being of 940 Caledonia residents:**

All of the 940 Caledonia residents agreed that there are far more services available at 940 Caledonia than were present at Central Park. At Central Park, service providers such as the SOLID Outreach Society, AIDS Vancouver Island, Peers Resource Society, the Ministry, and BC Housing would visit, but to individual tents. Campers felt they did not always know how or when to access services. In August, the NPNA donated a pop up 10x10 tent providing a centralized area for service providers to connect with park residents, and a collection point for donations. However it was removed in November, when the park resident who oversaw the tent moved to another park.

The 940 Caledonia site provides more consistent access to basic goods and services. The site is equipped with 4 port-a-potties (cleaned on a daily basis), running water, and garbage and recycling

disposal. In early February mobile showers, funded by the City of Victoria and organized by the Salvation Army, began visiting the site on a rotating basis, several days per week.

A warming tent was set up on site on January 22, 2020. It was staffed daily by outreach workers. Originally, the tent used 3 propane fueled heaters, however, electricity was finally provided, and by mid February, the warming tent was heated with electric heaters. Electric heat is both safer and more effective, and was a dramatic improvement. The outreach workers at the warming tent distribute snacks (noodles, oatmeal, soup, fruit, high calorie snacks, etc.), warm drinks (coffee, tea, hot chocolate), batteries, harm reduction supplies, and clothing donations sourced from the neighbourhood. Many of these resources were made possible by this grant as well. The warming tent also stored any leftover meal deliveries ensuring that residents had easy access to food. It also provided a friendly place for residents to socialize in a covid safe environment.

All of the interviewees used the warming tent on a daily basis, many multiple times a day. For some, having the warming tent made the difference between eating or going without, *"They're doing so much. They're filling a huge gap in terms of food and heat. A lot of times people will miss their meals and so the next step is to come here."*

More than one respondent shared that it's meant they've been able to put on much needed weight for the first time in months. The warming tent staff are always on site when the warming tent is open. They shared that it has been an important space to build relationships and connect with residents. There were however challenges in getting the warming tent up and running - there were bureaucratic challenges in arranging and meeting permitting requirements with the city. There could have also been clearer communication by the NPNA with Peers (who assisted with staffing) to ensure a shared vision for the space. While there have been learnings, the residents, and the staff shared that the warming tent has been a very important and successful initiative.

Service providers from organizations such as the SOLID Outreach Society are on site daily providing harm reduction supplies, safe supply, and cigarettes. Other organizations such as AIDS Vancouver Island, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and BC Housing visit regularly. The importance of harm reduction supplies was emphasized by more than one of the respondents: *"The harm reduction really helps, we're not re-using our old stuff."*

As outlined above, the Canadian Red Cross grant allowed the NPNA to make the purchase of goods to directly benefit those at 940 Caledonia. This included:

- flashlights, first aid supplies: including headlamps, lanterns, batteries, hygiene products such as clean socks, laundry bags, mold spray for tents, clean team supplies,
- winter weather supplies such as tarps, pallets and plywood for elevating structures, vapour barrier to insulate tents, maintenance supplies, replacement tents, sleeping bags, toques, gloves, hand warmers,
  - The NPNA also supplied laminated signs for tents in which the occupant was trained in First Aid, the use of Naloxone, and/or custodians of a fire extinguisher.

- bus tickets, and
- food for weekly meetings
- staffing of, and additional supplies and food distributed at the warming tent

As the infographic shown below demonstrates, a high proportion of 940 Caledonia residents received these items.



