

## **Introduction - Sooke Compassionate Action Plan**

Compassion is concern for the suffering of others. It requires empathy and understanding rather than pity and judgement. Compassion is often the motivation for acts of caring and kindness.

The Charter for Compassion invites communities of all sizes to encourage and reinforce compassionate action in practical, specific ways to address troubling issues. These issues are often deep-rooted and persistent. Much good work is already underway to reduce the resultant harm to affected individuals and households. The development of a Compassionate Action Plan (CAP) by a diverse and inclusive coalition of caring individuals and groups in our community is intended to help Sooke to become a more fully Compassionate Community.

A Compassionate Action Plan Workshop was held at the Sooke Baptist Church on Saturday, October 27<sup>th</sup>. It was well-attended with close to 50 participants from 29 community groups and service agencies (listed in Appendix 1). The afternoon began with short context-setting presentations by speakers from the Sooke Shelter Society, the Sooke Food Bank, the Sooke detachment of the RCMP and the BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions.

A broad range of issues were raised in six breakout groups. Reports to a plenary session followed. A review of the findings and recommendations by these many Sooke voices, not surprisingly, revealed many shared concerns and underlying linkages between issues. Communities are evolving, organic entities, like a forest with its trees connected in the web of life.

Five areas of focus for short (within the next 12 months) and longer term (one to five years) compassionate actions are proposed in this draft Sooke CAP:

- Homelessness
- Affordability Crisis (Housing, Food, Childcare)
- Social Isolation (Seniors, Disabled, Youth)
- Inadequate Health Services (Access, Mental Health, Whole Person Care)
- Communication/Awareness/Collaboration

Specific compassionate actions are indicated for each area of focus, based on the reports of the breakout groups. Comments and suggestions on a draft Sooke CAP,

distributed in December, were used to complete this initial plan. An implementation strategy will be developed at a second workshop which will be held on March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The Sooke CAP, if supported by the participants at the upcoming workshop participants and by Sooke Council, will be submitted to Charter for Compassion International. It is hoped that this submission will occur in the Spring.

Recognition of Sooke as a Compassionate Community by Charter for Compassion International would not involve the issue of a certificate or a seal of approval for the Cap. Our community will join a worldwide humanitarian movement of citizens in over 400 cities, town, villages and neighbourhoods that are striving for a kinder, better planet.

### **Five Proposed Areas of Focus for the Sooke Compassionate Action Plan**

The five areas of focus for the Sooke CAP are proposed below. Their order of presentation does not indicate their relative importance.

Several groups and organizations are already working independently and together in each of these areas of focus. Compassionate actions are being taken but it was agreed at the workshop that much remains to be done. The March 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop may identify further short- and longer-term actions, as well as the human and material resources necessary to implement these actions.

#### **1. Homelessness**

Estimates of the number of homeless people in Sooke range from about 35 to more than 100. They are a nearly invisible part of our community. They spend much of each day trying to satisfy basic needs for food, safe shelter and hygiene. Social contact with the larger community is often avoided by these individuals, just as more fortunate residents tend to avoid contact with them. Many homeless people contend with mental illnesses aggravated by addictions to alcohol and street drugs. These challenges become more difficult during our winter months, especially during periods of extreme weather. Some working poor are also

homeless due to the lack of affordable housing in Sooke. They may inhabit vehicles and moored boats.

The stigmas associated with homelessness, addiction and mental illness can be reduced through greater awareness of the struggles involved and empathy towards the afflicted.

**Short-Term Compassionate Actions:**

1. Designation of safe areas for the homeless with storage lockers, coolers, trash receptacles and access to showers and laundry facilities. Provision of temporary shelters such as tents. Access to a commercial kitchen with food safe certification.
2. Establish an extreme weather shelter for the homeless (cold temperatures, heavy rains). It would eventually evolve into a seasonal shelter for the October to April period.
3. Continue and broaden the ongoing dialogue and joint activities by individuals, groups and agencies to relieve the plight of the homeless residents in Sooke. Examples are the ongoing efforts by the Sooke Shelter Society, Sooke Homeless Coalition and Sooke Crisis and Referral Society.

**Longer-Term Compassionate Action:**

1. Establish a seasonal shelter that will provide for homeless residents -from October through April.
2. Support the purchase of modular housing for homeless Sooke residents (170 units recently purchased for Nanaimo).

**2. Affordability Crisis**

Sooke is a fast-growing community with an increasing range of goods and services amenities for residents with the required income. It is becoming unaffordable for many households who are struggling to meet the costs of housing, food, childcare and transportation.

The historical view of Sooke as a cheap place to live within Greater Victoria no longer holds. One indicator is the increasing number of individuals and families who use the Sooke Food Bank on a regular basis. Another indicator is the cost of

driving to and from Victoria with gasoline prices increasing year over year. Limited bus services within Sooke and between Sooke and Langford/Victoria discourage a shift from private to public transportation.

