

**2nd Annual Report Card
on Homelessness
for Nelson & Area**

**Prepared by the Nelson Committee on
Homelessness**

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The purpose of this Report Card is to provide current information about some of the most vulnerable individuals in the community: those who are homeless and at risk of homelessness due to low income and lack of supports to maintain housing. It also highlights multi-year trends and the extent to which demand is increasing while funding for support services is stagnant, decreasing or disappearing.

This Report Card is divided into six sections, as follows:

1. Context
2. Trends
3. Demographics
4. Employment and Income
5. Mental Health and Addictions
6. Summary

Data sources include Statistics Canada, BC Stats, BC Housing, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) George Penfold, the Regional Innovation Chair for Rural Economic Development at Selkirk College, and statistics gathered from the following agencies: Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter, Nelson Food Cupboard (the food bank), the Salvation Army, and Our Daily Bread (the soup kitchen operated by Kootenay Christian Fellowship).

Other contributors include guests of Our Daily Bread, service providers, agency directors, members of the Nelson Business Association and two Rotary Clubs.

1. CONTEXT

Chart 1.1 – How Much Renters Spend on Housing in Nelson

In 2004, the city of Nelson was deemed a Designated Community to receive federal homelessness funding due to the reality that the city of Nelson had one of the highest proportion of individuals in the province paying over 50% of their income on rent.

According to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the definition of affordability is recognized as a maximum of 30 per cent of the household income spent on shelter. Renters spending over 50% of their income are classified as having “extreme affordability issues”.

The most recent data from Census Canada indicates a slight decrease in renters paying above 30% of their income between 2000 and 2006, however, since this time the vacancy rate has decreased by more than 50% and a recession began in fall of 2008.

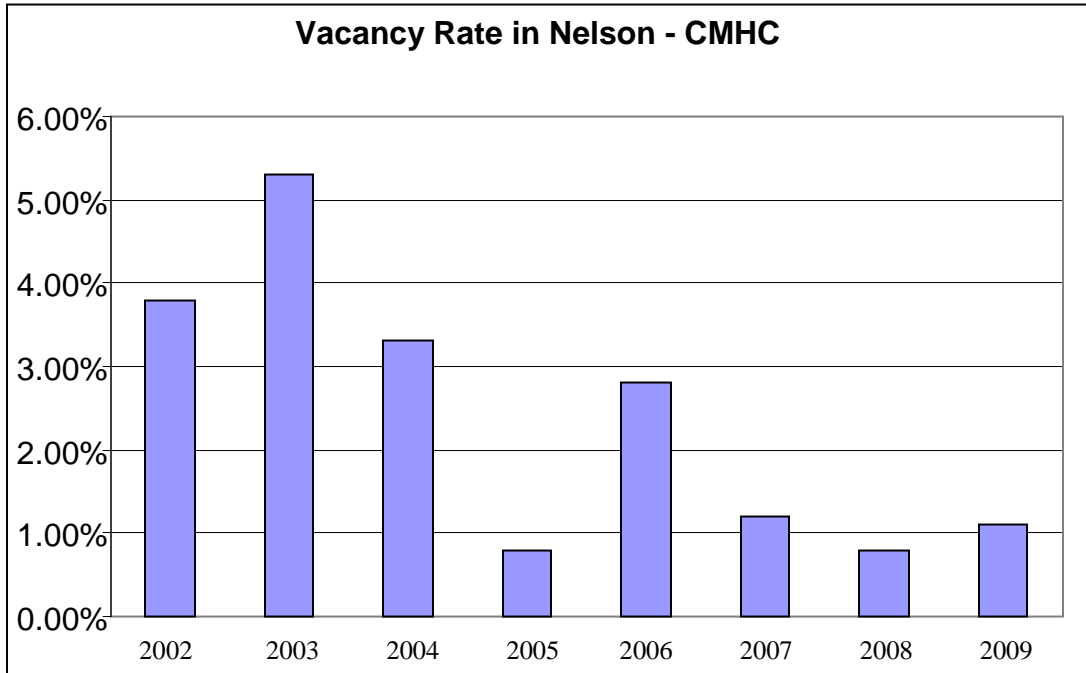
Household Spending for Nelson, BC

Year	Household Type	Number of Households	Housing costs as a percentage of 2005 household income (before tax)	
			30-49%	50% and over

2006	Rented	1,505	410	27.2%	320	21.3%
2000	Rented	1,535	390	25.40%	375	24.40%

Source: BC Housing, Research & Corporate Planning, 2006 Census Custom Table

Chart 1.2 – Vacancy Rate in Nelson: 2002-2009



“The vacancy rate in Nelson is consistently among the lowest in the Kootenays. There is an increased demand due to population growth combined with few additions to the stock of purpose built rental accommodations.” Paul Fabri, Senior Market Analyst for the CMHC