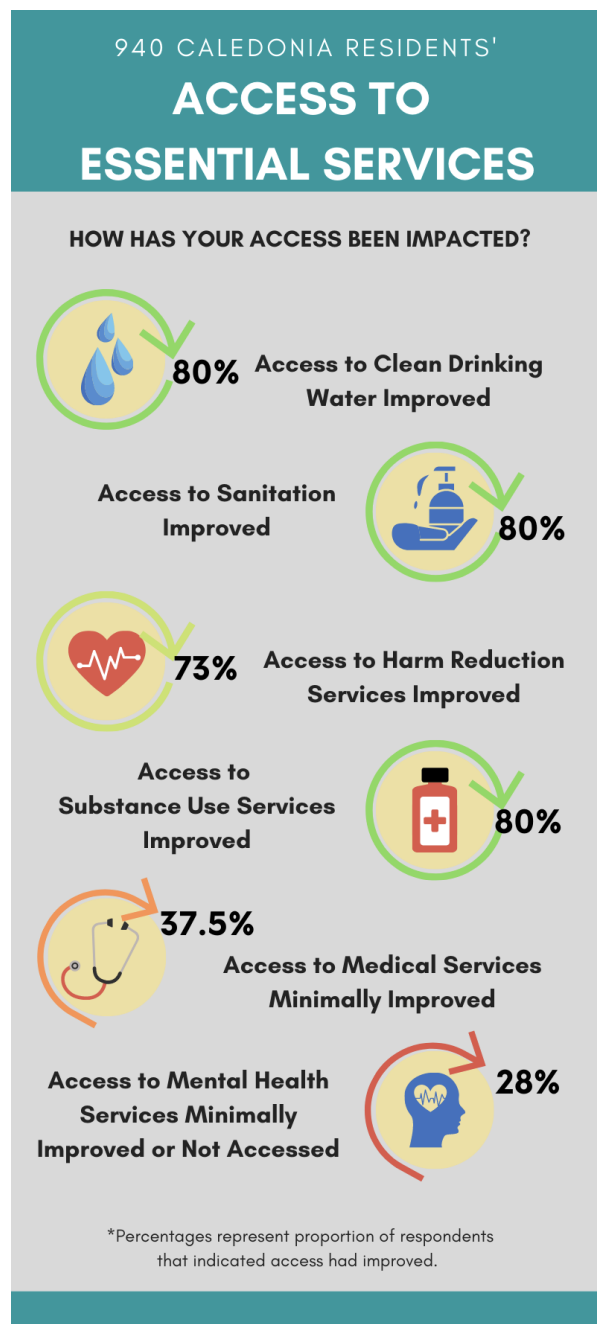
Every respondent stated that the impact of having received these basic goods has been tremendously positive. As one respondent noted: *"It's helped tremendously, I don't need to go out and be in places I don't want to be."* Two respondents shared that this has meant they are no longer bottle picking, or going onto other peoples properties to finance the purchase of essential goods.

Importantly the move from Central Park to 940 Caledonia has improved access to essential basic services and increased connections to health and mental health care providers. As demonstrated in the infographic on the next page, 80% of respondents noted that their access to clean drinking water and sanitation had been improved by the move to 940 Caledonia. 80% felt that their access to substance use services had been improved. Similarly, 73% felt their access to harm reduction services had been improved, commenting, *"It's really good [harm reduction supplies] are always available. [Downtown] there would always be people going down, and there would be no Naloxone. Here, it's always available."* 93.75% of respondents shared that they had accessed harm reduction services, at least 2 of those respondents had accessed harm reduction supplies on a daily basis.

Respondents did however note that access to medical and mental health services could be improved. Responses on access to medical services were quite varied – 37.5% of respondents felt that access had been improved by the move while 56 % of respondents said that access to medical services was

the same at Central Park, or that they had not accessed medical services. For one respondent the move meant connecting to medical services at a vital moment to his health – following the flooding

in Central Park the respondent developed a serious skin infection. The move to 940 Caledonia connected him to supports that ensured he visited the emergency room, where his infection was cleaned and he was provided with antibiotics.



On January 25, 2021 one of the residents at 940 Caledonia was found dead in his tent of a suspected overdose. This had a significant impact on the other residents at 940 Caledonia. This devastating incident demonstrates the gaps that are left when on site wraparound supports are not provided for encampments.

