

PORT ALBERNI SHELTER SOCIETY REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Port Alberni Shelter Society (PASS) operates a BC Housing funded facility called “Our Home” in Port Alberni, which was opened in March 2019. Through this facility PASS operates a 23-bed emergency shelter, a 30-unit supportive housing program, and Community Expansion Shelter Spaces (15 at Our Home and 12 in a separate building). PASS operates other related facilities in Port Alberni, such as the Overdose Prevention Site, which have other funders.

In response to escalating concerns about services provided by PASS for people experiencing homelessness, BC Housing initiated a review of the organization. BC Housing hired an external consultant to collect information and conduct the arm’s-length review. Information for the review was collected primarily through telephone interviews with local service providers and community partners (such as City of Port Alberni, Vancouver Island Health Authority and Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council), protesters and concerned community members, PASS representatives from governance, management and staff, and relevant BC Housing staff. In total, 26 interviews were conducted for the review and they included both lived experience and professional expertise (front line and management). Community partners were included in the interviews to provide a contextual understanding of the community and the local homeless population. Input from these interviews shaped the observations presented in the review report.

The review reflects current BC Housing requirements and guidance; it references relevant Service Agreements and Program Frameworks, and the 2019 Operational Review, as well as the resulting Action Plan. It also references the PASS Policy Manual.

The interviews highlighted a range of issues regarding service access, the service environment, governance, operations, and external supports. The interviews also provided suggestions for remedies which have evolved into the recommendations presented in this report.

PORT ALBERNI SHELTER SOCIETY REVIEW

Introduction

BC Housing has received communications from Port Alberni service providers, community partners, and former staff and clients regarding a range of concerns about Port Alberni Shelter Society (PASS) and the homeless services and housing it operates. Recently the level of concern has increased, and a protest encampment was set up outside the PASS Our Home facility in Port Alberni. In response, BC Housing initiated a review of PASS. This review presents the concerns expressed by some of the protesters, community partners and service providers and their proposed solutions. Due to the pandemic, all interviews were conducted by telephone, from November 9, 2020 and December 16, 2020, and there were no site visits conducted by the reviewer.

Background

Port Alberni is a small Vancouver Island community (population 17,678 – region 24,000). Port Alberni has high child poverty rates, a significant population of people who are precariously housed, high rates of substance use and opioid overdoses, and high rates of reported domestic violence. Organizations providing homeless services include PASS, Canadian Mental Health Association (HOP outreach), Alberni Community and Woman's Services (Transition House and Drop-in Centre), Alberni Drug and Alcohol Prevention Service, and the Salvation Army. Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) provides mental health and substance use services in the community.

There is a sizeable First Nations presence in the community including 4 local First Nations (Hupacasath, Tseshaht, Uchucklesaht, and Huu-ay-aht) which are part of the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council (NTC). Services for Indigenous people who are homeless include: The Friendship Centre, NTC Social Development, Quu'asa Outreach to residential school survivors and their families, and Kuu-us Crisis Line Society.

PASS History

Our Home, a new supportive housing and emergency shelter facility developed under the Rapid Access to Housing program was opened in March 2019 and is operated by PASS (see Appendix A for further details). Prior to this, PASS operated the Port Alberni Hostel, which was formerly known as the First Nations Hostel. This older facility was opened in 1972.

PASS' agreements with BC Housing include a support Service Agreement for the Emergency Shelter Program, a Service Agreement for Capacity Expansion Shelters (CES) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and an Operator Agreement for Combined Property Management and Support Services for the Supportive Housing. All three agreements pertain to Our Home at 3939 8th Street and, for the CES Service Agreement, 3978 8th Avenue is also included. PASS has additional agreements with other funders including VIHA for non-BCH services, such as a sobering centre, an overdose prevention site, and the Shelter Farm (therapeutic recovery) in and around Port Alberni.

The BC Housing funded services offered by PASS are guided by service agreements. Below are sections included in the Emergency Shelter Program Support Services Agreement:

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Emergency Shelter Program (“ESP”) supports emergency shelters, drop-in centres and local housing registries to provide Services to meet their Clients’ immediate need for overnight accommodation, basic nutrition and hygiene and to provide Gateway Services to help their Clients access appropriate housing and break the cycle of Homelessness...

