

Presentation to North Park Neighbourhood Association (NPNA) Board about Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours (NSUN) and invitation to residents of North Park to join. Tuesday, October 12/22.

What/Who is Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours (NSUN)?

NSUN is a loose association of residents from several neighbourhoods, predominately: Fairfield, Gonzales, Fernwood, and James Bay concerned with the plight of our unhoused neighbours.

What is our History?

We started out in October 2020 as a small group of concerned residents *under* the Fairfield Gonzales Community Association (FGCA) and in response to the encampment in Meegan/Beacon Hill Park. You may or may not be aware that half of Beacon Hill Park is situated in the Fairfield neighbourhood while the other half is in James Bay. Of course, as residents of Fairfield and Gonzales we knew homelessness existed, but with the encampment came visibility and immediacy in our backyard so to speak.

We quickly expanded to include concerned residents of neighbouring communities. During this time/the fall and early winter of 2020 while North Park was dealing with their own encampment in Central Park and the subsequent move to the Royal Athletic Park, we were dealing with the Community Support Tent and supporting as best as possible people in Meegan.

While we are no longer *under* FGCA, our relationship with them is considered a partnership. FGCA, has provided us with a donation line on their Canada Helps Donation page enabling us to provide a tax receipt for any financial donations we receive. We are also able to use their Facebook page to make requests and we use their Zoom account for our meetings.

What are our Connections?

We have a working relationship with the James Bay United Church's Social Justice Ministry. We have requested and received funding from them for certain items or services on behalf of people who are living homeless or in inadequate housing, for example funding for work boots and dentures. James Bay United Church has also provided us with meeting space.

NSUN is a *corporate* member of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness and there are three of us who participate in the Coalition's System Transformation Working Group. Currently, we have on the agenda, Improving Life on Pandora for Everyone, but Especially for People Living There Without Housing. This work entails working with the Downtown Residents' Association's (DRA) Urban Livability Committee as well as the Pandora 900 Block Community Group.

What is our Purpose?

The purpose of Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours is to actualize housing justice and inclusive neighbourhoods in Greater Victoria through solidarity and mutual aid.

How are we Organized?

We are a loose affiliation of concerned residents from several neighbourhoods in Victoria. There is plenty of room for members to form their own relationships with unhoused individuals and to work in areas they are most interested in, for example collecting donations or advocating. We do this work individually or as a group, but always at the direction of the people we are attempting to help.

One of the original ideas for organizing our work was to connect with each community/neighbourhood association. In this way, each association would have its own local NSUN group. It's easier to do the work if it is located close to your home and easier to make connections with people living homeless in *your* neighbourhood and the local Community Association can provide administrative and support-in-kind. For example, photocopying when needed.

What is Our Philosophy/Ethos:

As best as possible we take our direction from people who are living without housing. When we advocate for an individual, we ensure we have their permission before proceeding. In the absence of adequate housing, we believe it is ethically right to support as best as possible homeless people who are camping in our city parks and elsewhere. We do this to minimize the harm created by living without housing. As best as possible we try to establish relationships with our unhoused neighbours.

What Do We Do?

We have been at this work for two years now and it seems what we do is in response to the situation at hand as it evolves. In 2020, we worked with BC Housing to ensure everyone in Beacon Hill Park that wanted housing was on the housing list and we distributed mobile phones provided by Bell Canada. Of late we have been trying to facilitate voting in the municipal election by offering rides and or keeping watch over belongings whilst the owner is away voting.

Other activities have been on-going:

- connecting or facilitating the connection between people living homeless with services such as the Island Health, Mental Health Substance Use Encampment Outreach Team (MHSU).
- providing material support: tents, tarps, sleeping bags, food, money.
- advocating for individuals and for systemic change.
- providing meals, barbeques in Stadacona Park (and in the past Central Park).

Currently, we are meeting in Stadacona Park once a month, providing a meal once a month and meeting monthly over Zoom.

What are we Planning for the Future?

In August of this year the Federal Housing Advocate, Canadian Human Rights Commission, Marie-Josée Houle began the first of her regional visits including stops in Victoria, Prince George, and Vancouver. We met with the Housing Advocate twice, the second time in Stadacona Park where she was able to speak directly with people unhoused camping there.

The SHIFT is an international organization and part of the global movement to secure the human right to housing. “The Shift has been asked by the Advocate to develop trainings for residents of encampments that will assist them to understand their human rights and make complaints regarding breaches of their rights to the Advocate or other accountability mechanisms. We’ll be partnering with local advocates to create and deliver this training and to assist residents to make complaints” (Sam Freeman, Director of Research and Tenant Advocacy, The SHIFT). This month/October NSUN will be meeting with SHIFT.

Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours believes housing is a human right and we look forward to working with SHIFT and with the Federal Housing Advocate to advance the right to housing.

If any or all of this is of interest to you, we would love to hear from you!

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