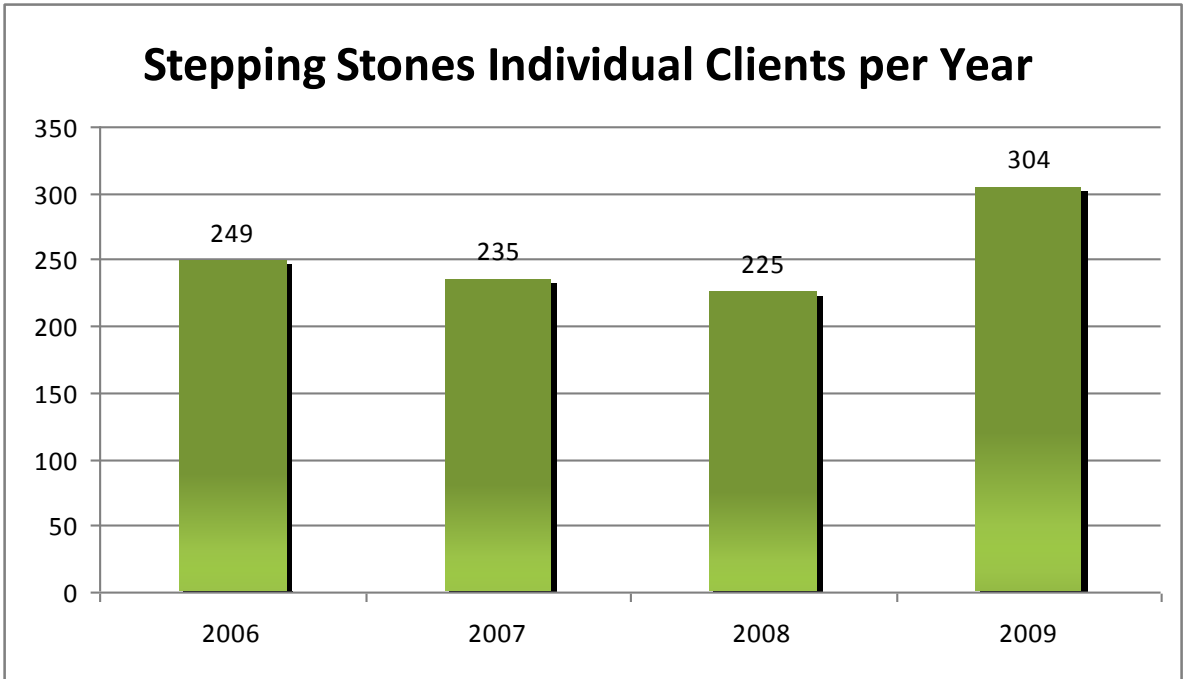
Richard Goatcher, CMHC Market Analyst for Edmonton has indicated that a vacancy rate between three and five per cent represents a “healthy market” for both landlords and tenants.

According to Mr. Goatcher, at a vacancy rate above 5%, landlords begin to suffer, and below 3%, tenants begin to suffer.

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2. TRENDS

Chart 2.1 – Homeless People Sheltered at Stepping Stones



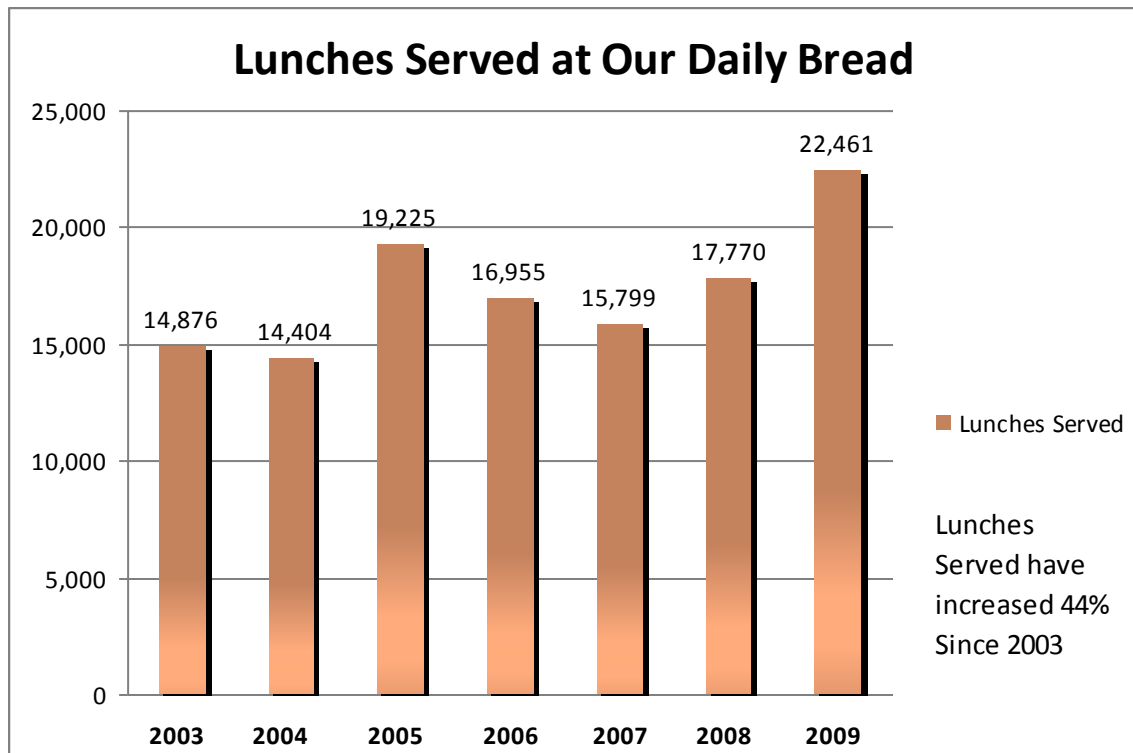
“Stepping Stones is a regional emergency shelter that serves the Kootenay – Boundary area. The majority of our clientele is from the West Kootenay area which includes Castlegar, Trail, Nakusp, Kaslo, and the Slocan Valley area. In January 2009 the staffing at Stepping Stones was doubled and our capacity number went from a maximum of 13 clients per night to 17 per night. With that change, our occupancy rate dropped from 93% to 84%.

