

The Impact of Lived Experience on the Homelessness Sector

Community Report



Hygiene Centre



Outreach Circle



Interfaith Steering Circle



Bylaw and RCMP Relationship



Storage of Belongings Program



AUTHORS

Stephanie Laing, MSW, RSW
Director of Operations – KHRC

Saran Mallinson, PhD
Associate Research Coordinator – KHRC

Emilie Isch
Graduate Research Assistant – KHRC

Melanie Warner, MSW, RSW
Research Technician – KHRC

John R. Graham, PhD
Principal Investigator – KHRC

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EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

Each Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness (LECoH) meeting begins with a land acknowledgement and a moment in memoriam. We respectfully begin this report in the same manner and provide a further expression of gratitude from LECoH.

We respectfully acknowledge that the land we gather on is the unceded territory of the Okanagan / Sylix people and we take a moment in memoriam of the members of LECoH no longer with us.

Diane Larsback, Wanda Mckinnon, Ricky-Lee Karaszi, Kerri Plumridge

On this journey, LECoH has been most grateful for:

Being valued

Being knowledge keepers, together

Seeing a greater awareness of street culture and the voices of people experiencing homelessness

Realizing that many people are actually willing to help

Being asked to participate

Growing their self-confidence and self-worth

Seeing grassroots systems change in their community, seeing improvements

The opportunity to participate in new initiatives from the very beginning to their completion

Being heard

Bringing community members together to listen to their perspective

Service providers' encouragement

The growth in Lived and Living Experience initiatives, beyond LECoH

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Introduction

The *Impact of Lived Experience on the Homelessness Sector* project is a Community-Based research project designed to support the Central Okanagan Journey Home Society (COJHS) and the Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness (LECoH) in identifying the successes and challenges of Lived and Living experience engagements with the homelessness serving sector in Kelowna, British Columbia since the design process of the Journey Home Strategy in 2018. The current project design and methods were established through a collaboration between the Kelowna Homelessness Research Centre (KHRC), COJHS, and LECoH to evaluate the impact of LECoH from members own perspectives and the perspectives of service providers who have worked with LECoH on various projects and initiatives since 2018. It is the hope of the authors that this report will not only celebrate LECoH's story publicly but that it will expand LECoH's local impact, and support future engagements with LECoH. This report begins with an introduction to LECoH through their origin story before moving on to the research design of this project and the themes examined and produced through the analyzed interviews.

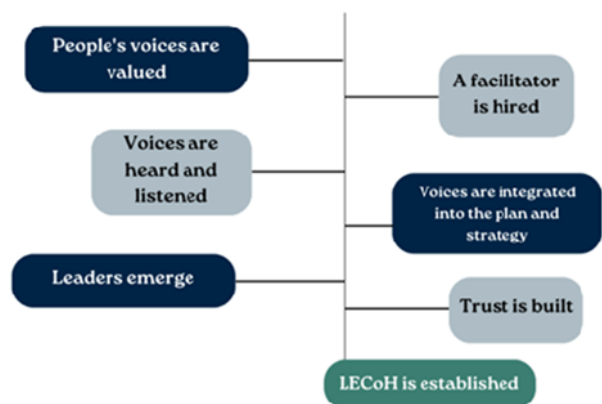
LECoH's Origin Story

The Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness (LECoH) began in 2018 during the design process of the Journey Home Strategy, the City of Kelowna's five-year plan to address homelessness.

The Journey Home Task Force and Transition Team phase

The first steps in LECoH's origin story are initiated by the City of Kelowna's Social Development Manager, who recognizes the significant value of people with Lived and Living Experience in addressing homelessness. From this starting point, the City of Kelowna recruits a Lived and Living Experience facilitator, with the support of a dedicated grant. The facilitator joins the Journey Home Task Force, the group with the mandate to help design Kelowna's plan and strategy. The role of the facilitator is to convene people with Lived and Living Experience of homelessness, to gather their perspectives and ensure that their points of view inform the direction and content of the Journey Home Strategy. The facilitator is also responsible for paying honorariums, booking rooms, and ordering food.

From contributing to a City-wide strategy to developing a Lived Experience structure



The facilitator hosted the gatherings and focus group sessions at Kelowna's public library, and people with Lived and Living Experience of homelessness participated, sharing their expert knowledge and suggesting policy and service improvements to better meet their needs. A graphic designer was present at the meetings, sketching drawings that represented the thoughts being shared by people with Lived and Living Experience. One service provider stated: *'There were wide callouts to people and friends brought friends. (...) We made the space accessible and provided a way for people to feel comfortable. It reduced a lot of the stigma.'* The same service provider remarked upon the value of the graphic designer, noting they: *'would draw pictures based on what people were sharing. (...) For some people, knowing their words are being heard and captured in a picture can make them feel like they're heard.'*

This input was then integrated into the Journey Home Strategy. The same service provider remarked: *'there were tangible pieces that were included in the strategy because of the Lived and Living Experience feedback, with other stakeholders seeing the value of the additions.'* Leaders with Lived and Living Experience emerged from this process. These consultations also built trust because people with Lived and Living Experience saw that their voices were embedded in the Journey Home Strategy, as observed by a service provider: *'when we presented the strategy to Mayor and Council, there were people with Lived Experience in the Chamber, who were there to support the strategy and speak for it. (...) We realized that we couldn't go forward with any type of implementation, without a concrete role for Lived Experience.'*

With support from the Journey Home Transition Team, the emerging Lived and Living Experience leaders created LECoH. The same service provider as above shares: *'while we were deciding what the Journey Home Transition Team should do, the Lived and Living Experience leaders were deciding what they should do, independently. (...) Over time, the Lived and Living Experience leaders identified that they needed a permanent structure. They transitioned to LECoH, building Terms of Reference and job descriptions.'*

The Central Okanagan Journey Home Society phase

From COJHS' inception, two Board member positions were explicitly reserved for people with Lived Experience, one of which was specific to youth, reflecting the value placed on Lived and Living perspectives by COJHS founders. A service provider notes: *'LECoH representatives came to Board meetings often, bringing their concerns and successes to other Board members. (...) LECoH representatives would also bring their Lived Experience voices, insights, and values as we debated Board issues.'* Another service provider states that LECoH's role on the Board was to *'educate the other Board members about homelessness.'*

LECoH's key operational structure, from the beginning, consists of their bi-weekly meetings, convened by a facilitator employed by COJHS, and assisted by a LECoH member secretary, who takes the meeting minutes. Each LECoH member is compensated for their time with honorariums, paid initially by the community members' donation, and then by COJHS. Importantly, COJHS'

main source of funding has been the City of Kelowna, highlighting a direct connection between the City's needs and the expectation that LECoH is available to support those needs.

It is also noteworthy that a youth-focused Lived and Living Experience advisory group was set up, in parallel to and at the same time as LECoH's adult-focused group, as part of the youth homelessness strategy, A Way Home Kelowna. Unfortunately, it was challenging for the two groups, LECoH and the youth-focused circle, to connect.

Research Project Design

The project consisted of the design period (i.e., co-creation of research design, ethics approval, the compilation of a timeline identifying each Lived and Living Experience Engagement since 2018, and the recruitment of participants) and two subsequent phases:

Phase 1 (June 2022 – November 2022)

- Pilot semi-structured interviews with members of the Journey Home Task Force, adjusting questions as needed,
- Complete interviews with key sector contacts,
- Transcription and interpretative phenomenological analysis,
- Focus group with LECoH representatives.

Phase 2 (December 2022 – May 2023)

- Complete interviews with LECoH members,
- Transcription and interpretative phenomenological analysis,
- Focus group with LECoH representatives.