Access to mental health services also appeared quite variable – 28% of respondents said that access had been improved, 57% said that they had not accessed mental health services or that access had remained the same. 14% said that access could be improved. One respondent did share that his time at 940 Caledonia had connected him to trauma services and addictions counselling.

100% of interviewees noted that having these basic supplies and services on hand has freed up time to do other things: residents are looking for housing, working to clean the camp, accessing medical and mental health services, showering more regularly, and one respondent is now accessing addictions counselling.

Overall, there is a sense the 940 Caledonia encampment has reduced worry, enhanced stability, and provided hope for longer-term change: *"Being provided a place where I can stay at night and be warm has a lot of meaning. To not have to worry about where I'm going to stay at night. It means I can actually go out in the day and get things done."*

Another resident noted that: *"It's made me feel there are people out there that are willing to help. For five months we felt invisible. It's given me hope in terms of housing. Lisa Helps said that we should all be housed by March 31<sup>st</sup>. That's the best news I've heard since being here."*

### Access to arms length subcontractor park roles

Following the move from Central Park, when the 940 Caledonia encampment was in place, the NPNA helped residents establish roles for 940 Caledonia residents to support in the maintenance and coordination of the encampment. The roles were clean team (3 per day), park liaisons (2 per day), park maintenance (3 per day), food distribution (2 per day). Residents from the 940 Caledonia encampment filled these roles on a daily basis.

As with all aspects of this project, the NPNA opted for a community led model with the arms length subcontractor park roles. The application submitted in October 2020 included these roles because these were the roles that the residents, while they were living at Central Park, repeatedly requested. We worked with the park residents on developing the guidelines for each role, and invited 940 Caledonia residents to choose when they participated through a daily sign up sheet. Two NPNA volunteers attended 940 Caledonia every single day to sign up the residents for the daily roles. Many conflicts arose throughout the course of this program.

80% of interview respondents had participated in an arms length subcontractor park role. The majority of those had worked on the park clean team or doing food distribution. Feedback on these roles was mixed. Two respondents noted that people were happy to receive food deliveries, and one respondent noted that it felt *“good to lead by example”*. 45% felt there had been no impact to others at 940 Caledonia, 36% felt that their role was seen negatively. Respondents noted that their efforts to help out went unnoticed by others, that there were inconsistencies in how roles had been assigned, inequities in opportunities to sign up for roles, and some respondents noted that they had received complaints from others in the camp that they had not received meals. One respondent summarized this as follows, *“It's complicated. There's been funding towards the clean team. But, there's conflict over how that's divvied out between people. Sometimes there are people that want to do it more often than others, some that don't participate at all. Say with the clean team or the food distribution, it seems like there's a lot of people repeating. Some people are doing it more often than others... That's starting to sort itself out. But there's been some squabbling and in-fighting”*.

Others noted that there have been issues with the park liaison role – that it has been a stressful position that requires 24/7 work that is compensated with the same wage as tasks that take much less time. Others commented that it was difficult to communicate with the liaisons and challenging to get clear information on how and when to sign up for other park roles. One respondent suggested that the Liaison role be assigned on a rotating basis to different people in the encampment: *“I'm unhappy. It's getting out of hand in terms of who's in charge or not. I'm getting the run around and not getting answers at all. I don't care about the stipends. I just want to lend a hand. We should be helping each other, not fighting. But that's how it's been seen. Because everyone is getting told to go to the Liaison and they scream that they don't want to do it anymore, but everyone is still going to them. We need to have a real meeting about the top priorities. Who's in charge and if possible, to hand it off to one person or 2 people once a week or every other week to give them a break.”*

Rotating the liaison role was suggested, but there were no residents volunteered to take on this role.

This portion of the project was the most time consuming, difficult and layered in its complexities. While it was in direct response to the requests of the residents, it was difficult to administer as a neighbourhood association who was not on site 24/7. Conflicts arose frequently about an imbalance in the amount of work being accomplished by different park residents. Because we were not able to be on site at all times when the work was being completed, we were unable to comment when disputes over these inequities took place. However, in each circumstance, the park residents were able to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution.