In April 2008 the federal government Homelessness Partnering Strategy started funding a Residential Transition Support Worker who works one to one with people who have had multiple stays at Stepping Stones.

This position has been an effective tool for helping people locate and maintain housing, even in a challenging rental market. We would like to see more funding for positions of this nature to help prevent and reduce homelessness in the region.

Klee Hunter – Manager of Affordable & Emergency Housing,
Nelson CARES Society

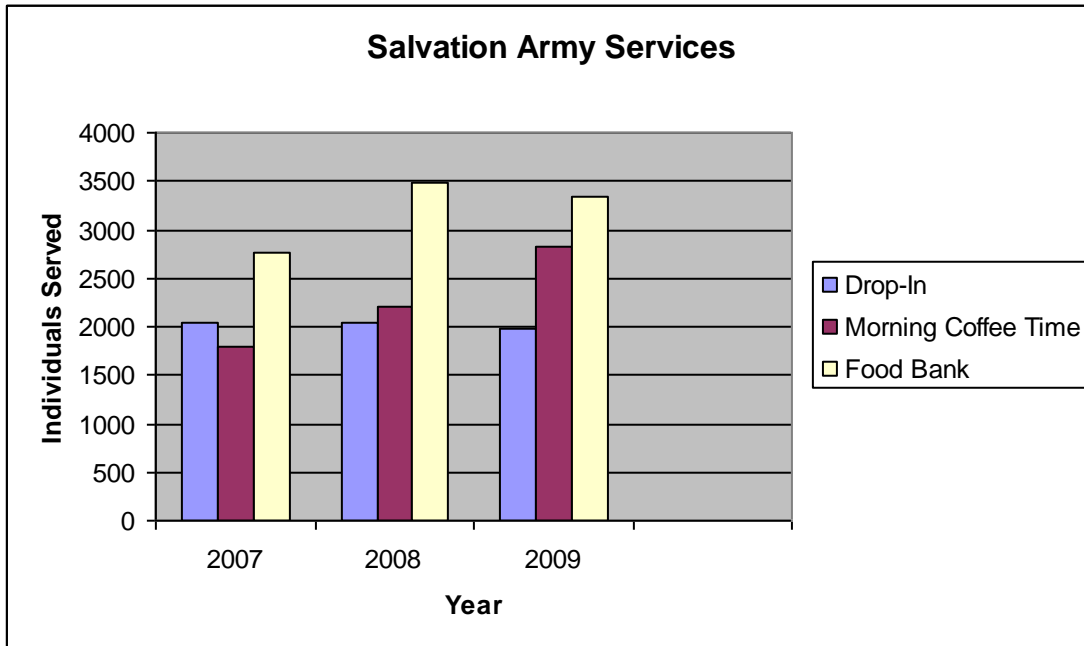
Chart 2.2 – Lunches Served at Our Daily Bread



Demand for hot lunches has increased significantly in the past year, increasing the strain on a resource that does not receive any operating funding from federal, provincial, or municipal governments. Pastor Jim Reimer of the Kootenay Christian Fellowship, attributes the increase to the increase in demand to rising unemployment rates and the cost of renting, both locally and in the outlying areas.

In June 2010 Our Daily Bread introduced a new policy of charging \$20.00 for a 22 meal punch pass or \$4.00 a meal for people not able to purchase a pass. However, no-one is turned away for lack of funds, as there is an option to volunteer with clean-up instead of paying for the meal.