During Phase 1, ten interviews were conducted with eleven service provider participants, while in Phase 2 six interviews were completed with members and alumni of LECoH. All interviews were conducted separately (apart from two service providers from one organization completing an interview together).

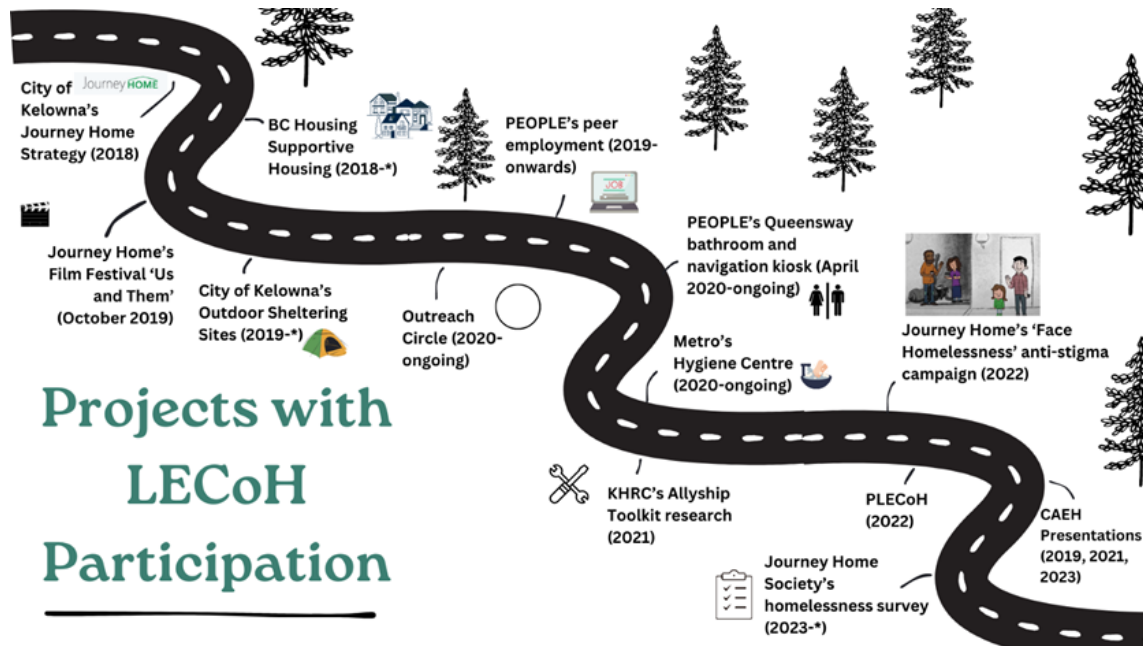
It is important to note the diversity of perspectives along a continuum of experiences of service providers that participated in this project. At one end, some service provider participants have longstanding personal and/or professional experiences with people with lived and living experience (PWLLE) and/or they may work for organizations where the workforce contains PWLLE, as one service provider participant indicates, *'at work, making space for volunteers, staff, stakeholders and participants with Lived and Living Experience to contribute has always been important. At least half of our staff have Lived Experience of substance use and/or homelessness'*, or the ethos of the workplace is to include the voices and perspective of PWLLE into program decision-making as evidenced by this service provider's perspective: *'some of the things we do are because staff have said "when I was living in homelessness, this is what was helpful for me, (...) this is what I needed, (...) this is what worked best for me. (...). We then test this with the people who are regularly accessing the programs"'*. Other service provider participants may have an

opposite experience wherein they have little to no history working with PWLLE. Still others may have had various experiences across such a continuum over the course of their career and professional lives.

All interview transcripts were systematically reviewed to identify patterns among the data. These patterns were then grouped into themes and subsequently grouped into six meta-themes: the purpose of LECoH, process of participation, challenges, strengths, achievements, and future improvements and aspirations. The analysis of the data can be observed throughout the report. These meta-themes will illustrate the impact of the work of LECoH from the perspective of LECoH members and service providers, respectively.

Participation timeline

During the design period, KHRC and LECoH members compiled a timeline identifying LECoH’s participation in various projects. This list of projects was used to (1) identify appropriate key sector service providers to participate in Phase 1 interviews, and (2) to provide context for the semi-structured questions asked of both service provider and LECoH participants to explore the impact of LECoH through their participation in the projects. The timeline compiled highlights that between 2018 and 2023, LECoH participated in more than twenty local projects in collaboration with service providers and community groups (see Appendix C for full list). Throughout this time, LECoH has also invested considerable time and effort in relationship-building with Bylaw, the RCMP, and the City of Kelowna’s Mayor and Council.



Note. The projects with an * are ongoing. Acronyms: COJHS (the Central Okanagan Journey Home Society); CAEH (the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness); PLECoH (Penticton Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness).

LECoH's purpose

According to the interviews undertaken with LECoH members, LECoH has three overarching purposes: (1) LECoH sets out to represent the voices of a broad range of adults with Lived and Living Experience of homelessness, (2) LECoH communicates the value of these voices to service providers in Kelowna, making every effort for these voices to be heard and known, and finally, (3) LECoH strives to break down stigma, especially between people with homes and people without homes and between people belonging to government culture and people belonging to street culture.



These findings align with LECoH's mission statement, which states that LECoH is

“A voice for the homeless or those at risk of homelessness, creating openness with understanding, releasing fear and judgement and initiating change.”

The interviews with LECoH members also indicated that LECoH gathers the voices of people with Lived and Living Experience of homelessness, during their regular visits to shelters, supportive housing sites, drop-in services, and the City of Kelowna's designated outdoor sheltering site, where they build trusting relationships with individuals over time and listen attentively to people's stories and perspectives. LECoH-organized street BBQs have also provided an additional opportunity for LECoH members to connect with people currently experiencing homelessness.

During the interviews, LECoH member participants emphasized that they share the perspectives of people with Lived and Living Experience with service providers, providing their subjective view of what they heard and understood, adding that the stories and perspectives they gather are filtered through their own personal feelings, opinions, and biases. When communicating with service providers, LECoH members also state whether they are providing their individual opinion as a LECoH member or the unified, consensus-based opinion of LECoH as a whole.

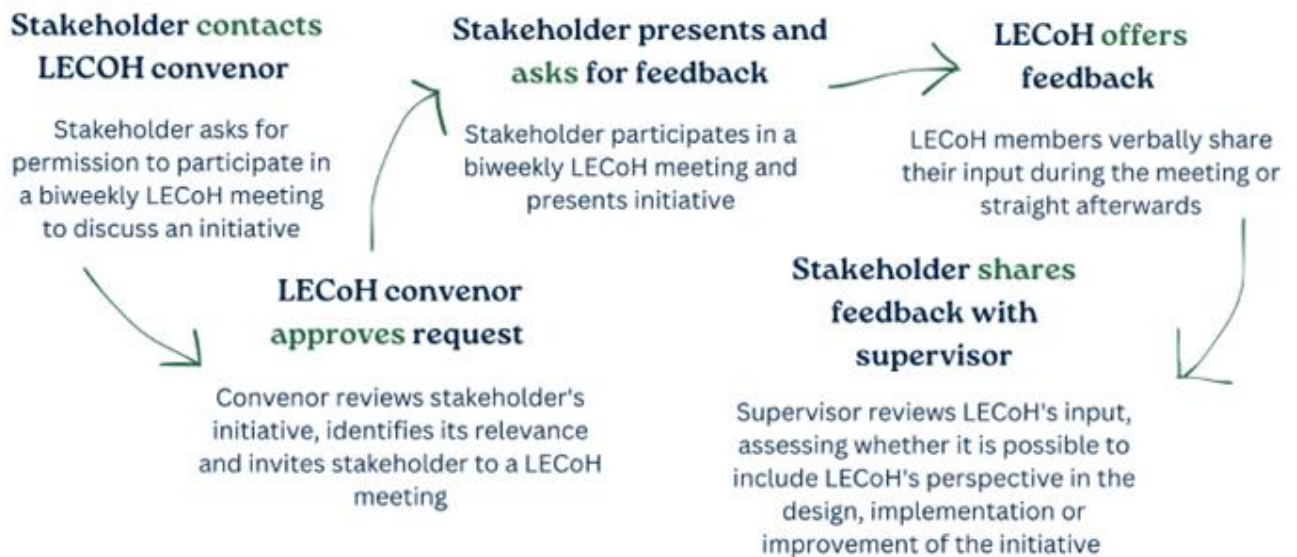
In 2018 and 2019, LECoH included members with Living Experience of homelessness. However, due to the personal life events of these members, they have either passed away or left LECoH. LECoH's difficulty in recruiting and retaining new members, particularly people with Living Experience, has resulted in LECoH lacking members with Living Experience of homelessness, from 2020 onwards. As one LECoH member notes: *'we're still missing the voice of folks who are really in great need, right now. (...) But when you don't have a permanent place to live, it's very hard to be tied to a regular meeting time, to have the technology. You're just in a very crisis moment. Coming to a meeting is the last thing on your list.'*