SERVICE DESCRIPTION

1. *The Emergency Shelter Cores Services include the provision of:

 - a. *Essential Services that meet Clients’ immediate needs for accommodation, nutritious meals, and basic hygiene; and*
 - b. *Gateway Services that help Clients break the cycle of Homelessness by providing assistance in obtaining Housing, and connecting them to Support Services...**
3. *In addition, emergency shelter service providers are encouraged to engage in communication, partnerships, and innovative initiatives with other providers of services to people experiencing homelessness to improve services available.*
4. *The Provider is a fully independent self-governing entity registered under the Societies Act...The members of the Provider and its governing board are responsible for all affairs of the Provider related to both Provider operations in general and the ongoing management of the Development.*
7. *The Provider is expected to create an environment that is supportive of the needs of the Clients and provide Client services and activities not funded by this Agreement.*

Observations

Protesters, who are former PASS staff and clients, were interviewed for the review. Their concerns are listed below along with observations from interviews with service providers, community partners in Port Alberni, BC Housing staff and PASS representatives (see Appendix C for a list of interview respondents).

1. SERVICE ACCESS

1. Service Restrictions and Evictions

One of the central issues for protesters, service providers and community partners is that PASS staff issue too many service restrictions, many of which have been long term or lifetime bans. They stated clients are restricted arbitrarily and often for minimal reasons and are also removed from the banned list arbitrarily. Most service providers and community partners are aware of the service restrictions and some think that there are still lifetime bans in place. The Port Alberni Friendship Centre is currently providing warm clothing and food daily to 50-60 people who, Friendship Centre staff say, are sleeping rough in the community because they cannot, or will not, seek service at the PASS shelter.

Some of the interview respondents point out PASS operates all emergency housing and supportive housing in Port Alberni – so there is nowhere to go once a client receives a service restriction or an eviction from Our Home. There is no other emergency shelter in Port Alberni and there are no

neighbouring communities with homeless services. People who cannot access the PASS shelter must sleep rough.

Service providers say that some people have been restricted for so long (over a decade) they might assume they still are, even if their ban has been rescinded. Recently, several people's names were removed from the barred list, but service providers believe those people may be unaware of this change. Alternatively, they may feel as though they are still not welcome even if their name is not on the list.

Former clients report that often when a person is barred from a PASS facility, they are not allowed to visit other PASS facilities including the Sobering Centre and Overdose Prevention Site (includes access to drug testing, Narcan and community food donations which are distributed at the OPS). PASS representatives say this only happens when the client is extremely violent.

There are variations of the barred list from Our Home circulating in the community. A list from 2017 apparently contains 100 names; another more recent version has 50 names. How these lists came to be publicly circulated is unknown, but it has resulted in the further stigmatization of those barred individuals.

Policies regarding involuntary discharge and service restrictions are in the PASS Policy manual, however they are out of date, unclear, and do not recognize that PASS is the sole emergency shelter provider in the community. According to PASS, the process for service restrictions involves checking with the manager and other staff and is usually based on threats of violence. The length of the restriction will depend on the nature of the incident. Longer term restrictions now go to an arm's length Review Committee (stated members include representatives from PASS, CMHA and NTC, although the NTC has not participated recently) which meets at least quarterly and will convene more often if needed.

More specifically about turn aways, "Clients may be turned away if they are in a condition that shelter staff are not able to properly supervise and assess their needs, on the restricted list or if the shelter is at capacity... Where clients are turned away Case Management staff will do their due diligence to refer clients to other available resources."

According to BCH's service agreement in *Schedule D – Client Eligibility point 2* "The Provider will have clearly written policies and procedures for providing services to clients, including policies for situations where services to a client may be restricted for the safety of other clients or staff. These policies must:

- a. Define reasons for, and conditions of, expulsion;
- b. Be clear and easy to understand;
- c. Describe the conditions and process for re-admission, including the appeal and complaints procedure; and
- d. Require reasonable efforts to provide an appropriate referral.

In point 3 "Clients should not be refused services unless extenuating health or safety issues are present (e.g. assaults/threats to clients or staff and/or medical needs beyond what the shelter can accommodate). The Service Agreement makes no mention of the potential length of a service

restriction nor if permanent bans are permissible. More direction is required about protocol in small communities without additional service options.