Chart 2.3 – Individuals Served Through Salvation Army Food & Drop-in Programmes



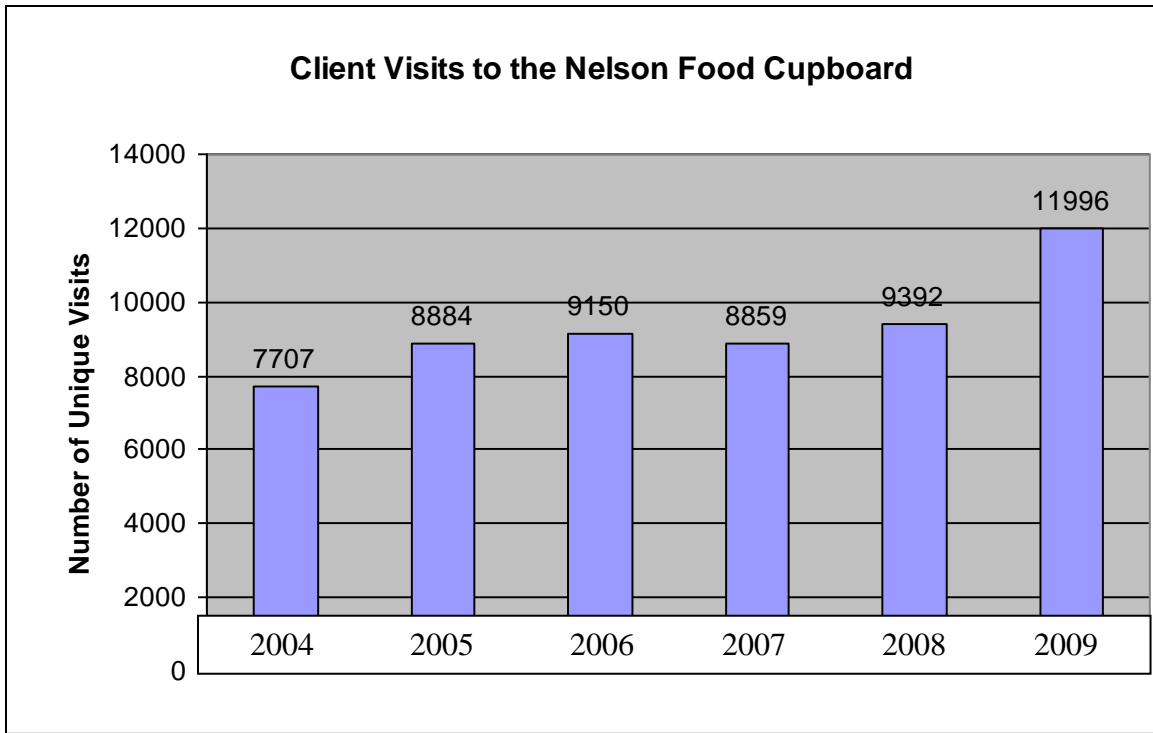
	Drop-In	Morning Coffee Time	Food Bank
2007	2033	1800	2760
2008	2050	2200	3475
2009	1980	2819	3348

In 2009 across Canada the Salvation Army helped more than 1 million people with food, clothing, and other practical assistance. Nationally the demand from 2008 to 2009 rose by 26% and in Nelson, BC, the story is similar.

Morning Coffee Time offers homeless and low income individuals a light breakfast, coffee, and a safe barrier free environment to relax and enjoy fellowship. It is a place to access non-judgmental counseling, referrals to other services, and is an alternative to hanging out at the park, library, or on the street. The food bank offers bags of groceries for individuals to take with them, and the Drop-In provides a hot meal and access to laundry and showers.

Trend: From 2007-2009 usage of the Food Bank increased by 28% and Morning Coffee Time increased by 36%. The numbers for Drop-In have remained stable during this period.

Chart 2.4 – Individual Visits to the Nelson Food Cupboard



The Nelson Food Cupboard is a significant contributor to the food security of lower income residents of Nelson and area. Many individuals are faced with the choice of paying for rent and utilities or food - they cannot manage both.

Trend: From 2004-2009 the demand for food increased by 36%. From 2008 to 2009 alone, the increase was 22%. To visualize how many people used the food bank in 2009, picture a lineup of roughly 100 visitors a day three times a week.

If this trend continues, the organization anticipates significant budgetary constraints and a possible inability to accommodate the additional demand as it has in the past.

“There are many different social factors contributing to the increased demand for emergency food services in the community. Currently our organization is concerned about increasing monthly grocery bills and our capacity to continue to meet the additional need if this trend continues. Our goal is to respond to the challenge without sacrificing our quality of service or barrier-free policy.

We have noticed a specific increase in young families and single men who are struggling to make ends meet. However, our clients represent a wide spectrum of social categories, including People with disabilities, mental health issues, seniors, children, single moms, families, those who have been recently laid off, are receiving social assistance or EI benefits, employed part time, full time, or even working 2 jobs. An intersecting theme is the inability to pay for rent, utility bills, gas and purchase food for themselves and their families. The monthly struggle to afford basic needs affects a significant population in the West Kootenay region.”

Laura Steeg, Coordinator, Nelson Food Cupboard Society

3. DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2008/9 Michelle Mungall, currently serving as the MLA for Kootenay Bounday Region wrote *Addresses for the Rural Homeless* during her tenure as the Community Coordinator for the Nelson Committee on Homelessness. She conducted focus groups with both homeless individuals and service providers to better understand the local population of homeless and at-risk of homelessness individuals.

Ms. Mungall’s research indicated that the demographics of Nelson and area’s homeless population changes seasonally. In the summer season, males under 30 years dominate the population, while males between 30 and 64 years dominate during colder months. Younger males spent less than 12/months per year residing in Nelson, while men over 50 lived in Nelson year-round. The most common housing situation for focus group participants when they are homeless is a combination of staying with friends, in a shelter and outside.

Service providers estimate the Chronically Homeless Population at 40 people, 98% of whom are male. 48% are male youth under 30 years old. Of this population, approximately 20% are Aboriginal (First Nation, Métis or Inuit), yet only 4% of the Central Kootenay total population identifies as Aboriginal.