LECoH's participation process

Three different participation processes are used by LECoH, with each process balancing the needs and preferences of both LECoH members and service providers.

LECoH-led meetings with service provider representation

Developed and led by LECoH, this process moves through the following steps:



This type of participation requires that the service provider seeking input from LECoH presents their project and questions to LECoH members during one of LECoH's bi-weekly meetings. This process is initiated by the service provider contacting LECoH's convenor and asking for permission to attend a LECoH meeting. The convenor then reviews the service provider's request and determines whether it falls within LECoH's mandate. If there is a good fit, the convenor invites the service provider to an upcoming LECoH-led meeting. At the meeting, the service provider shares information regarding their initiative and asks for LECoH's feedback. LECoH members then take turns to share their perspective, in real-time. The service provider then shares LECoH's feedback with their supervisor, who assesses the pros and cons of including LECoH's input in the design, implementation, or improvement of the given initiative.

If a service provider offers information to LECoH on a significant, contentious, and/or new initiative, LECoH's convenor may suggest that LECoH members gather as a group, amongst themselves, after the LECoH-led meeting with the service provider, to discuss the topic and unpack LECoH members' perspectives. In this instance, the goal is for LECoH members to reach a group consensus regarding their views on the matter. LECoH's convenor then asks the service provider to participate in another LECoH-led meeting, where LECoH members share their key messages with the service provider. Service providers seeking regular input from LECoH (e.g., City of Kelowna's Social Development team, Bylaw, the RCMP, and COJHS) or seeking to involve

LECoH in new initiatives (e.g., the local representative of the BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner and the representative of the Interfaith Steering Circle on homelessness), may be invited by LECOH to participate in their meetings on a regular basis.

The benefit of this type of participation process is that LECOH members can shape the style and tone of their interaction with the service provider, from within a safe and comfortable space designed by their needs, preferences, and culture. Being immersed in LECOH's space also offers learning opportunities for service providers who may then embed these experiences into their professional perspective and workplace practice.

Service provider-led meetings with LECOH representation

Another type of participation, developed by service providers, in partnership with LECOH, requires that LECOH representatives attend a service provider-led meeting to share their perspective and expertise regarding a topic determined by the service provider. This participation process is either initiated by the service provider contacting LECOH's convenor and asking for LECOH's participation or by LECOH's convenor asking the service provider if LECOH can participate in their consultation activity. If there is a good fit, LECOH generally chooses two members to represent LECOH at the service provider meeting. At the meeting, the service provider shares information regarding their initiative and asks for LECOH's feedback. The LECOH representatives then take turns to share their perspective, in real-time.



“LECoH identified the problem and explained what was wrong with the existing system, from their perspective”.



The service provider then shares LECOH's feedback with their supervisor, team and/or stakeholders, who assess the pros and cons of including LECOH's input in the design, implementation, or improvement of the given initiative.

If a service provider offers information to the LECOH representatives on a significant, contentious, and/or new initiative, the LECOH representatives will take notes of the conversation. The LECOH representatives will then schedule a LECOH members' only meeting, to report back to LECOH as a whole and to discuss their perspectives amongst themselves. The goal is for LECOH members to reach a group consensus regarding their views on the matter. LECOH representatives then share their key messages with the service provider, in an additional meeting or via email.

Service provider or community groups seeking regular input from LECOH (e.g., the Outreach Circle, the Peer Employment Circle, the COVID19 Operator's Table, or the Interfaith Steering Circle) invite a LECOH representative to participate in their meetings on a regular basis. At these meetings, the LECOH representative shares relevant updates and pertinent knowledge that informs decision-making, as noted by one of the service providers: *‘LECoH brings that Living Experience perspective (...) to inform the group of service providers so that we're not tone deaf to the realities*

of what we need, as we make service delivery decisions and try to establish a more effective system of support.’ At times, LECoH will deliberate regarding whether they feel comfortable participating in a group’s regular meetings. One service provider recalls: ‘the experience with our type of communities is generally not positive. LECoH did deliberate whether they wanted to be involved with the Circle and then they agreed.’

The benefit of this type of participation process is that LECoH members have the opportunity to be involved in consultation events and inter-agency or community group meetings, as a voice alongside other community partners and stakeholders. Being regularly immersed in the inter-agency service provider and community groups also enables LECoH to remain up to date with community-level changes and new initiatives.

COJHS-led initiatives, in partnership with LECoH

A further type of participation involves LECoH collaborating on initiatives led by COJHS’ leadership. Examples include BC Housing’s open house for McCurdy’s supportive housing, the ‘Us and Them’ Pop up Film Festival, the Emergency Shelter Design Lab, PEOPLE, the anti-stigma communication initiative, and the local Homelessness Survey. The nature of LECoH’s efforts in this approach aligns broadly with the International Association of Public Participation’s definition of collaboration, namely that LECoH members partner in many aspects of the decision-making process, including the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions. LECoH’s role in this form of participation is to advise and innovate, with COJHS committing to incorporating LECoH’s perspectives and recommendations into decision-making to the maximum extent possible.



The Emergency Shelter Design Lab is used as an example to illustrate this process. In this instance, the new activity is initiated by COJHS’ leadership and LECoH, who ask COJHS staff to flesh out

ideas and help implement the plan. Next, COJHS staff design a draft action plan and meet with LECoH representatives to share their progress and ask for feedback. LECoH members then provide their perspective, during that meeting or at a second meeting. Following this, COJHS staff incorporate LECoH's feedback and share the revised action plan with COJHS' leadership. COJHS staff and LECoH members then implement the action plan. In the case of the Emergency Shelter Design Lab, LECoH members facilitated focus groups with people experiencing homelessness with support from COJHS staff. COJHS staff then summarized the focus group findings, identifying four Lived Experience guiding principles (Choice, Safety, Connection, and Healing), for COJHS and the City of Kelowna's Social Development Department to use in planning future services. COJHS then shared these findings with LECoH for their input and feedback. Finally, COJHS and LECoH jointly presented the findings of this initiative at a public event attended by government, non-profit and business leadership as well as other community stakeholders and partners.