Despite the difficulties associated with the arms length subcontractor park roles, it was overall a successful portion of the project. 940 Caledonia residents were engaged in their community, empowered to take on leadership roles, compensated for their efforts, and had a voice in the coordination and establishment of the community.

There was however clear consensus among residents who participated as a subcontractor that receiving compensation for their work had a positive impact. For some, the honorariums helped them feel recognized for their efforts, *"I felt like I was compensated. You know, that my time is valuable."* For others it meant less financial stress, *"It's hard living from cheque to cheque so it means I can go and purchase some things like food that I need throughout the month."*

Despite the efforts of the park clean team, half of the housed neighbours that were interviewed expressed concerns that there was an increase in garbage in the neighborhood (with one noting that they had found a needle on the street). This indicates that even with the clean team, greater efforts may be needed to keep the area clean.

940 Caledonia residents also shared that there are a few additional roles they'd like to see in the camp. One interviewee suggested a washroom specific clean team. (The NPNA together with park residents did consider this at a weekly meeting, but it was deemed an unsuitable role due to biohazard concerns. Instead, it was decided that if washrooms were in need of attention, the warming tent staff would call the City Parks department.) Others suggested a role specific to tent repairs. This was however, already considered a part of the general Park Maintenance Team but due to the sheer number of tents that required repairs, it was not always performed by the residents in that role. This challenge highlights a suggestion from another resident – that the outcomes and expectations of each role be more clearly articulated to help ensure tasks are completed. Two interviewees suggested that counselling roles could be added to assist with the interpersonal conflict in the encampment, this would however require additional training and resources.

While the arms length contractor park roles had a positive impact on residents' feeling of self-worth and ability to access other goods, there have been clear challenges and many lessons



learned. With the close of Canadian Red Cross funding on February 19th, the management of subcontractor park roles was passed over to Peers Resource Society. This presented an opportunity for the management of role sign up and accessibility to be reviewed.

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*SEE ALSO: Youtube: [Life Outside video series](#). This series of 18 interviews was filmed by documentary filmmaker, Krista Loughton. These videos were included in this grant (See "Speaker's Corner" grant category).*

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## Communications

The NPNA helped to establish several avenues of communication at 940 Caledonia and opportunities for residents of 940 Caledonia and housed North Park residents to meet, voice concerns, and to coordinate with service providers and City staff.

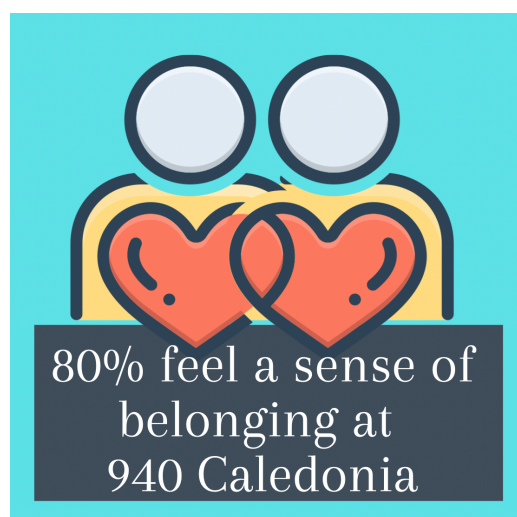
Daily logistical meetings were held at 8:30 am attended by park residents, housed neighbours, Bylaw Officers, City staff, the Victoria Police Department, and members of the NPNA. These meetings allow those present to address issues like noise complaints, security concerns, and to check-in with each other. Of those who participated in the evaluation, 60% had participated in the morning meetings. Of those who didn't the majority noted that they were too early for them to attend.

Weekly meetings were also held each Wednesday at 2 pm. These meetings were more widely attended by 940 Caledonia residents. The meetings were facilitated by Janine Theobald (Inclusion & Collaboration Manager with the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness) and served as a space for residents to share news and information on site initiatives, bring forward concerns, and to problem-solve noted challenges. 73% of respondents had attended these weekly meetings.