Chart 3.1 – Gender of Guests at Our Daily Bread

Gender of ODB Guests - 2009

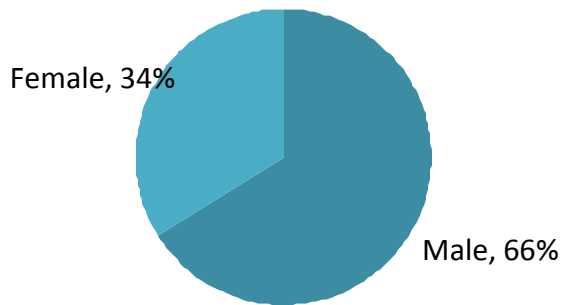
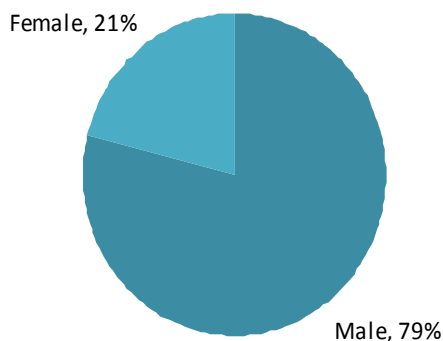


Chart 3.2 – Gender of Stepping Stones Clients

Gender of Stepping Stones Clients - 2008/9



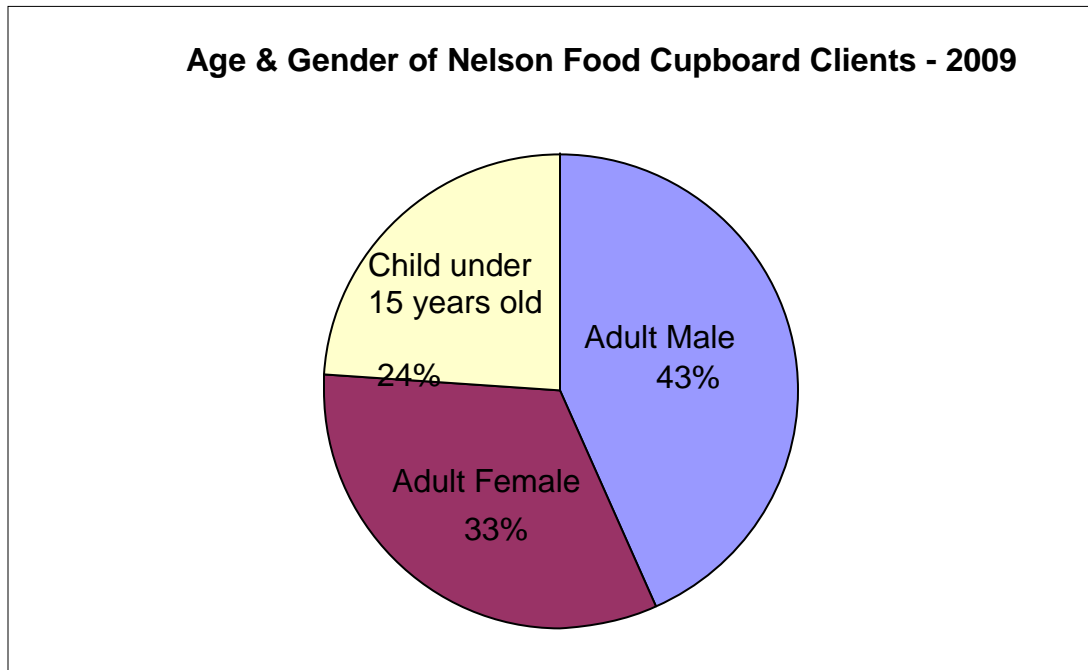
Trend:

Males outnumber females two to one at Our Daily Bread and four to one at Stepping Stones emergency shelter.

This is perhaps due to the fact that women rely more on informal social networks for shelter and are more likely to “couch surf” with friends and/or family.

The percentage of clients at Stepping Stones that identify as transgendered is <1%.

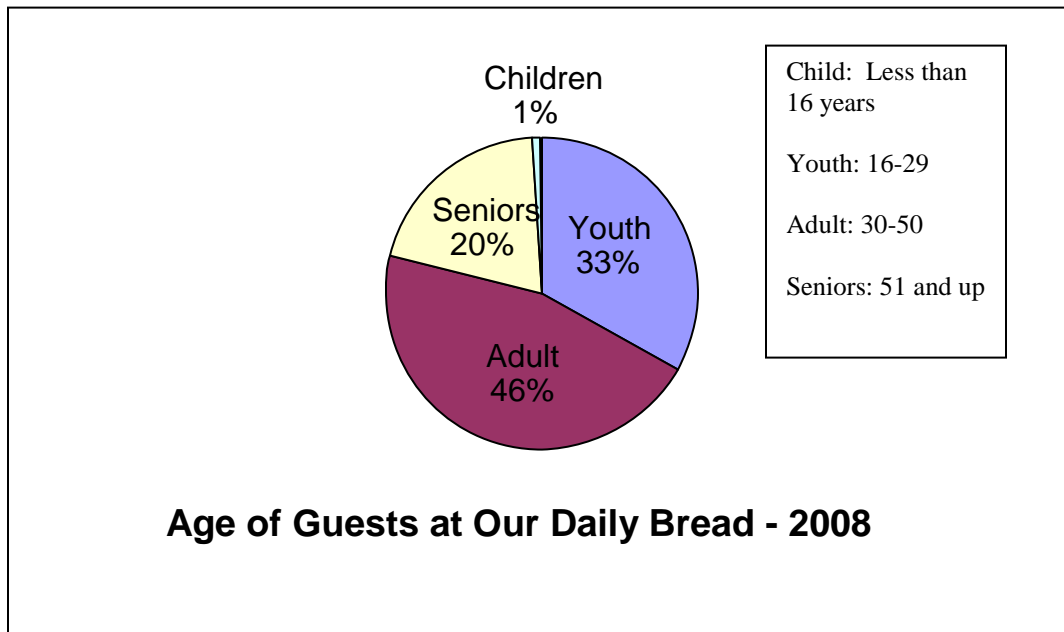
Chart 3.3 – Age & Gender of Nelson Food Cupboard Clients - 2009



In contrast to Our Daily Bread and Stepping Stones, women are as evenly represented as men at the food bank. Women are less likely to be absolutely without shelter and are more likely to have access to a kitchen where they can prepare food obtained at a food bank.