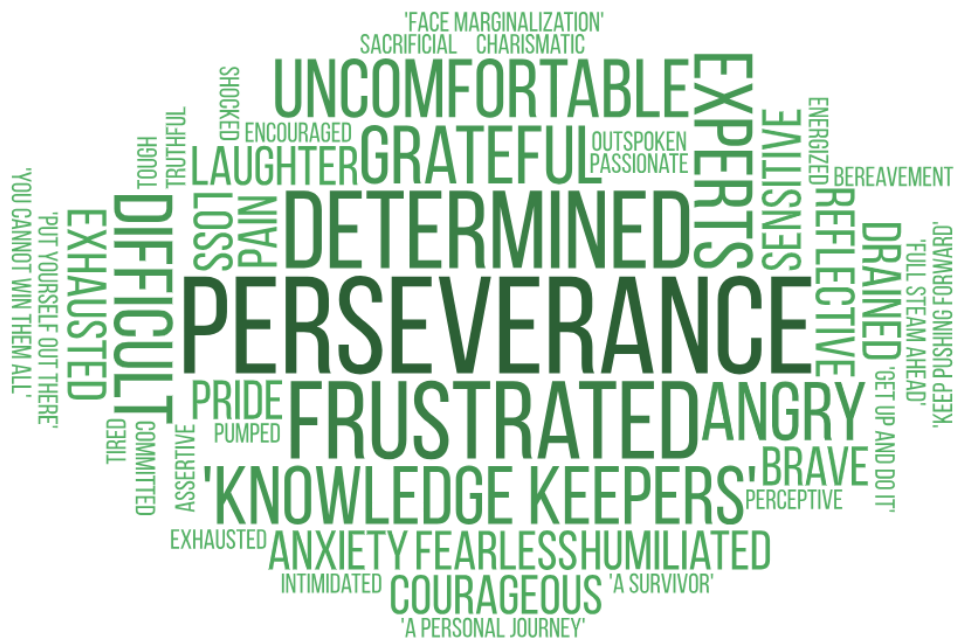
The benefit of this type of participation process is that LECoH directly helps initiate a project, in partnership with COJHS, in an area where LECoH members themselves see a gap and a need. LECoH's input and feedback is therefore embedded into the project without them being reliant on service providers seeking them out. Whilst there is no guarantee that LECoH's voice will be equal to the voices of COJHS leadership and other stakeholders, the close partnership between the groups involved establishes an expectation of accountability and transparency.

Challenges

Emotions and mindsets

Whilst the LECoH members and service providers interviewed all expressed a variety of challenges tied to LECoH's participation, LECoH members' difficulties were acutely reflected in the variety of comfortable and uncomfortable emotions shared by LECoH, pointing to the ups and downs, the successes and challenges, as well as the overall emotional toll of LECoH's work on the professional and personal lives of individual members. On the one hand, the work leads members to feel energized, passionate, encouraged, brave, pumped, happy, proud, and grateful. On the other hand, the work brought out uncomfortable emotions including a loss of self-confidence as well as feeling anxious, drained, bereaved, frustrated, intimidated, shocked, in pain, humiliated, and angry. Whilst some service providers may have felt similar ups and downs in their emotions, these feelings are likely experienced more profoundly by LECoH members since they are in a position of less power and influence relative to the service providers.

During the interviews, LECoH members also mentioned specific mindsets that helped keep them going, as they waded through huge barriers and significant losses, highlighting the importance of being outspoken and *'putting yourself out there'* in the face of marginalization, as well as being confident in your expertise and bearing witness, by being knowledge keepers together. Key qualities LECoH mentioned included being sacrificial and *'a survivor'*, showing determination and perseverance with a *'full steam ahead'* attitude and a *'get up and do it'* mentality, all the while accepting that *'you cannot win them all.'* The fact that these mindsets are even mentioned points to the intense level of challenges LECoH has faced so far.



The perspective of LECoH members

The struggles that interviewed LECoH members encountered, while participating in projects and building relationships with service providers, are varied, extensive, and captured further in the following sub-themes: power dynamics between LECoH and service providers, the intricacies of adapting to different cultures, having to ‘take the flack’ in the community, administrative challenges, and the myriad impacts of the COVID19 pandemic.

Dependence on service providers

One set of challenges revolved around the power dynamics between LECoH and service providers. Firstly, LECoH is significantly reliant on service providers seeking out their input. For example, despite several attempts, LECoH was unable to join BC Housing’s local Coordinated Access Table Working Group that was developing policies and procedures to improve the prioritization processes for people experiencing homelessness into local supportive housing. Additionally, LECoH is seriously dependent on service providers’ openness to elevating LECoH’s voice and perspective to a level of influence equal to standpoints held by other partners. Lastly, whilst service providers seek out LECoH’s input, there is a risk of ‘rubber stamping’, whereby LECoH is held up publicly as having significantly influenced a project when in reality, there is no concrete evidence of their perspective in the final program design or implementation.

Adapting to different cultures

Another set of challenges focused around having to adapt to a culture different to their own, whether this be the culture of valuing quantitative data, the culture of academia, understanding

service provider jargon, or trying to fit an Indigenous worldview ‘circle’ and a street culture into a bureaucratic ‘triangular’ culture.

‘Taking the flack’

An associated struggle consisted of LECoH having to ‘take the flack’ and being on the receiving end of ‘push back’, NIMBYism, racism, discrimination, and stigma from community members making presumptions about people experiencing homelessness and LECoH.

Other related issues mentioned by LECoH members included:

- Being misunderstood and manipulated, witnessing their ‘words getting twisted or lost in translation’ or wanting some service providers ‘to be truly aware of what I do, and listen to my truth’ or acknowledge that ‘this is not my individual perspective, this is LECoH’s perspective’,
- Being treated unequally, with their voices having ‘unequal power in the room’,
- Being outnumbered in public during group conversations on a contentious issue,
- Experiencing a disregard for their intellectual property rights, accompanied by insufficient public acknowledgement of their contributions, especially in the media,
- Experiencing a lack of respect for their participation in a project (e.g., some service providers offer no follow up with LECoH after seeking their perspective and input),
- Being excluded from conversations that matter and where they clearly have a role (e.g., committee meetings that directly influence government funding or a local podcast focusing on homelessness),
- Public relations’ stories being prioritized over real life stories,
- The persistence of tokenism,
- The lack of political will.

Administration issues

Administrative challenges were also raised by the interviewed LECoH members which included (1) turnover in service provider and political leadership, leading LECoH to start afresh in some of their relationship-building efforts and awareness-raising endeavors, (2) uneven service provider follow-up after LECoH’s participation, due to either unfavorable power dynamics or lack of service provider capacity, compelling LECoH to pro-actively seek out the impact of their work by connecting with service providers at community tables, and (3) LECoH’s limited capacity, including challenges around recruitment, retention, transport, and funding.

The perspective of service providers

The challenges identified by service providers are captured in the following sub-themes: the purpose and role of LECoH, contentious representation, concerns of LECoH’s influence being inflated or over-valued, continued siloing in the work LECoH is engaged in and the lack of decision-makers ‘at the table’, and their difficulties in recruitment.

'Seeing through glass darkly'

Some of the service provider participants understood LECoH's purpose as raising awareness around the needs of people experiencing homelessness, helping design appropriate initiatives, and identifying challenges, issues, and solutions. One service provider emphasized LECoH's role as an advisory group and key player within the Journey Home Strategy and its implementation, as well as more broadly around actions to address homelessness in Kelowna.

However, there was a lack of clarity amongst several service providers, regarding LECoH's purpose, their participation process, how to connect with LECoH, their degree of autonomy from COJHS, and the source of LECoH's honorariums. Several questions were also raised regarding LECoH's recruitment and membership process, namely:

- When do LECoH spaces become available?
- What is the referral process?
- What participation is expected from LECoH members to maintain their LECoH membership?
- Is LECoH responsible for diversifying their membership, to include missing voices, such as people with Living Experience, seniors, people who are queer?
- Is continual, yet sustainable, on-boarding considered?
- Where can youth voices be represented?

