



**LOCATION:**

Kelowna, BC

**SIZE:**

- 60 S2 Sleeper shelters (70 sq. ft.)
- 3 Communal S2 Sleepers (120 sq. ft.)

**POPULATION SERVED:**

Local unhoused individuals

**OPENING DATE:**

February 16, 2024

**FUNDING:**

- BC Housing
- Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing Program (HEARTH)

**SERVICE PROVIDER:**

- John Howard Society of Canada



# Kelowna, BC: Collaborating to Build Rapid, Supportive Shelter Community

**STEP Place is the result of employing coordinated interorganizational collaboration to provide urgent aid for local populations experiencing homelessness.**

Set in the heart of British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, Kelowna is a city well-known for its tourism and breadth of recreational activities. But like many other cities in the province, it has also seen a steady rise in unsheltered homelessness and insufficient resources to aid vulnerable local communities: existing shelter options were nearing capacity with upwards of 90% daily occupancy.

To effectively address this growing crisis with winter's freezing temperatures fast approaching, city and provincial leaders knew it was imperative to take action and implement broader shelter solutions to accommodate Kelowna's displaced residents.

Working closely with the Province of British Columbia concerning growing encampments and issues surrounding local unhoused populations, the City of Kelowna signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in October 2023 that formalized the partnership between the two governing bodies. The MOU allowed access to a funding stream via the Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing program (HEARTH), which provides emergency shelter and housing options tailored to each individual's needs.

Signing the MOU and acquiring the HEARTH funding unified the City of Kelowna, Province of BC, and BC Housing to develop the village on a rapid timeline: once the contract was finalized with Pallet, it only took 4 months for the site to be open, operational, and welcoming residents.

"We recognize the immediate need to bring unhoused people in Kelowna indoors and provide them the care they need," said BC Minister of Housing Ravi Kahlon. "That is why the rapid opening of these units is significant as it means more people now have access to a safe and warm place to stay. Through this housing, people experiencing homelessness can be supported as they stabilize and move forward with their lives."

The site was named STEP Place to represent the adoption of a service-centered approach. Standing for "Supported Transitional [Housing] with Embedded Programming," this model is new to the Province of BC and is intended to act as a gateway to permanent housing as it becomes available.

Onsite services including daily meals, skills training, and housing support are provided by the John Howard Society of Okanagan and Kootenay (JHSOK), a non-profit that secured the contract through an RFP process. Further resources such as primary healthcare, clinical referrals, and treatment for substance use

disorder and mental health challenges are supplied through BC Interior Health. Their Integrated Health Outreach Team (IHOT) also added an Indigenous patient navigator to their staff to assure culturally appropriate care for every resident.

"Using a trauma-informed, person-centred approach, STEP Place will provide a high-quality therapeutic program designed to help people achieve their housing, employment and health goals," said JHSOK Executive Director Patricia Bacon. "We are excited to be part of this collaboration for the first HEART and HEARTH project for Kelowna."

Ultimately, determination to establish the city-province partnership and collaboration with BC Housing, JHSOK, and BC Interior Health made STEP Place a reality on an extremely short timeline. Exploring new solutions for the unhoused population of Kelowna received support from across the community and opened a new pathway for people experiencing homelessness in their journey toward permanent housing.

**Pallet understands how critical it is to move quickly to address the homelessness crisis and offer viable solutions to help people on their housing journey. By using their units at STEP Place, we were able to move from concept to a functioning 60-unit transitional housing site in just 4 months.**

**TOM DYAS, MAYOR OF KELOWNA**

## Site Features:

- 60 private S2 Sleeper shelters (70 sq. ft.) with integrated climate control option
- 3 communal S2 Sleeper units (120 sq. ft.)
- Shared kitchen and hygiene facilities
- 24/7 staffing and security
- Individualized case management focused on housing and employment assistance
- Primary healthcare, medication services, clinical referrals, and treatment for substance use disorder and mental health challenges