2. Mental Health Challenges

Several interview respondents point out that it is clients with mental health issues, especially those who have associated behavioural problems, who are often barred from the PASS shelter. Some also say that there is no trauma informed process and support at the shelter. They state that some of the people coming into the shelter need mental health assessments to be effectively served, however, this is not required by BC Housing and they say that is not currently occurring.

Some interview respondents say that staff members are not adequately trained to work with people experiencing mental health concerns and/or trauma (including FASD and cognitive impairment) and they have been witnessed using verbally abusive language and treatment with mentally ill clients. Former clients report that sometimes it is the staff members who escalate the situation; they need de-escalation training along with Mental Health First Aid and other more in-depth mental health training so they can work more effectively with clients.

Service provider estimates of the number of people experiencing homelessness in the community with severe mental illness and addictions who have extreme difficulty finding housing or shelter in the community range between 15 – 100 people, (depending on the season) and some believe the numbers are growing.

Senior PASS management mentioned that PASS shelter workers are now required to have Human Service Worker diplomas from North Island College. It is unclear whether longer term staff members also have this training or equivalent. Senior management stated that additional training requirements are met through HSA BC training modules online.

Former PASS clients and service providers say there is a long wait list for mental health treatment in Port Alberni. They also stated mental health services need to be delivered in a more accessible manner, such as outreach and relationship building. Current mental health services are limited and challenging for the most vulnerable, who are predominantly Indigenous, to access. Substance use is a barrier to getting assessed and diagnosed. Being transient and without a phone, the unsheltered homeless are unable to communicate and make appointments without the assistance of an outreach worker.

VIHA states that Mental Health and Substance Use services are voluntary and without a diagnosis of a severe mental illness, a person cannot be forced to undergo mental health services. VIHA Mental Health services are not currently offered in an outreach format for those with undiagnosed mental health concerns in Port Alberni.

BC Housing service agreement provision includes the requirement for staff to have training in mental health first aid and crisis prevention and/or de-escalation training and nonviolent intervention. There is no requirement for a mental health assessment to be conducted at the shelter.

The Service Agreement does require the provision of Gateway Services including “*referrals to appropriate services or resources including, but not limited to, medical services, mental health services, alcohol and drug treatment services*”. VIHA is responsible for providing mental health and drug treatment services.

3. Minimal Barrier Shelter and Housing

Interview respondents say PASS is not providing the right type of housing for people with significant mental health concerns and that the PASS shelter is not being operated as a minimal barrier shelter. All service providers and community partners interviewed agree that there is no minimal barrier housing or emergency shelter in Port Alberni, but it is desperately needed. Several interview respondents would like some minimal barrier beds in Port Alberni for clients with mental health concerns who are not able to stay at the PASS shelter. The need for low barrier beds and housing for those struggling with addictions, homelessness and mental health has been highlighted by the City of Port Alberni in recent communications with BC Housing.

Interview respondents point to positive examples of low barrier housing they have seen in Nanaimo and Victoria, such as the Insite and Douglas Street SROs. They feel this model could work in Port Alberni as well.

When PASS moved to the “Our Home” facility, new service agreements were signed. These agreements reflect recent changes in BC Housing’s service approach with the inclusion of gateway services such as the Coordinated Access Assessment and Vulnerability Assessment Tool, minimal barrier standards with increased accessibility for those with addictions and mental health challenges and increased staff training requirements.

PASS representatives say that BC Housing has not increased its demand for the organization to be more accommodating of minimal barrier service needs in recent years; only regarding harm reduction have service requirements changed significantly.

The following Minimal Barrier Shelter Service Standards clarify current requirements.