Reflecting some of the confusion, one service provider states: *'I'm not sure I ever had a sense of what LECoH's role was. (...) I thought that whatever the plan was going forwards, it would have that feedback loop built in, so that there could be an ongoing way of making sure that the decisions made were all fitting with the information from folks who were living the experience of homelessness.'* Whilst this summary accurately reflects the original intent of LECoH, the confusion expressed by this service provider, who has been involved with the design of the Journey Home Strategy from its inception, points to the disconnect between LECoH's goal and what they have been able to achieve, due to the challenges they have faced. These challenges will be unpacked further in this report.

Contentious representation

Several service provider participants were also curious about how accurately LECoH represented Lived and Living Experience voices, as well as who was included in LECoH's representation efforts. Key questions asked by some service providers, accompanied by the reflections provided by other service providers on this topic, demonstrate different perceptions of this issue and point to the overarching limitations of one person representing and speaking on behalf of others. This is especially concerning when representatives' expressed viewpoints unintentionally limit a vulnerable population's access to key services and supports, a *'rubber stamp'* and *'check box'* phenomenon that may be exacerbated by unequal power dynamics within a community, where the interests of a privileged group are upheld to the detriment of the interests of a marginalized group.

- Are LECoH members’ perspectives subjective or objective? In other words, do LECoH members state they are sharing their personal viewpoints, experiences, or perspectives with service providers, or do they affirm they are providing factual and neutral information, unfiltered by their personal beliefs or biases, and coming directly from people with Lived and Living Experience in the community?
- Is LECoH representing Lived Experience, Living Experience, or experiences from their workplace? Are there current LECoH members with Living Experience?
- Is LECoH representing the collective voice of all members, the individual voices of each member, or the voices of others?

Service providers shared a variety of answers to these questions, noting that LECoH’s role is to:

- Provide ‘*subjective perspectives, (...) in relation to their own individual experience of homelessness*’, recognizing that it is impossible to offer an objective perspective.
- Also, speak on behalf of others, ‘*from the work they were involved in previously.*’
- Represent a broad Lived Experience voice, contrasting this approach with the voice of “peers”, frontline workers with Lived and Living Experience, ‘*who speak specifically from their social location.*’
- Be clear when sharing ‘*their own experience, LECoH’s collective experience or trying to share a broader viewpoint.*’

The differing views on this topic point to the significant value of authentically and responsibly contextualizing LECoH’s voices and perspectives, listening carefully, with curiosity and discernment, to the content and tone of the experiences shared whilst being prepared to ask follow-up questions for clarification and deeper understanding. Seeking out Lived and Living Experience voices beyond those expressed by LECoH is an equally valuable approach, as noted by a service provider: ‘*LECoH is not a huge group. There’s a ton of voices that they’re not able to represent. (...) We have a duty to look outside of LECoH for experiences that are not represented.*’

Inflating, or over-valuing, LECoH’s influence

One service provider cautioned against inflating the power of one cohort of Lived and Living Experience voices over others, noting that LECoH is potentially being given too much value by some service providers. Another interviewed service provider makes a similar point, stating that ‘*the biggest challenge currently is that LECoH is viewed as the Lived and Living experts in our community. We must be very clear that LECoH doesn’t speak on behalf of every single person experiencing homelessness. LECoH plays a role but they are not the “be all and end all.”*’ Importantly, this is not every service provider’s opinion, as illustrated in this statement: ‘*LECoH is not seen as a gatekeeper, nor are they perceived as a group that people approach to seek their permission to undertake a specific initiative.*’



Undervalues living experience cohorts who have valuable perspectives to share

The consequence of this trend is the undervaluing of other Lived and Living Experience cohorts already connected to other service providers, cohorts who should be

valued above LECoH’s voice in particular contexts.

Another consequence of this trend is the unfair questioning between service providers who hold unequal amounts of power and influence, within a context of



Unfairly questions service providers' commitment to embedding Living Experience voices into their programming

competition for scarce funding resources. One service provider expresses this situation by observing: *‘LECoH is not saying “you need to listen to us”. It’s other service providers saying to me: “Have you asked LECoH or are you inviting LECoH’s participation?” (...) At our organization, we’re looking to hear the voices of folks who are accessing our services and who are currently living in homelessness. We would weigh the experience of the person who’s accessing our program a little more than we would weigh LECoH’s’.*



Silences different service provider viewpoints who fear disagreeing with LECoH

A further consequence of over-valuing LECoH’s voice, according to a service provider referred to previously, is

situated in the context of inter-agency service provider tables, where inflating the voice of the LECoH representative *‘almost paralyzes the conversation, out of fear, because nobody wants to be seen as being contradictory or disagreeing with LECoH.’* This stifling of debate prevents service providers from having honest conversations and working through disagreements or differences in values.

An additional consequence of over-valuing LECoH’s voice, according to the same service provider participant, is that once service providers have LECoH’s engagement and/or approval on a project,



Paves the way for tokenism and inauthentic consultation

the initiative is more likely to be perceived as valuable and worthy of proceeding forward, because it includes or represents a validated ‘expert’ Lived Experience lens, when in reality, there are many other people with Lived and Living Experience in the community who have not been consulted and whose needs have not been considered.



Downplays best practices and frontline worker expertise.

Building on the perspective that LECoH offers subjective points of view, and in connection with the observations presented above, a service provider participant highlights the importance of balancing best practices with the

perspective and lens of LECoH: *‘we seek LECoH’s advice and incorporate it into decisions, but at the same time, we try to avoid contradictions with best practices.’* They also highlight the importance for decision-makers and planners to be *‘connected with frontline service providers because they provide a depth of expertise and experience’* that is often not consulted.

Siloed engagement

One service provider participant observed that LECoH’s participation during a specific project was siloed, noting: *‘there was a social development group, a communications group, and the contractor. The contractor would meet with the social development group, and then the social development group would share information from the contractor with LECoH. Then, LECoH shared their thoughts with the social development group that would be fed back to the contractor. There were several meetings with all the parties present, including LECoH. But there was a hierarchy.’* Another service provider highlighted a similar pattern, noting that siloed engagements would often take place instead of a cohesive and robust group discussion with all parties: *‘There’s a reluctance to bring the perspective of one group to other groups in the same space, especially if they’re dissenting opinions or speaking against a project.’*

Absence of decision-making allies

“ LECoH’s participation is equal to that of all stakeholders at the tables. However, the tables are not the ultimate decision-makers. Decisions are made higher up. ”

One interviewed service provider highlighted LECoH’s lack of powerful allies, observing *‘the people representing other organizations at inter-agency tables, where LECoH participates, are very unlikely to be the ultimate decision-makers.’* Another service provider referenced a similar difficulty, stating: *‘I am*

not a decision-maker. I advocate for LECoH to my employer, but it’s not necessarily translated into decisions. (...) My meaningful engagement with LECoH becomes a checkbox.’ This service provider adds that confidentiality requirements constitute an extra barrier to involving LECoH: *‘I was not allowed to speak publicly about start dates, the location and what exactly the initiative looked like, which made it difficult to meaningfully engage with LECoH.’*

LECoH recruitment difficulties

As mentioned by LECoH member participants, service provider participants also discussed the challenges of recruiting people to groups such as LECoH, with one interviewee noting: *‘you really have to put some serious efforts into recruitment (...) and how you’re meeting people where they’re*

at, so that you're bringing people in who are not the go-to person with Lived Experience of homelessness because that's when people start getting tapped out.'

COJHS Board challenges

COJHS Board members and LECoH both encountered challenges in their relationship with each other, regarding communication, youth representation, the disconnect between the intent and practice of LECoH, and administration.