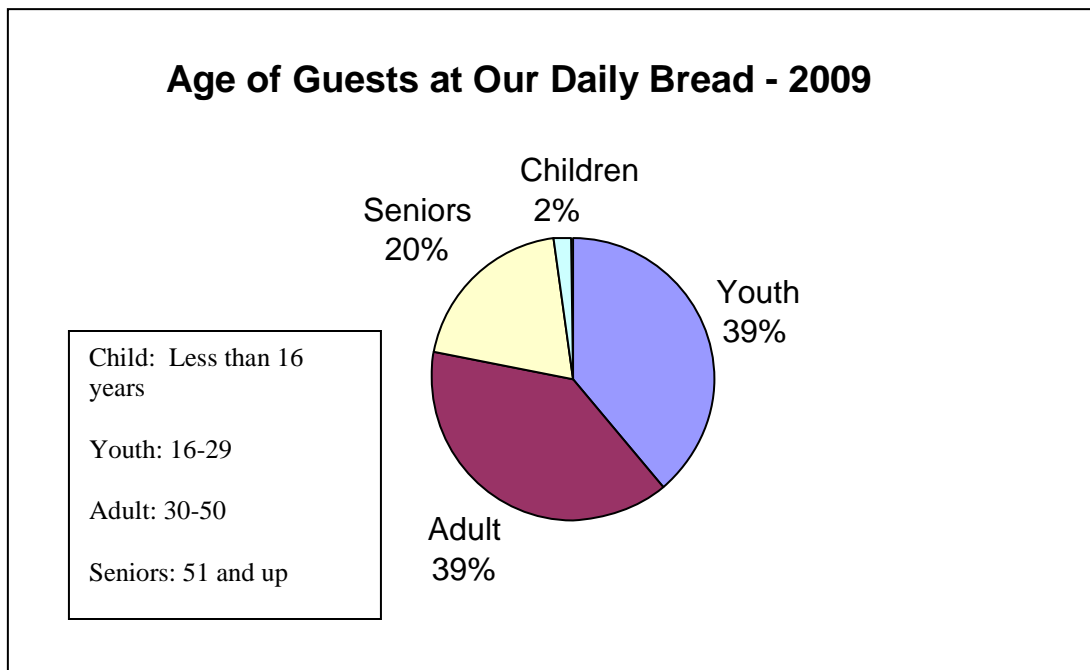
Trend: Even though overall demand has increased the percentage of children dependent upon the food bank decreased slightly from 2004-2009 - from 29% to 24%.

Chart 3.4 – Age of Guests at Our Daily Bread - 2008



Trend: From 2004-2009, the proportion of youth and children visiting Our Daily Bread has been increasing while the number of adults decreased. Pastor Jim Reimer attributes this and the increase in cost of living and rents in the region as well as the reduction in entry level jobs for youth.

Chart 3.5 – Age of Guests at Our Daily Bread - 2009



Youth are dramatically over-represented at both the emergency shelter and at the soup kitchen in Nelson. In 2009 youth (18-24) represented 43% of clients of Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter despite being only 10% of the population in the West Kootenay region (Penfold, BC Stats 2008).

Our Daily Bread uses a different definition of youth that includes persons aged 16-29. The percentage of youth as guests stands at 39%. The above numbers suggest the recession in Canada is having a disproportionate effect on young people in the region, and the services available to help them are struggling to meet the demand.

4. EMPLOYMENT and INCOME

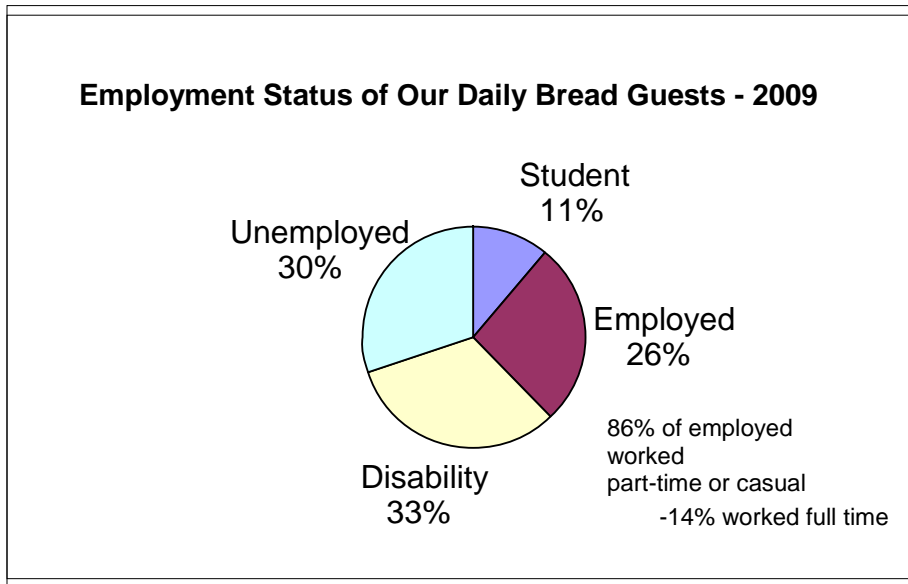
Service providers consulted for this report card were unanimous in citing the recession as the driver behind the increased demands for social services in Nelson and Area. Some groups are impacted disproportionately, such as youth, people with disabilities, or those with mental health and addictions, and other barriers to employment.