Canada's Official Poverty Line, across all regions of the country, was \$37,542 for a family with two adults and two children in 2015. It is based on the cost of housing, transportation, nutritious food, clothing and other household requirements.

Perhaps the greatest affordability concern is the cost of housing in Sooke for both potential owners and renters. Local figures are not available but the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) reported in January 2017 that the Victoria Region was the least affordable small city in Canada for single family houses: the median price was over eight times the median household income. Rent costs in Greater Victoria increased by 8% between 2015 and 2016. Current low vacancy rates only worsen the situation.

The current District of Sooke Official Community Plan (OCP) defines affordable housing as housing that sells or rents at a rate that is affordable (no more than 30% of annual income) to households with the lower half of incomes in Sooke.

Attainable housing refers to the gap in housing and services for people who do qualify for provincially or federally defined affordable housing and yet do not make enough to purchase a home at the market rate.

The Capital Regional District (CRD) in its draft housing affordability study (April 2018) estimates that there is a shortfall of 6,200 affordable rental units in Greater Victoria.

### **Short-Term Compassionate Actions**

1. Broaden the mandate of the District of Sooke's Affordable Housing Committee to specifically include affordable and attainable housing as defined in the OCP. Consideration would be given to renaming it "the Housing Committee" to reflect this broader mandate.
2. Request the District of Sooke to hold meetings with developers, real estate agents, concerned citizens and other stakeholders to develop policies to increase the availability of affordable and attainable housing Sooke.

3. Request the District of Sooke to investigate non-market options to increase the stock of affordable and attainable housing in our community. These options might include the use of District-owned lots with other designations, such as inactive parkland, for the construction of buildings which would be sold or rented at an affordable non-market cost plus a fixed percentage.

### **Longer-Term Compassionate Actions**

1. Lobby both the CRD and the provincial government for increased funding for both affordable housing and attainable housing (alternative structures such as tiny houses) for low to moderate income Sooke residents.
2. Work with Sooke Council and developers to make rental suites in private houses more suitable for families, e.g. better sound-proofing.
3. Lobby BC Transit for better coverage and increased frequency in bus services both within Sooke and between Sooke and Langford/Victoria. BC Transit's Local Area Plan Consultations are now underway. (Reference: <https://bctransit.com/victoria/transit-future/local-area-transit-plans/project-updates/sooke>).
4. Lobby both the CRD and the provincial government for building code exceptions that allow alternative housing structures, such as trailers, recreational vehicles and tiny houses, for marginal-income (homeless, unemployable) and moderate-income Sooke residents.

### **3. Social Isolation**

Some Sooke residents live marginal lives. There are many causes, including mental illnesses, psychological disorders and dementia. Others suffer from chronic physical handicaps and drug/alcohol addictions. Social interaction with the broader population is often limited by communication challenges, behavioural issues and social stigmas/prejudices.

Social isolation is an issue also faced by single people, youth and the elderly. Generally speaking, there is an increasing disconnection in our communities and less opportunities for social interaction.

### **Short-Term Compassionate Actions**

1. Expand mental health services in Sooke, including addiction treatment and counselling.
2. Establish neighbourhood programs for regular checks on persons with psychological disorders and dementia. An existing example is the Keep in Touch (KIT) program which is run by the RCMP.

### **Longer-Term Compassionate Action**

1. Increase the number of rooms for persons with dementia at Ayre Manor.
2. Increase the number of easily accessible public spaces in Sooke where people can feel secure and have opportunities for interaction. Such a space might be provided as part of the development of Lot A on Wadams Way in Sooke.
3. Encourage events and activities that foster intergenerational contact, particularly between seniors and youth.
4. Establish a program, possibly through local faith-based groups, that would allow seniors and people with disabilities to rent extra space in their homes to trustworthy individuals. This action would also address the housing affordability concern in Sooke.

## **4. Inadequate Health Services**

The need for additional physicians and a well-equipped medical facility is a long-standing issue in Sooke. This problem is especially acute for persons with physical and mental disabilities and addictions.

### **Short-Term Compassionate Action**

1. Support efforts by the Sooke Family Resource Society and Sooke Region Communities Health Network to enhance health services in our community.
2. Support efforts by the Mayor's Sooke Region Primary Health Care Services Working Group to bring more physicians to Sooke and improve medical facilities.
3. Explore the importance of spirituality in fostering compassionate action and mental health.

### **Longer-Term Compassionate Action**

1. Establish a multi-service clinic in Sooke that would provide a whole person approach (physical, psychological, spiritual) to patient care.
2. Ensure that each resident of Sooke has access to a local physician by 2023.
3. Establish a respite lodge in Sooke for temporary accommodation for persons requiring homecare. Private caregivers would benefit from the opportunity for a break from their daily responsibilities.
4. Provide independent multi-belief spiritual development space integrated with the multi-service clinic in Sooke
5. Sponsor a public parade for peace/climate/community development to involve the whole community and to demonstrate implementation of the Sooke Compassionate Action Plan.