In both cases, 940 Caledonia residents felt that these meetings had a positive impact on the camp. As one resident noted, *"It's been really great. It feels like more of a community. It's helpful to know who's around for help and what resources there are."* Another shared, *"It's allowed residents to know what's going on. It's nice to meet [housed] neighbours."*

## Self-Determination of 940 Caledonia Residents

For many of the 940 Caledonia residents expressed that living in the encampment had positively changed how they view other people experiencing homelessness and made them feel a greater sense of connection. As one resident noted, *"I can relate better now. It's not because you want to be out here, but because you have to be out here."* Of those who participated in the evaluation, 80% felt a sense of belonging at 940 Caledonia. Respondents expressed a clear sense of community, connection, and self-worth:



*"It's a good spot here. I'm where I should be. It's made me feel like I'm needed – I'm not a waste of space. I have a voice here."*

That sense of belonging was lower for the broader North Park neighbourhood, with only 65% indicating they felt a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood.

When asked if they felt they could choose where to live, the majority answered no. For some the encampment has provided hope that longer term housing will be made available (through the opening of the Save-On-Food Memorial Arena, the Tiny Homes initiative, and through BC Housing), *"We're going to have options when we leave... We had no options at Central Park. They had nothing to offer us over there"*. Others however, expressed that long-term housing remains the greatest struggle they face, *"I don't know [if I can choose where to live]. That's to be determined based on what happens with BC Housing."*

For some the encampment has provided a greater sense of control over their housing situation. One resident noted, *"Being here makes them realize that I should have been housed years ago. People found me, and they're looking for that perfect place for me."* While others stated simply, *"It's out of my control"*, and *"I don't have access to the choices I would choose due to my limited income."*

The encampment at 940 Caledonia has had a clear impact on residents' sense of belonging, however big challenges lay ahead to ensure they are securely housed and regain a sense of control over their living situation.

## Relationships to Organizations and Community Members

### 940 Caledonia Resident Relationships

As previously noted, the move from Central Park to 940 Caledonia meant that service providers and other agencies have been on site more frequently. Most interviewees noted that their relationships to these organizations were positive. There were no interviewees that suggested they had a negative relationship with any of the organizations listed below. Any responses that were not positive, were neutral or an indication that they had not interacted with the organization.

The SOLID Outreach Society, Peers, the Victoria Policy Department and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction received the most enthusiastic responses (with 93%, 88%, 88%, and 88% of respondents indicating a positive relationship). Several respondents noted that they were extremely happy to see outreach workers from SOLID and to have access to harm reduction and safe supplies. While most saw no change in their relationship to those organizations in their time at Central Park and 940 Caledonia, many noted that seeing these organizations more regularly helped to build trust and a sense that they could source necessary services when they needed them, *"It's been nothing but positive. I'm so appreciative of everything they're doing."*

Residents' relationship to other organizations was more mixed. With 78% of respondents

indicating a positive relationship to the BC Ambulance service, 75% positive with Bylaw Officers, 73% positive relationship to AIDS Vancouver Island, 66% positive to the NPNA and 40% to BC



Housing. Respondents noted that they had infrequent interactions with the BC Ambulance service, with only 2 interviewees having accessed their services.

Several respondents shared that their relationship to Bylaw officers had improved over time. As one resident commented, *"It started off not very well, but knowing them and seeing them more often, it's been alright. A lot of them are friendly now that we*

*know each other."* There was a general sense among respondents of growing trust towards and lessened fear of Bylaw Officers. Others, however, noted that Bylaw officers were not doing enough to resolve arguments. Still others felt they were under the constant watch and surveillance of officers, creating a feeling of uneasiness.