According to First Call BC, the Child Youth Advocacy Coalition, “People aged 15-24 have experienced a disproportionate increase in both job loss and unemployment rates since the recession took hold in October 2008...representing 28.7 % of total provincial unemployment (BC Stats December 2009). The current BC youth unemployment rate sits at 16%, a number that is more than double that of adults aged 25 and over [6.9%] (BC Stats November 2009).” Even before the recession, youth employment rates in the past 10 years have been roughly double that of the general population (Statscan 2009), making the path to economic independence a difficult one for young people trying to attach themselves to the labour market.

“Since the recession started in 2008 entry level jobs are not as easy for youth to obtain in the region. There is an increasing number of youth coming to town hoping to work and not enough jobs for them. Right now, people with post-secondary education are taking the entry level jobs and youth with less experience and resources are being shut out of the workforce.”

*Maibrit Sorensen
Nelson Youth Employment Resource Centre*

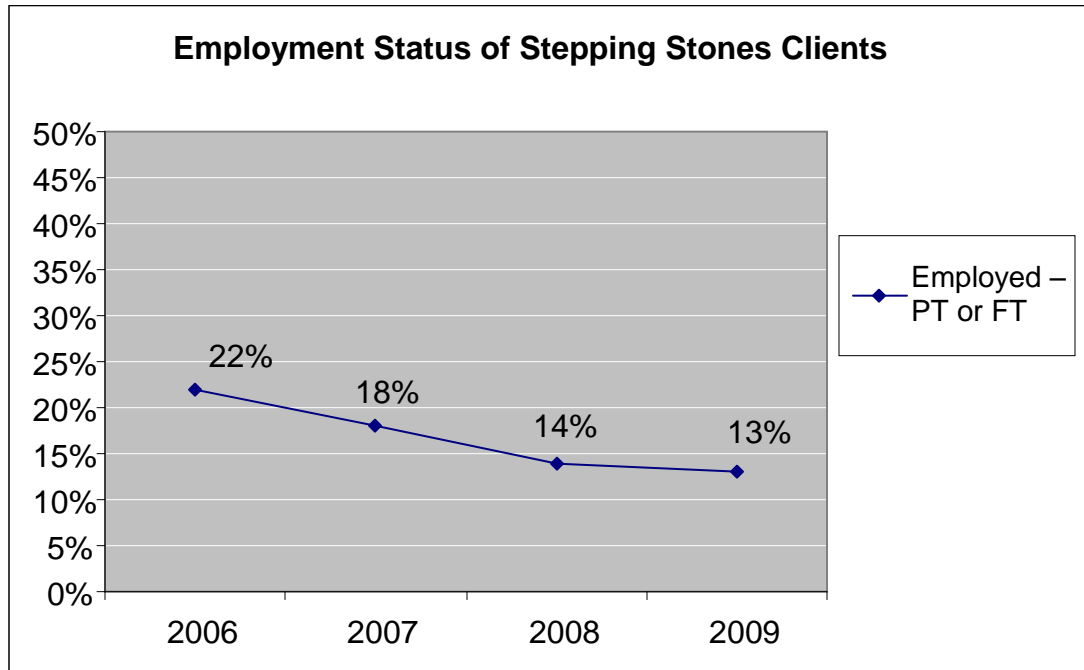
Chart 4.1 – Employment Status of Our Daily Bread Guests – 2009



In 2009 staff at Our Daily Bread began tracking the employment status of guests at the soup kitchen.

During Homelessness Action Week in October 2009, the Nelson Committee on Homelessness wanted to learn more about what people envisioned as solutions to the homelessness. We were surprised to learn that the 172 diners at Our Daily Bread’s annual Thanksgiving Dinner, members of Nelson’s 2 Rotary Clubs and Business Association (100 people) identified similar solutions to homelessness. All three groups identified sustainable employment for those who can participate in the work force and supported housing for people who cannot maintain housing due to disability as their best solutions to homelessness. Sustainability is crucially important, as many ODB guests expressed frustration with not being able to secure full time work and wages sufficient to support themselves despite their strongest efforts.

Chart 4.2 – Employment Status of Stepping Stones Clients: 2006-2009



There is great overlap between clients staying at Stepping Stones and those going to Our Daily Bread for a hot meal. Not surprisingly, there are fewer clients at Stepping Stones who have any connection to the paid workforce. Stepping Stones has noted an increase in clients who are receiving Disability, Social Assistance benefits, or have no income at all. These pension rates are inadequate to purchase both housing and other necessities in the area, as the shelter portion is set at a maximum of \$375.00.