### **5. Need for Better Communication/Awareness/Collaboration**

Participants at the October Sooke CAP Workshop exchanged a great deal of useful information about their respective concerns, current activities and aspirations on a broad number of issues. It was an awareness-building event that will hopefully lead to further alliances and partnership between individuals, service groups, agencies and local government. The success of the Sooke CAP will depend on this communication and collaboration.

The Sooke Region Volunteer Centre has produced a very useful brochure, entitled *Where To Find Help In The Sooke Region*, which provides a good start in generating greater awareness of local services.

A network for regular communication between individuals, service groups and agencies would allow compassionate actions in the above four areas of focus to be monitored and, where possible, measured.

This network would also have an advocacy role. Parties who are striving for the same goals would jointly press for needed changes in our community.

### **Short-Term Compassionate Action**

1. Foster alliances and partnerships between individuals, service groups, agencies and local government.

2. Submit the Sooke CAP to the District of Sooke for inclusion in the new Official Community Plan (OCP).
3. Further promote the Charter of Compassion, keep a list of members of the community who have signed the Charter and share stories of how the Charter is being applied in the community.
4. Establish a Compassionate Action Registry to record acts of kindness. Hopefully, this recognition will have a “snowball” effect by fostering further good works in our community.

### **Longer-Term Action**

1. Establish a communications/advocacy network which would have a triage or “navigation” capability to direct persons with specific needs to the appropriate service providers in an efficient, timely manner.
2. Monitor progress and prepare an annual public report on implementation of the Sooke CAP.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The Sooke CAP was prepared for discussion at a workshop which will be held on March 2, 2019. Participants will be asked to develop an implementation strategy by which to carry out the specific short-term and long-term actions.

This plan will be further revised in coming years to reflect new areas of concern in our community and, hopefully, successful implementation of short-term and longer-term goals in the initial document submitted to Charter for Compassion International.

The Charter for Compassion calls on us to treat others as we wish to be treated, to help alleviate the suffering of others and to enhance our interdependent spiritual and material wellbeing. It is a journey to a better world for all of us.

**Appendix 1: List of Participants at Sooke CAP Workshop, October 27, 2018**

Shirley Alphonse	T'Sou-ke Nation Elder
Sherry Thompson	Sooke Shelter Society, Sooke Homelessness Coalition
Earle Bretherton	Sooke Shelter Society, Sooke Homelessness Coalition
Dale McLean	Sooke Shelter Society
John Ede	Sooke Resident (Homeless Representative)
Jeff Bateman	District of Sooke Councillor, EMCS Society, Transition Sooke
Tony St-Pierre	District of Sooke Councillor, Cast Iron Farm, Sooke Farmland Trust Society
Carolyn Bateman	Transition Sooke
Bernie Klassen	Transition Sooke, Zero Waste Sooke
Michael Tacon	Transition Sooke
Koshin-Moonfist	Sooke Region Multi-Belief Initiative
Jackson Hughes	Sooke Resident
Corporal Sam Haldane	RCMP – Sooke Detachment
Sharon Sterling	Team Sooke Refugee Sponsorship
Barbara Michell	Holy Trinity Anglican Church
Gerry Kusuqak	Sooke Resident
Michael Kusuqak	Sooke Resident
Rick Eby	Minister, Sooke Baptist Church
Maddi Prinn	Youth Worker, Sooke Baptist Church
Josh Fast	Youth for Christ, Victoria
Les Haddad	Sooke Chamber of Commerce, Baha'i Faith
Bernie Klasschuk	Sooke Resident
Christine Brown	Baha'i Faith
Elaine McMath	Sooke Resident
Neil Poirier	Sooke Resident

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Sheila Wallace	Sooke Country Market
Frederique Philip	Sooke Resident
Joanne Scholten	Sooke Resident (Allies, Alliances)
Ted Mehler	Sooke Resident
Loretta Deutscher	Sooke Resident
Jen Wilde	Greater Victoria Extreme Weather Shelters
Britt Santowski	Sooke Pocket News
Shayna Chamitoff	Women Care (?) Group, SFA
Pauline Kissinger-Hamilton	Sooke Resident
Maxine Medhurst	Sooke Resident
Nicky Logins	Sooke Family Resource Society, Sooke Region Communities Health Network, District of Sooke Affordable Housing Committee, Sooke Homelessness Coalition
Jonny Morris	BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions
Kim Kaldal	Sooke Food Bank
Christina Brown	Big House Breakfast
Ron Ramsey	Sooke Region Resident
Melody Kimmel	Sooke Region Resident
Caroline Hudson	Sooke Food CHI
Sean Brown	Sooke Resident
Tracy Ewert	Public Health Nurse, Island Health Authority
Don Brown	Sooke Region Multi-Belief Initiative, Baha'i Faith
E.M. Anderson	Sooke Region Multi-Belief Initiative
Phil Rossner	Sooke Region Multi-Belief Initiative, Vancouver Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants & Refugees
Mark Ziegler	Sooke Region Multi-Belief Initiative, Rotary Club of Sooke