

# On & Off the Streets in Surrey

A Quick Dive into the realities of people living & working on the ground, to bring fresh views into a tough reality.



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## The Whalley area in Surrey has attracted a large number of people with challenges around housing, addiction & mental health. Through a 2-week Dive, we hope to bring fresh views into a tough reality.

In 2017, the Metro Vancouver homeless count identified 602 homeless individuals in Surrey. That's a 49% increase in only one year. Many homeless people concentrate on a single street, 135A Street.

Meanwhile, Options Community Services took over the management of a social housing complex nearby. They are pressured to 'clean up the strip'. Housing First and Harm Reduction are common approaches.

But residents and staff already have their hands full with other challenges, including drug and alcohol addiction, health and mental health issues, and bed bug investigations, to name only a few.

**602**  
Homeless people  
in Surrey in 2017\*

**49%**  
increase in 2017

The current approach and thinking are not sufficient to address the growing problem. Around Christmas 2017, we spent a month to open up alternative ways of looking.

We started with the people living on/off the street, and social service staff. What are their experiences, motivations, unmet needs, and aspirations? What opportunities and untapped resource may there be?

This dive is not a comprehensive research. It aims to spark fresh conversations between people and organizations in Surrey, by showing what 'could be'. This leaflet illustrates the process we took.

*\*Of these, 399 were sheltered and 203 were living on the streets. These numbers are widely accepted as an undercount.*

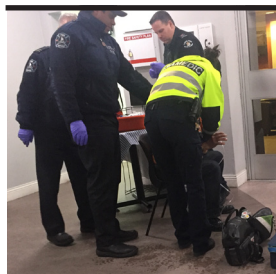
### research



**Monday 9am:** we hit the road to recruit people



**Tuesday 8pm:** showing up at services to talk to staff



**Saturday 10pm:** hanging out in the housing complex

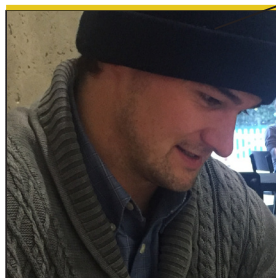


**Monday 1pm:** conversations in the mall using prompts



**Friday 1pm:** shadowing staff doing outreach work

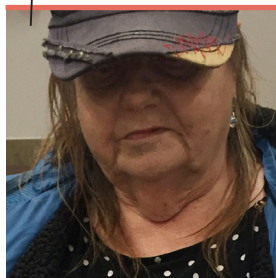
## In eleven days, we met fifty people: 31 living on&off the street + 19 frontline staff.



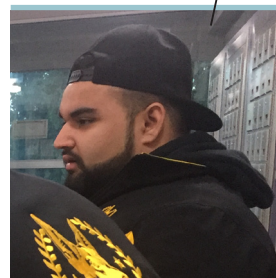
**Taylor (20s)** Despite sleeping on the floor last night, he could pass as a college student. Instead, he spends his days at the library creating his own curriculum, and his nights at a shelter. For months, he has bounced between shelters, couches, and the back of a van. The drugs, drinking, and partying took over. Taylor is tired He's applying for benefits and "looking for bigger things."



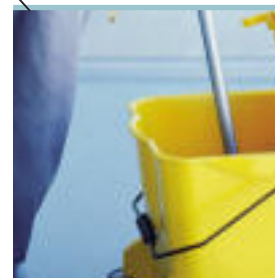
**Scott (50)** Traveling light is a strategy Scott has gained over 20 years on & off the streets. "Eight months was my longest stretch of doing well. I was clean and sober on my own. But, I screwed that up with one beer." Scott tried treatment centres, recovery houses, and AA programs. Few have been helpful. Their structures rubbed against his needs for "adventure", and "respect."



**Kate (62)** has lived in the complex for 7 years. Her addiction to crack, which she started using for pain relief, is worsening. Her daughter is falling into addiction and prostitution. Kate wishes she knew how break the cycle. The normalcy in her days are the calls with her mom, who lives a 'normal' life in Victoria. But the last time she asked help herself, she ended up in handcuffs.

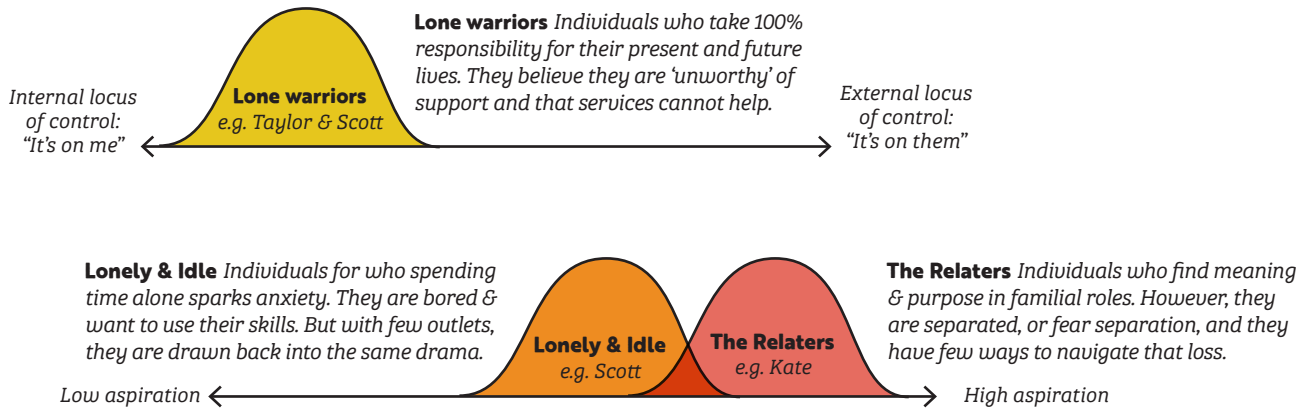


**Security staff team** is contracted to by Options to provide physical safety to residents after the staff team leaves at 5pm. But over time, they've also provided emotional and mental support for residents, providing a listening ear and kindness. On long nights, many residents come down to the lobby multiple times to chat with the security staff. It helps them to be less anxious.