66% of respondents noted that their relationship with the NPNA was positive, with some sharing that the organization had become an important part of their life at 940 Caledonia, *"They're very caring... They felt like family right away."* Others had not interacted with the NPNA, except for participating in the camp meetings, or felt their relationship to the NPNA had been challenged by the organization and arguments around the arms length contractor park roles.

Most respondents were clear that their relationship to BC Housing could be improved. While no one indicated that they had had negative interactions, the majority of interviewees suggested that they would like to see BC Housing more often. 80% of interviewees noted that their long term housing situation had improved – they felt more stably housed in tents than sleeping on the streets, or searching for somewhere to set up camp every day. Being at 940 Caledonia also meant that it was easier to connect with BC Housing, *"It's better, Here I'm under the microscope. I'm not just some random person sitting alone in the park. They look at each person here and they know them."* For many this has provided a sense of hope for indoor housing in the near future, *"It's given me the chance to get long-term housing. It's given me a step towards long-term. It's awesome."* Others did however worry about staying in touch with BC Housing workers. It was noted that the agency does visit the encampment, but two interviewees worried that without a fixed address to receive mail, and without power to charge cell phones on a regular basis, they had limited ability to contact BC Housing to check on their file or to make independent searches for housing.

### Relationships between the housed and unhoused

The encampments at both Central Park and 940 Caledonia have brought the housed and unhoused residents of North Park into much closer contact. For those at 940 Caledonia, the impact has been mixed. For housed North Park residents, the impact has been markedly negative.

For over half of the interviewees residing at 940 Caledonia, their time at the encampment has not changed their relationship to housed neighbours. The remaining respondents were evenly split in feeling that their relationships had either improved or had deteriorated, with one commenting, *"They don't approve, and they look down. They're quick to judge, but maybe I am too because I assume they're all like that. It's made me feel shunned by them."* Another commented, *"When we have our meetings and see people from the neighbourhood, it helps me know that we're in touch with the community. More so than when I was living on the street and carrying my tent around every day."*

For housed neighbours, the encampment has caused great concern, and for the majority of respondents negatively impacted how they view their unhoused neighbors. While all the housed neighbours expressed a desire to be compassionate towards the encampment, they expressed repeated concern about the park's impact on neighbourhood safety, *"I do feel badly for them. In other ways, I'm angry because they've made my neighborhood such a crap hole. But in the long run it's not them, it's our government system that's not doing its job."* Another neighbour commented on the impact of the proximity of the encampment, *"Having them that close makes me not want to interact with them at all. When I'm downtown I don't mind giving them [money]... When you might recognize me, I feel vulnerable. I don't want to have any eye contact. I don't feel safe."* One neighbour suggested that more opportunities to open the area up and to increase interactions with the rest of the neighborhood would help, *"They're not really a part of our community, and we're not really a part of theirs. There's been no integration. If we knew these people, we would be like, 'oh that's just Tom'. They wouldn't be complete strangers."*

### Relationships with City Staff and Elected Officials

For 940 Caledonia residents the encampment has meant many have had greater contact with city staff and elected officials. Some noted that, while the flooding at Central Park was extremely difficult, it brought greater visibility of their needs to elected officials and brought the promise of indoor housing, *"That was the catalyst for us sitting here. Everyone took notice, including the mayor. She gave us her word that she would fight to get us housing. And then the Attorney General stepped up and said, 'I'm on board, I'm going to make sure everyone is housed by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. There have been a lot of bold statements made by people in power."* For others it's increased a sense of trust and connection to city staff, *"I've gotten to talk to some of them... It's nice to know that they come through here and help keep us safe and clean."*

For housed North Park residents the encampment has meant greater contact with city officials, but has not been accompanied by a comparable feeling of being heard. The majority of interviewees noted that they had written to City Council, many on multiple occasions, expressing their concerns. Neighbours expressed feeling ignored, shut out, or as one neighbour expressed,

*“silenced as politicians sought to advance their own political goals.”* Neighbours expressed concern that plans for the neighbourhood were being made without their consultation, *“The tiny homes have been in the plans for a while. They had \$300,000 fundraised before I had even heard of it. City council did not tell us what was happening.”* One neighbour suggested this might be alleviated by greater consultation and engagement with the neighbourhood, through a liaison to the city, or an open house to discuss proposed housing plans.