MINIMAL BARRIER SHELTER STANDARDS

1. *All providers are expected to operate shelters as minimal barrier unless otherwise approved by BC Housing, depending on the availability of other adequate services in the same community.*
2. *Minimal Barrier shelter means an emergency shelter that accommodates all individuals, twenty-four (24) hours per day, seven (7) days per week, who require shelter services and focuses on bringing people indoors. A minimal barrier shelter should accommodate individuals who:*
 - a. *Require physical accessibility to the shelter and within the shelter;*
 - b. *Are currently experiencing addiction and/or mental health issues;*
 - c. *Have a pet;*
 - d. *Require appropriately sized and secure storage facilities for their belongings, including a cart, bike etc.*

- e. Require harm reduction supplies on site, including but not limited to clean needles, access to safe disposal (i.e. sharps containers), condoms etc.,; and Require access to primary health care.*

4. Complaints and Appeal Process

Several interview respondents report that there is no accessible appeal or complaints process for clients who have been barred. They want an appeal and complaint process that provides more options than just speaking to one PASS staff person. Some service providers say it is also not currently possible for service providers or peer support to advocate for clients who have been barred. Outreach workers can intervene for clients when they know about a service restriction situation, it can be time consuming, but can result in positive changes for the client.

Some interview respondents feel the Board of Directors is unaware of the number and degree of service restrictions in the shelter. The PASS Board does not deal directly with any client or staff complaints or appeals. They may hear stories in the community and ask the Executive Director, but Management says it is not a formal function of the Board.

The PASS Policy Manual does provide some guidance on the Complaint and Appeal Process; however, given the stated concerns of interview respondents it does appear that the relevant policies and procedures in this area may not be adhered to in a consistent manner.

The BCH Emergency Shelter Service Agreement requires organizations to have written operating policies in place, including a system for review of complaints and conflict resolution.

5. Overflow Bed Capacity

According to service providers who were interviewed, the old PASS shelter, which is located across the street from Our Home, is designated for Capacity Expansion Shelter/ overflow shelter beds but it does not appear to be used for this purpose. PASS owns the building and receives funding from BC Housing for overflow capacity. A resident caretaker lives in the building for security. They feel that the overflow shelter should be opened when needed so people and families seeking shelter are not turned away, especially during the winter.

6. Non-shelter Use of Rooms at Our Home

Some interview respondents expressed concerns about rooms at the shelter reportedly being used for non-shelter purposes such as housing pets, including a litter of puppies in the family room and staff living in PASS facilities (Caretaker in the overflow shelter).

Since COVID19 started in March, the family unit at Our Home has been reported as full by shelter staff. Outreach workers feel that more family housing is needed in Port Alberni because they are often trying to find accommodation for single parents and their children. One family has been recently housed in a local hotel for 3 months.

A review of shelter statistics indicates that since June 18th, no children have stayed at the shelter and only two minors have stayed at the shelter between June 10th and August 18th. It is not clear if the minors were in the family unit or not.

Regarding the Family Unit, a PASS representative said that the family unit at Our Home had been shut down in March 2020 due to concerns about COVID19 exposure. While it was closed an older male was housed in the unit because his dog had puppies and he would have been evicted because he was only allowed one animal in his unit. He lived in the family unit for 6 weeks with the puppies. The family unit was opened again in mid-November.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- BC Housing should develop more detailed direction about service restrictions, including maximum length and specific protocols for lone shelters in smaller isolated communities.
- BC Housing should review service restriction and eviction procedures with PASS and ensure that only those who present an imminent health and safety threats are considered for time-limited-service restrictions and evictions. Clear guidelines for implementing and completing a service restriction should be developed.
- PASS staff members require further training in mental health related topics including de-escalation and violence prevention.
- PASS must improve confidentiality protocols to ensure that banned clients are not further stigmatized in the community.
- BC Housing should review current staffing levels at the Emergency Shelter, CES/EWR, and Second Stage Housing operated by PASS to ensure minimum barrier shelter standards can be safely maintained.
- BC Housing should work with PASS to develop a more accessible and client-centred complaint and appeal processes for evictions and service restrictions at Our Home, including options for clients who are unable to read or write.
- BC Housing should require PASS to update all aspects of the Policy manual which no longer meet BC Housing requirements (see Appendix B).
- To address current unmet needs in Port Alberni, BC Housing should consider the development of an alternate shelter/housing site in Port Alberni with strong mental health and substance use supports. To ensure diversity and choice in the community an alternate service provider would be beneficial.
- It is beyond the scope of this review to provide recommendations to VIHA, but more client-centered and accessible, relationship based, and culturally safe mental health services are needed for the

most vulnerable homeless population in Port Alberni. Without this type of service, it will be difficult for some to remain housed.