Communication

Service providers unpacked the following interconnected communication challenges between the Board and LECoH, including:

- The initial busy-ness of Board members: *'they were so busy figuring out their own structure and direction, it was hard for them to focus on LECoH.'*
- The mismatch between a white settler bureaucratic governance model and a relationally focused group: *'you can't take folks who speak truthfully, from their gut and put them in a structure that is a task-oriented meeting, where the power, the ability to act, is controlled by a group of people that you have no relationship with and maybe don't trust you.'*
- The fluctuation in LECoH representation on the Board: *'for a period, we had no LECoH representative, with LECoH's convenor filling in, instead. Now, we're back to two regular LECoH representatives on the Board.'*
- The lack of a formal reporting mechanism: *'it was assumed that the LECoH representative would communicate Board updates back to LECoH, but the set up was very reliant on individuals, versus a formal reporting mechanism, and so sometimes communication didn't happen.'*
- The disconnect between COJHS staff and LECoH: *'there was a period when staff were not participating in LECoH's meetings. There was a gap going both ways, (...) but we've mended the fences.'*

Youth representation

COJHS' Board also encountered significant difficulties in finding youth interested in acquiring governance experience on a traditional Board, one service provider stating: *'Youth wanted to be more operational.'* As a result, the youth coordinator for the youth strategy became the youth Lived Experience representative on the Board.

Smoke and mirrors?

Regarding the disconnect between the intent of LECoH and the practice, one service provider reflected: *'LECoH was held up as a standard, where Lived Experience people were directing the community's plan to address homelessness, setting Kelowna apart from other communities (...)*

but it wasn't as strong in reality as it was on paper.' Similarly, another service provider notes: *'the intent is there, sometimes it works well and other times, there are gaps.'*

Administrative issues

One participant referenced the financial limitations experienced by COJHS and its direct impact on the activities that LECoH could participate in, with Board members. For example, a service provider and Board member notes: *'we were working on a project and there was no one with Lived or Living Experience. Part of the issue was: "Where will the money come from for honorariums?"'*

The COVID19 Pandemic

The COVID19 pandemic brought its own set of specific challenges. Specifically, LECoH members' ability to remain connected to one another was significantly reduced. Whilst a small number of LECoH members met virtually on a semi-regular basis, for the majority of LECoH members, lack of access, discomfort, and limited familiarity with technology were all significant barriers to communicating with each other. One participant noted: *'when things went online, it created havoc. LECoH members don't all have access to technology, wifi, data or training to use technology. (...) They were shuttered completely and for a while, there were three LECoH members holding down the fort.'* A LECoH member echoed this remark: *'COVID took us down, but we survived.'* LECoH's capacity to participate in projects was also severely limited due to lower than usual recruitment and retention rates.

Despite these challenges, a small number of LECoH members were able to undertake site visits at all the local shelters, supportive housing, and drop-in sites throughout the duration of the pandemic, thanks to funding from SPARC BC. During these visits, LECoH members collected stories on how the pandemic was impacting people experiencing homelessness and people recently housed. A LECoH representative regularly shared a summary of this information with service providers meeting for the COVID19 Operators' Table, which helped to both inform and validate existing knowledge used for local decision-making and service planning. One participant noted: *'the SPARC BC grant gave LECoH a purpose and a mechanism to check-in at the street level.'*

Strengths

The perspective of LECoH members

The interviewed LECoH members mentioned two strengths that have been particularly valuable on their journey, as they seek to overcome together the significant challenges they face in their work. These are group cohesion and supportive partnerships.

Group cohesion

LECoH members' group cohesion has been a significant asset. Several interviewed LECoH members referred to this strength emphasizing that *'we all know each other'*, *'we're supportive of*

one another, *'other LECoH members have my back.'* This sustained group support has given individual LECoH members courage, including a readiness to feel uncomfortable, as they step into difficult spaces where they speak from their heart, *'tell it the way it is'* and *'put ourselves out there'*. LECoH members' mutual support for one another has also helped them develop a consensus-based practice when developing key messaging to service providers on a contentious topic, which in turn has increased their success in some areas. One interviewed LECoH member notes that *'we realized that speaking with a unified voice increased our capacity for change.'*

Supportive partnerships

Interviewed LECoH members also mentioned that partnerships with supportive service providers have been tremendously beneficial to their cause and their continued existence. LECoH members are grateful for this group's welcoming and inclusive attitude, their participation in bi-weekly LECoH meetings, and/or commitment to seek out LECoH's input, their listening ear, encouraging words, respectful and hopeful approach, their supportive collaboration, and their time. Importantly, there have been times when senior service providers from within this group have asked their staff to consult with LECoH, causing a ripple effect in service provider partnerships with LECoH. Interviewed LECoH members feel that this group of service providers sees them as equals and have consequently validated LECoH's work and recognized their contributions, by demonstrating an authentic interest in LECoH's perspective and the standpoint of people experiencing homelessness and by representing their lens amongst other service providers.

Other strengthening factors that interviewed LECoH members remarked upon include public acknowledgement *'that LECoH has contributed to legitimate and measurable system improvements'*, as mentioned in the media, public ceremonies, and at conferences hosted by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) where LECoH has often presented on their work.

The perspective of service providers

The service providers interviewed identified LECoH's strengths in terms of specific attributes displayed by LECoH members. LECoH's strengths more broadly, that have impacted service providers and community members, including people experiencing homelessness, are discussed in the 'Achievements' section, below.

Membership consistency

LECoH membership has been consistent over a long period of time, which has helped LECoH members draw on the knowledge they have accumulated over time and as a result, *'they really understand the systems and know the players. They can participate in a meaningful way.'* With the consistency in membership came the depth of relationship amongst the LECoH members, and their reliance on one another for support and guidance, as observed by one of the service providers interviewed: *'the LECoH representative on the Board was reluctant to express an opinion unless they had talked with LECoH. (...) That might have been frustrating for some of the Board members, but LECoH was such a close group, they cared about their relationships with each other.'*

Networked connections and openness

LECoH is also well connected amongst the communities of service providers and people experiencing homelessness, with one service provider noting that this places LECoH in a good position to bring together their networks of connections, particularly when it comes to finding the voices of people that are missing and should be represented. Further, a service provider was struck by LECoH's *'openness to invite new service providers'* into their biweekly meetings, a trend noticed by other service providers.

Learning together

A key theme that emerged out of the interviews with both LECoH members and service providers was the value of learning from one another through the process of working alongside different types of people. LECoH member participants noted that because of their participation in a variety of projects in diverse contexts, they recognized that people are unique individuals that cannot be lumped into one homogeneous group. LECoH members also accepted new aspects of service provider culture, including the importance of using quantitative information, in parallel with the personal stories of individuals, to increase the effectiveness of their advocacy work since *'numbers are key for funding.'*

In addition, LECoH members noticed encouraging changes amongst some service providers, who showed signs of accepting LECoH's reality, *'looking at us for who we are'*, adapting to LECoH's needs and modifying their behavior towards people experiencing homelessness, in alignment with the way LECoH members interact with this group of individuals.

Other noteworthy changes that LECoH noticed regarding service providers included RCMP and Bylaw making a point of wearing plain clothing, rather than their uniforms, when interacting with LECoH. Some service providers were intentional in wanting to help create a safe and comfortable space for LECoH and therefore became open to meeting with LECoH members within a sacred circle. Lastly, several service providers interviewed recognized the value of involving LECoH from the early planning stages of a new initiative and adapted their practice accordingly.

The following visual 'word map' is a means of communicating hope and encouragement to LECoH members and their partners, spurring them on to persevere in their endeavors, by including the significant challenges and barriers, in smaller fonts, and projecting the strengths, in larger fonts.