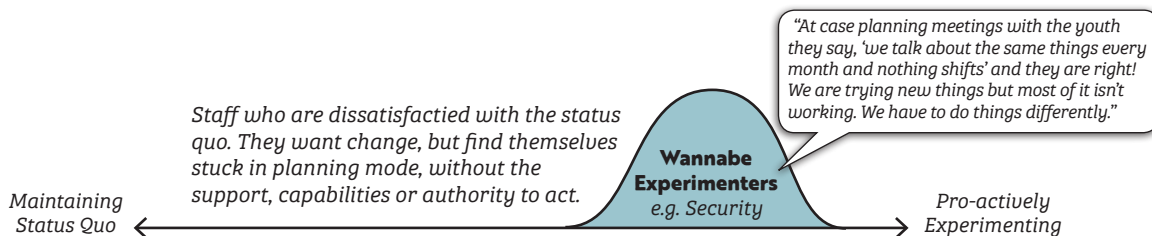


**Cleaning staff team** regularly goes inside housing units to clean. They've done so for many years with compassion, building relationships and winning hearts of many residents. They're eager to do more to help, but often don't have the opportunities. or the know-how. How do we leverage their motivation and relationships with residents to inspire change?

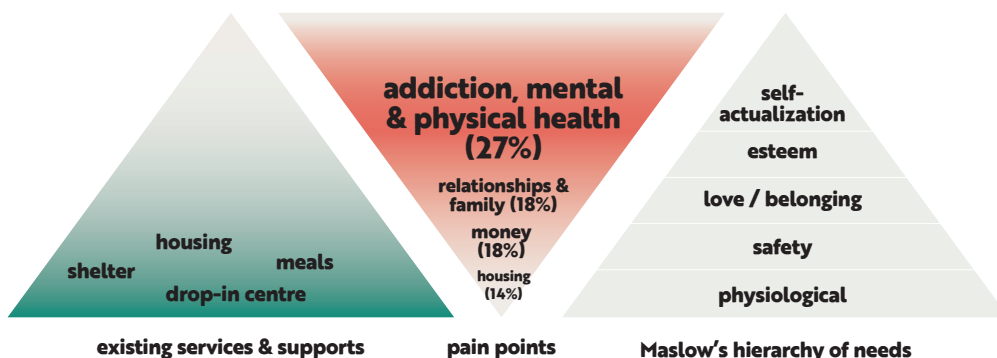
**We grouped these 50 people in many new ways, for example by aspiration. New segmentations help to spot new opportunity areas.**



**In the same time, we found staff unsatisfied with the status quo, interested to try new approaches.**



**And we found that many supports address basic needs. While there are big pain points higher up in the hierarchy.**



## We came up with 32 ideas across 5 opportunity areas to spark fresh conversations. Here are three:

### Out of Place

for: Lone warriors

Living in poverty, with physical disability or being disconnected from friends and family, contributes to a poverty of experience. While some said they could “leave anytime”, most people felt stuck in place.

These people aspired to see other places, spend time in nature, return home to visit family and friends in other communities/provinces. That’s what Out of Place is about: a change of scenery, for a different kind of day.

featured idea

#### Out of Place

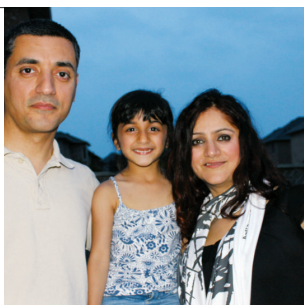


*What if there were outlets to switch context and spend some time in nature? What if you could pre-book retreats and leave before the chaos of cheque days? What if you could choose a new support network when you returned, to help not fall back in old patterns?*

featured idea

#### Familial (re)connection

*What if there were a range of new roles - from Family Mediators to Dad Coaches - who could work with people to re-establish family roles and broach conversation after years of separation?*



### Familial (re)connection

for: The Relaters

Familial loss is a strong motif in most people’s stories: some were taken into care as a child, others lost their own child, or a loved one died. Relaters are harboring tremendous, often unacknowledged, grief and loss.

Despite these losses, many continue to hold on to the identity and role of parent, grandparent, child, or sibling. Familial reconnection provides approaches for reconciliation and a little encouragement when needed.

opportunity area

### Meaningful Roles

for: Lonely & Idle

Chef, ironworker, firefighter, accountant, bank manager, photographer, cleaner, fisherman, a mall-Santa’s helper, entrepreneur. These were just some of the roles that held meaning for people in their past lives.

Many talked about the skills they had. Through these past roles, skills and interests, there are way more ways people could belong and be connected in community, as well as have self efficacy and dignity.

featured idea

#### Meaningful Roles



*What if there were super clubs and interest-based groups you could join at Ted Kuhn Towers or through shelters? What if shelters and supported housing felt more like a Meet-Up platform around interests - not just drugs and transactions?*

other ideas



visit [www.inwithforward.com](http://www.inwithforward.com) to see all segmentations, opportunity areas, emerging insights and ideas.

This Quick Dive was a collaboration between InWithForward and Options Community Services. Quick Dives are 4-week periods of ethnographic research, synthesis, and reflection.

Our research team draws out insights and opportunities, all with the intent of gaining momentum for longer-term change. More information at: [www.inwithforward.com](http://www.inwithforward.com)