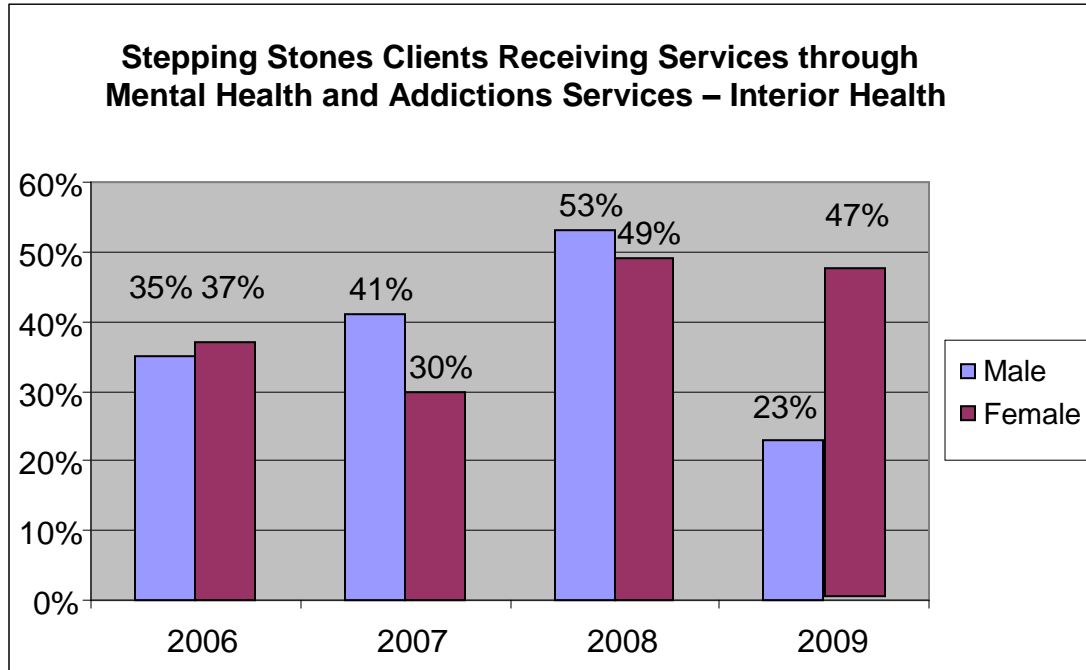
Recent cutbacks at the Ministry of Housing and Social Development have made it more difficult for individuals to apply for benefits. The changes in procedure and staffing level have resulted in delays in payment or the clients' inability to access income assistance at all.

People used to be able to apply in person and get help from a worker to complete the necessary paperwork. Now the process has been centralized in Kamloops and homeless individuals must fill out an online application with 86 questions. Afterwards, they are required to phone in to request a telephone intake with a worker in Kamloops. The client is advised that the response time will be anywhere from two hours to two weeks.

Clients are now facing multiple barriers to accessing Disability and Social Assistance support: many do not own a computer or telephone, have limited access to one, or have issues with literacy, numeracy, and the skills required to fill out a government form on a computer without assistance.

5. MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS

Table 5.1: Stepping Stones Clients Receiving Services through Mental Health & Addictions Services – Interior Health



The above chart represents only those clients of Stepping Stones who have an official relationship with Mental Health and Addictions Services through the Interior Health Authority.

“In addition to the clients who have had formal contact with the mental health system, up to 80% in total are suffering from some form of mental illness and/or addiction.”

Vince Hemsall – Emergency Support Worker / Statistician at Stepping Stones
Mike McGaw, Supervisor at Stepping Stones

Trend: From 2006 to 2009 Stepping Stones has seen an increase in clients with mental health and addictions issues and a decrease in those who have employment. This trend highlights the great need in the region for housing that is both affordable and supported by a trained worker to help people maintain stability in the community and improve their health.

SUMMARY:

- Nelson has a very challenging housing market for renters at all income levels due to a very low vacancy rate and availability of rental stock compared to the number of people who want to live here. Individuals on the lower end of the income scale are especially challenged to find accommodation that is affordable enough to keep it and meet their needs for food and other necessities.
- Over the past two years (2007-2009), all service agencies have seen their numbers increase significantly, and the funding they receive has not matched the increased demand.

Nelson Food Cupboard – 26%
Salvation Army Food Bank – 28%
Salvation Army Coffee Time – 38%
Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter – 23%
Our Daily Bread – 30%

Some agencies are considering cut-backs in the level of service they provide, others have instituted new policies such as Our Daily Bread charging a fee for meals that used to be provided for free.

- Youth are dramatically over-represented in the homeless population despite their small percentage in the community. Obtaining housing and employment with wages sufficient to support themselves independently is the biggest challenge they are facing today. Most homeless and at risk of homelessness youth report high levels of motivation to achieve sustainable employment and are frustrated by the realities of the economy in the region.
- The percentage of people staying at Stepping Stones who have employment has steadily decreased from 22% in 2006 to 13% in 2009. During this period Stepping Stones also saw an increase in the number of clients with mental health and addictions issues.
- All three levels of government are required to create solutions for homelessness, and unfortunately the large investments required are on hold from the provincial government and the federal government has no national strategy to deal with the problem.
- At the municipal level, the city of Nelson recently commissioned a Need and Demand Study on housing by Cityspaces Consulting, which will be released some time in the month of July. It will contain some policy recommendations that can be enacted on the municipal and regional level to encourage the creation of more affordable housing.

Other Reports Available Free from the Nelson Committee on Homelessness

- Nelson's Community Plan to Prevent and Reduce Homelessness Update 2007-2009 (Paper Copy)
- Addresses for the Rural Homeless, Michelle Mungall, 2009 (Digital Copy)

For more information please call

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