Achievements

Whilst LECoH has experienced significant achievements in accelerating an end to homelessness, in partnership with service providers, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Kelowna in recent years. This humanitarian crisis on our doorstep requires a collective impact approach necessitating ongoing substantial, coordinated changes in service provision and policy directives, at a municipal, provincial, and federal level, as well as significant and sustained investments over time and comprehensive buy-in from every member of the community and the economy. Reflecting this reality, an interviewed LECoH member observes: *‘in terms of life on the street, things haven't improved, the mental health repercussions, the accumulative trauma is worst and more pervasive, and incredibly normalized for anyone living in it. Things must improve at a much more exponential rate.’*

Whilst acknowledging this dark reality in front of us and the challenges involved in finding solutions, one service provider poignantly highlights the following achievement: *‘As a community, we’re honoring a cohort of people, LECoH, and we’re saying we want to hear your voice, let’s listen. In and of itself, that is a success.’*

The perspective of LECoH members

Small steps

From this starting point, therefore, it is no wonder that one interviewed LECoH member, reflected that *‘none of the changes are a huge solution. But each change makes the experience of people on the street a little less complicated and a little more comfortable.’*

Credible voices

Whilst acknowledging the pervasive and persistent challenges, one significant area of achievement for LECoH has been their ability to solidly establish their credibility, over time. LECoH is now more welcomed, included, heard, valued, and respected amongst service providers than they were previously. One interviewed LECoH member states that: *‘there is an interest in our opinion and an openness to hearing our input.’* Another LECoH member notes that: *‘a variety of staff seek us out, sometimes on an ongoing basis.’* LECoH has also successfully developed trust-based relationships with both service providers and people experiencing chronic homelessness. One LECoH member observed that *‘the strong relationships we have with service providers means that we can be honest and critical, without damaging the relationship.’*

This established credibility in the community is enabling LECoH to fully participate in inter-agency service provider tables, where LECoH sometimes takes on the role of bringing a healing perspective. One LECoH member remarked that *‘with us at the Circle, there is more space for staff to feel the loss of their clients.’* Another consequence of LECoH’s successful efforts in building their credibility is that *‘more service providers are aligning their voices with ours.’* Whilst an increased attunement to the value of Lived and Living Experience voices across the community may have occurred without LECoH’s presence and input, interviewed LECoH members observed, nevertheless, that *‘judgement has decreased, the language used has improved and there is a greater awareness of the issues.’*

Shaping local initiatives

Thanks to their credibility and acceptance amongst service providers, LECoH has also, from their perspective, significantly shaped the following initiatives: the Supportive Housing Plan, the ‘Us and Them’ Film Festival, the Peer Employment Program, the Emergency Weather Response, the Hygiene Centre, the Outreach Circle, the Interfaith Steering Circle, the Transitional Storage of Belongings Program, the Creating Allyship in Research project and Toolkit, and the relationship with Bylaw and the RCMP.

In particular, LECoH’s relationship with Bylaw is paving the way for a more humane approach to law enforcement and community safety. One interviewed LECoH member stated that *‘in the past, Bylaw would ignore us. (...) But now, we are welcomed, and Bylaw is receptive. Now, we could be working with someone or just hanging out, seeing what we can do to help and then a Bylaw officer says: “Hey, can you come over here and talk to so-and-so with us?”’* Another LECoH member remarked that: *‘uniformed and municipal staff have changed their approach to people experiencing homelessness. Views and opinions have been impacted and are changing.’*

The perspective of service providers

A first point of contact

One of LECoH’s significant achievements, according to the service providers interviewed, is that LECoH has become an excellent first point of contact for any community member in Kelowna

who has not yet had the opportunity to connect with a person with Lived or Living Experience of homelessness. This was emphasized by one of the service providers, who stated that *'the meeting with LECoH was tremendously valuable for that cohort of people who have not had any experience of meeting someone who has lived in homelessness. It was honoring, dignifying and helpful. (...) It created a real sense of humanity and personalized the experience.'* Another service provider echoes these thoughts, stating: *'any time where LECoH has shared either their own story or the collective story, (...) it's made a difference in terms of the stigma.'* One service provider also notes: *'that's the gift of LECoH, they've taught me to be more honest and critical.'*

LECoH has successfully taken on a similar role, as a first point of contact, within the workplace, as remarked upon by one service provider: *'other departments in the organization have seen the value of LECoH (...) and are keen to draw on LECoH as a resource.'* Another service provider shares a similar thought, stating: *'When your work is not on the frontline, it is difficult to get that immediate feedback and we lose touch with the realities of what things are like on the ground, so having engagements directly with people with Living Experience is important.'*

Valuable expert voices

Another significant achievement, according to the service providers interviewed, is that LECoH has developed a valuable voice, as a group with connections, knowledge, and experience, that service providers can easily seek out and listen to for the following:

- High-level wisdom or practical input, especially for new programs in new areas of work.
- Street-level feedback, from a Living Experience perspective, regarding existing service provision or future planned programming, and their alignment with people's needs.
- Information on needs, gaps and priorities to assist inter-agency and community-level decision-making, including as one service provider notes: *'holding on to whatever it is that gets pushed down to the bottom and deprioritized, and reminding partners to come back to these other things later.'*

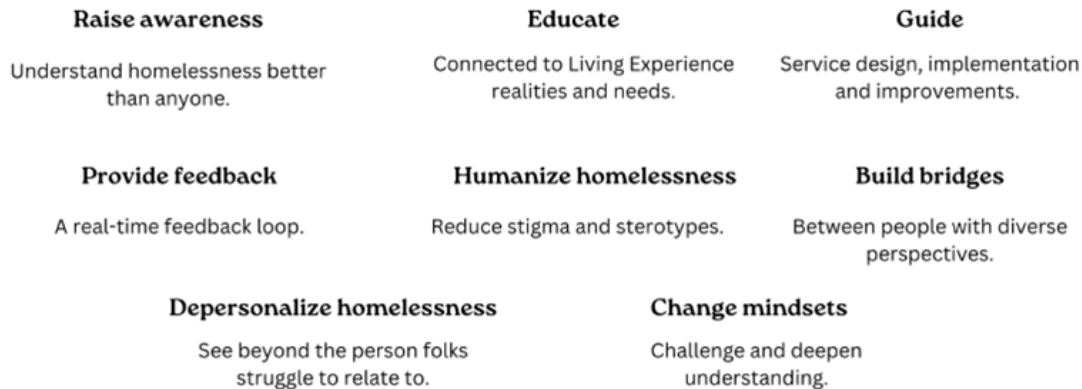
Reflecting these points, one service provider states: *'when we began one of our new programs, it was useful to have LECoH step into the space and think of anything that's missing. They gave us practical and useful suggestions and we implemented them.'*

Elevating marginalized voices

An additional noteworthy achievement is the role LECoH has played, in partnership with supportive service providers, in elevating the value of Lived and Living Experience voices across Kelowna, a grassroots de-stigmatizing campaign in and of itself. One interviewed service provider communicated their high regard for Lived and Living Experience voices. Thanks to LECoH's existence, this service provider was able to incorporate LECoH's values into a local Circle of community members, supporting the implementation of the Journey Home Strategy. This service provider notes: *'we must always involve others in what the solutions are going to be for them. (...)*

This is about recognizing what we need to know before action happens and not doing something just because we think it's the right thing to do.'

Below is a summary of the value of Lived and Living Experience voices, including LECoH's voice, drawn from interviews with LECoH members and service providers.



A contributor to decision-making?