## Impact on North Park Housed Neighbours

Neighbours in North Park, and particularly those residing on the street adjacent to 940 Caledonia, have felt a substantial impact. Many shared common concerns. Neighbours commented on the physical impact of the encampments to the neighborhood - an increase in garbage, blocked off park space in Central Park (that is now being rehabilitated), one neighbour noted that they had found a needle on the street while out walking their dog. All of the interviewees also commented on the increased noise and conflict in the area, *“The sirens, the screaming, the buggies going up and down the street, the couples fighting all the time. It’s a part of our life now. It’s very disturbing.”* The encampment has also caused an increase in car traffic on the streets, with neighbours noting that there are more emergency vehicles, and what appear to be drug dealers parked outside their homes. More than half of the housed evaluation participants shared stories of encountering people in distress, people screaming at late hours of the night, or of fights breaking out on their properties.

These incidents have led to a feeling of insecurity, and that a once quiet and friendly neighbourhood street is no longer safe, *“I believe in the project. I want people to be housed. But, it felt closer and closer and it felt kind of scary.”* One neighbor shared that she had been threatened while walking her dog through Central Park, *“It scared me ... I didn’t feel safe to walk around my neighborhood. I didn’t go back to the park again.”* The fear of crime has meant that her family members, and two young grandchildren, are no longer willing to visit, *“They would come once a week and stay overnight. They won’t come anymore. They don’t feel safe... These years are precious, this is our bonding, time ... It’s heartbreaking. It was our special time.”*

While several neighbors expressed appreciation for the presence of service providers, Police and Bylaw Officers, the majority expressed concern that their presence didn’t seem to put a stop to drug use or crime, *“I know there’s 24/7 security, but I don’t know if they’re paid to turn a blind eye. There’s a lot of nefarious behaviour”.* One neighbour felt that the presence of harm reduction and substance use services had increased drug use, *“SOLID has been a disaster for North Park, they’ve brought drug users into our neighbourhood.”* As one park resident noted, the presence of substance use services has provided an incentive to stay off people’s properties, *“A lot of us have been digging through bins just to get empties, things like that. It’s putting us at risk. Handing us out cigarettes it’s not enabling, it helps prevent [us from bottle picking].”*

More than one neighbour expressed concerns about how funding is being spent, suggesting that 940 Caledonia residents were being overly accommodated. Some respondents shared concern that low-income housed residents of North Park were not receiving the same treatment, *“There are people living a paycheck or two away from homeless. They can’t help but have a bit of resentment.”* Others, worried that providing services to the encampment would attract more unhoused people to the neighborhood. On the other hand, a neighbor commented that the services were very necessary, but inadequate, *“We’re doing all these good deeds for these people, but they’re band-aid solutions.”* This sentiment was shared by all interviewees.

The encampments at Central Park and 940 Caledonia have brought neighbours together. Residents on the street adjacent to 940 Caledonia have created a group chat on social media and have hosted several outdoor meetings to share concerns and strategize for how to deal with the challenges they’re facing. For some this has meant meeting new neighbors and greater connection to the neighbourhood. That connection is however focussed on the shared stress and unhappiness of neighbours about the encampment. *“My neighbours and I are talking about it all the time. It now consumes my daily life.”* There have also been disagreements between neighbors regarding their approach to the encampment.

All the North Park neighbors in this evaluation expressed that the challenges faced by the neighborhood are not due to the ill-will of those living at 940 Caledonia. Neighbours expressed that homelessness is a long-standing systemic issue that has arisen out of years of government underspending and a lack of wrap around services for people experiencing addictions and housing precarity. As one neighbour noted, *“They walked away from mental health services 25 or more years ago, and now we see that neglect on our doorstep.”* While North Park neighbours have felt unfairly burdened by the stress and conflict that encampment has brought to their neighborhood, all expressed the desire for a longer term investment in housing and wrap around services. But, that it should be done in consultation with community members and through transparent decision-making processes.