A final achievement, based upon the service providers interviewed, is that LECoH can play a significant role in contributing to the process of thoughtful collective decision-making in Kelowna. One service provider observes: *'Folks on the street ask: "what is LECoH's objective and how effective have they been? Is it worth the expense?" (...) It is, if we're looking to thoughtfully make decisions as a community.'* A different service provider emphasizes their authentic commitment, sharing: *'This is not a rubber stamp at the end, that "oh yeah, Lived Experience agrees with what we're doing." It really is embedding the Lived Experience voice into the process from the beginning.'* Another service provider makes a similar point, emphasizing LECoH's role within the governance structure of the Journey Home Strategy: *'There's a structure, that's been put in place for collective involvement, and LECoH is a key piece of that structure. The more we respect that structure and shared decision-making and use LECoH for their expertise, (...) the better our actions will be.'*

Without reducing the truthfulness of these quotes, as stand-alone statements, it is crucial to emphasize that LECoH's influence has been primarily applicable to pockets of junior and middle management, rather than senior level decision-making, as discussed earlier in this report, due to LECoH's significant challenges in influencing leadership.

Future improvements and aspirations

The perspective of LECoH members

In the interviews with LECoH members, six key areas of improvement were raised. Firstly, LECoH wishes for increased political will to address the issues of extreme poverty and mental health challenges experienced by people without homes in Kelowna. Secondly, LECoH would appreciate more public acknowledgement of their efforts, especially in the media. Thirdly, LECoH is keen to see service providers and stakeholders increasing their awareness and understanding of street culture. LECoH also asks all service providers to include content about LECoH's role and mandate in their training materials and onboarding processes for new staff. In addition, LECoH would value an increased representation of people with Living Experience of homelessness, a task that would require greater capacity and time investment from LECoH members to build deeper relationships with people currently experiencing homelessness, since as one LECoH member notes: *'It's hard to find people willing to talk about their experiences because a lot of people are embarrassed, they don't want to say anything (...) because there's a lot of stigma.'* Finally, regarding LECoH member recruitment and retention, LECoH would value additional capacity for longstanding LECoH members to mentor and partner with new members.

There are several projects that LECoH is interested in pursuing, pending sufficient resources. These include:

- A 'tiny homes' development, with a hub of services, staffed by workers living onsite or brought in for daytime and nighttime support
- A return of the homelessness simulator
- A service hub
- A Kelowna-focused film festival on homelessness.

Finally, LECoH would appreciate support in addressing the challenges they have mentioned during the interviews, summarized earlier in this report.

The perspective of service providers

Sharing learnings with allies

Several of the service providers interviewed referred to the benefits of LECoH taking stock of their achievements to date, summarizing the questions LECoH members could ask themselves, as follows:

- What have we learned?
- What do we think we're best at?
- Where do we think we can have the most impact in shifting the community?
- From a list of where we think we may have the most impact, choose one top priority or 'wished for' action.

- What funding sources are out there for a group like ours? How do we apply?
- What financial resources would we need to move forward, to progress our top priority?
Consider:
 - Staffing requirements, for an ongoing paid facilitator role, with grant writing and reporting skills.
 - Gathering or meeting location needs.
 - Access to technology, to ensure sustained communication amongst members.
 - Recruitment and staff retention costs.
- What is our preferred relationship with COJHS?
- Is there any other organization that we would like to be connected to?
- Is our preference to be completely independent? What are the pros and cons of this decision?
- How could we improve our public image to:
 - Help service providers better understand our role.
 - Facilitate service provider engagement with us.

Once LECoH has developed their answers to these questions, one service provider suggests that LECoH shares their answers with allies in the community, who can support LECoH in achieving their goals.

This process and these questions are important because, as one service provider notes: *'LECoH is not just to be used by others. They are here for their own defined purpose. There should be resources for them to address things that are important to them so that they have projects and actions.'*

Engaging with Living Experience, service providers and community members

People with Living Experience do not fit neatly into LECoH's existing structure, as noted earlier in this report. Given this limitation, several service providers suggested that LECoH organize Living Experience engagements, several times per year, using their network of connections, with additional funding for paid coordinator roles. The high-level engagement ideas proposed by service providers included:

- Setting up a booth near the overnight sheltering site.
- Designating a day each month or every quarter, to go out onto the streets.
- Undertaking a survey for a specific purpose.
- Seeking out service providers whose clients are people experiencing homelessness, to gather Living Experience voices. This would mirror the SPARC BC site visit model that LECoH adopted during COVID, with the addition of a deeper partnership with service providers.

This area of improvement intersects with a request from interviewed service providers for greater engagement with LECoH, either for service providers to support a LECoH initiative or for LECoH to share feedback on a service provider initiative. One service provider shared: *'A staff member from our organization could explain a new initiative to LECoH, to get their feedback. I would really value. (...) If there's an opportunity for us to learn from someone else, I am totally open to it.'* This service provider adds that they are also interested in seeking the perspective of a collective of partners, including service providers and people with Lived Experience, like LECoH, stating: *'there's a lot of value in a group of people coming together, each with their own experience, and differences of opinion, agreeing on a particular initiative for the sake of the community.'*

Within this context, LECoH could also assist in designing terms of engagement, in partnership with service providers and community members, to facilitate the sharing of different voices in one space. The same service provider unpacks this idea, stating: *'Let's create a space for folks to have a conversation with one another, for bylaw and people experiencing homelessness, for example. If there's a person who's hoarding a lot of belongings, and bylaw is having difficulty moving them along, how can we assist as a collective so that the person doesn't end up getting arrested because they freak out?'*

Increasing communication between Lived and Living Experience groups

Another related area of improvement that was suggested by service providers involved encouraging local Lived and Living Experience groups, such as LECoH, PEOPLE, KANDU and Interior Health's Lived and Living Experience peer network groups, to work more closely together, with resources provided to accomplish this goal, to facilitate knowledge transfer and explore a coordinated vision for the community.

Integrating LECoH into COJHS

With regards to improvements, in addition to or as part of taking stock, service providers shared the need for COJHS and LECoH to meaningfully integrate their work, since as one service provider notes: *'COJHS talks about how important Lived Experience is, but this is not reflected in their effort and attention currently.'* Similarly, another service provider shares: *'LECoH feels far apart from COJHS right now. (...) I'd love to see more integration between the two organizations, on anti-stigma campaigns, for example.'*

Revising LECoH's feedback process

Revising LECoH's feedback process and giving LECoH members more reflection time before responding to service providers was also highlighted as an area of suggested improvement. One service provider interviewed shared how helpful this would be for them: *'when you present an idea and someone speaks up against that idea, very vocally, at LECoH (...), I think: "Oh my gosh, it was a horrible idea. I should just scratch that and go back to the drawing board."' Instead, it's*

important for LECoH to have the opportunity, in their own time, to deliberate and discuss, and then present a more formal position on what their feedback is.'

Recruiting a representative membership

Increasing LECoH's capacity to recruit, train, and retain members, by using, amongst other resources, their existing alumni as support, could assist in expanding the variety of voices they seek to represent. Service providers noted the following sub-groups that could be represented by LECoH: members of the queer community, seniors, and youth.

Recommendations

After reading and analyzing the interviews undertaken with LECoH members and service providers, the authors of this report recommend that LECoH identifies one priority project they would appreciate leading on, in partnership with service providers.

We also recommend that service providers, partners, and stakeholders support LECoH in the following ways:

- Get buy-in from senior-level leadership in Kelowna to invest in one priority project identified by LECoH.
- Assist LECoH in applying for and receiving sufficient investments to undertake this project, including investments for member recruitment and retention.
- Empower LECoH to have overall ownership over this project, with appropriate service provider and stakeholder back-up, in the areas of governance and leadership support.
- Offer ongoing mentorship opportunities, to build LECoH members' skillset, to ensure this project is successful in meeting its objectives.
- Fill skill gaps for this project by providing LECoH with appropriate staff from amongst service provider organizations.