## Conclusions

The initiatives funded by the Canadian Red Cross grant have produced substantial improvements to the material well-being, sense of belonging, and self-worth of those sheltering in North Park. The encampment at 940 Caledonia has provided greater stability and access to service providers for those living there. There have however been a number of challenges in the roll out of initiatives such as the subcontractor park roles program, and there are serious concerns among housed neighbours regarding the impact of the encampment to the safety of neighbourhood and the well-being of those living adjacent to the camp.

This evaluation found that the move of shelterers from Central Park to 940 Caledonia, resulted in increased access to services for the unhoused, but has also meant increased noise, conflict and concern around drug use and drug dealing for both those in the camp and those living nearby. The



organization of the 940 Caledonia encampment has provided its residents with essential goods (e.g. tents, sleeping bags, warm winter gear, etc.) and increased access to food, water, stable access to tenting space, and life-saving harm reduction supplies. For many this has meant they are able to fulfil basic needs that were otherwise being unmet. Residents shared that this has created a greater sense of well-being, and importantly, has freed up time that they are now using to look for housing and employment.

The opportunity to participate as an arms length subcontractor, whereby residents had the opportunity to be compensated for performing tasks such as cleaning the camp, acting as a liaison, or helping to distribute food, has had mixed results. There have been substantial challenges in the coordination of the role signups and this has created conflict in the camp, and subsequently impacted the relationship of some residents to the NPNA. Participants were however in universal agreement that participating improved their feelings of self-worth and ability to buy needed goods.

For both the housed and unhoused, the daily and weekly meetings have been well-received. Both parties expressed thanks to have a space to share their concerns and connect with one another. For the 940 Caledonia residents this space has played an important role in helping to create a sense of connection.

The encampment at 940 Caledonia has had a clear impact on residents' sense of community - 80% of respondents shared that they felt a sense of belonging at the camp, and that it had created a greater sense of empathy for fellow unhoused people. However, there remain important challenges in ensuring they regain a sense of control over their living situation. The majority of respondents shared that they did not feel they could choose where they live. The encampment has brought greater visibility to their housing struggles, but what will come of their long-term living situation depends on the actions of agencies like BC Housing.

The influx of unhoused people to North Park and the initiatives at 940 Caledonia have had a profound impact on relationships among the housed and unhoused. Those at 940 Caledonia shared that their relationships with service providers have increased in positivity and trust. It was however shared that they would like to have more regular contact with BC Housing. The encampments have also shifted the relationships of both the housed and unhoused to city staff and elected officials. 940 Caledonia residents shared that they feel their struggles have increased visibility to elected officials, and that there is greater promise of political action. Housed neighbours have repeatedly written to the city and other elected officials, but feel their concerns have gone unanswered and that housing proposals like the tiny homes initiative are proceeding without community consultation.

Housed neighbours shared that the encampment has caused a great deal of stress. Neighbours complained about an increase in crime, drug dealing, and garbage in the neighbourhood. They worry that funds are being misspent and that there are a lack of sufficient security measures.

Several shared stories of confrontations with park residents, leaving neighbours feeling unsafe in their homes.

Ultimately, both the housed and unhoused residents of North Park were in agreement that the encampment is not a long-term solution. While the initiative at 940 Caledonia have had a clear positive impact on the well-being of unhoused residents, the support offered are a band-aid solution. 940 Caledonia residents have been left outside through the harshest weather and storms of the year. A neighbour summarizes this stance, *"I don't want to see anyone, regardless of where they are, living in a tent. I would like to see proper places for people to get the supports they need."* The residents of 940 Caledonia are in need of longer-term solutions - indoor housing with wrap around supports to ensure their physical and mental health.