- Review BC Housing funding for the Overflow site, historical usage, and potential future uses.
- BC Housing should review the use of shelter space at Our Home to ensure that rooms and beds are being used for homeless clients.

2. SERVICE ENVIRONMENT

7. Welcoming, Safe and Secure Service Environment

Some of the interview respondents claim that clients report facing ongoing stigma, demeaning language, and jail-like rules which are enforced arbitrarily at Our Home. Some say that there are clients who do not feel safe and respected at Our Home. Service providers, community partners and former clients say that while the PASS facility is clean and well maintained it does not provide an atmosphere of dignity and respect for all clients. They are not surprised that some people experiencing homelessness choose not to stay at the shelter.

BC Housing staff have also observed that when they are on site, they see relatively few clients in the facility during the day. The building interior is very (too) clean, the visitor policy is strict, and the signage is strict and not welcoming. BC Housing staff expressed concern that it is not an encouraging environment, and clients might not seek case management or support services because of this. BC Housing staff members say that they have encouraged the operator to develop a more welcoming environment by removing signage that is too directive.

The BC Housing service agreement states that the service environment in an emergency shelter is to be “welcoming, safe and secure”, also “The Provider is expected to create an environment that is supportive of the needs of the clients and provide a sense of community within the development”, and finally, “The provider will ensure that an atmosphere of dignity and respect for all clients is to be maintained.

8. Indigenous Awareness

First Nations interview respondents say that some Indigenous people do not feel safe at Our Home. Some interview respondents also say that the clients who are often barred from the shelter or who are asked to leave for minimal or arbitrary reasons are Indigenous with mental health concerns and learning disabilities. They say Indigenous people at the shelter need to be better connected to primary health care and that there is a lack of understanding amongst staff about the link between past trauma and health problems.

Some interview respondents do not have confidence in the PASS Board and their governance structure to meet the needs of Indigenous clients. Indigenous representatives feel staff training, trauma informed practice, and cultural safety training are missing from the PASS approach to providing service to Indigenous people.

Several of the interview respondents reported that Indigenous people in Port Alberni continue to face systemic racism in the community. They point out that there is a history of oppression; the local residential school only closed 25 years ago.

Port Alberni is now a hub for people from NTC communities which are mostly small, remote, and spread out on the west coast of Vancouver Island. NTC members are drawn to Port Alberni but it is difficult to find appropriate and affordable housing. The NTC estimates that approximately 150 NTC members are homeless or couch surfing/precariously housed in Port Alberni. Several interview respondents, including representatives from the NTC Council confirmed that the homeless population, especially the absolute homeless, are disproportionately Indigenous in Port Alberni.

The Tribal Council representative says the NTC has been unable to meet with the PASS Board of Directors. Requests to meet with the Board have instead resulted in meetings with senior PASS management. Some Indigenous interview respondents say PASS does not reach out to Indigenous leadership. There is no collaboration and no functional relationship, unlike in Nanaimo and Victoria where the NTC has been welcomed and there are productive relationships with service providers and the local leadership understands the impacts on Indigenous people and their need for service. PASS relations with Indigenous organizations does occur at the staff level with some clients being referred to the Friendship Centre to get status cards, mental health counselling or job placements. In addition, PASS staff say that food donations are shared with the Friendship Centre.

BC Housing staff have noted that PASS does not appear to operate as a culturally inclusive organization. PASS senior management confirmed that there are no Indigenous people employed in management or front-line positions at Our Home. For a shelter that serves a clientele that it is 50% - 60% Indigenous, it is surprising to those interviewed that there is no evidence of Indigenous culture being accepted or present at the facility.

BC Housing Service Agreements and Program Frameworks provide limited direction to service providers regarding the provision of services to Indigenous people. Aside from warning against discrimination based on race, there is little specific guidance about actively welcoming Indigenous clients.

According to PASS representatives there is one Board member (since 1992) who is Indigenous, as well as kitchen and housekeeping staff. When asked about specific practices for welcoming Indigenous clients at Our Home, PASS representatives emphasized that all clients are treated the same regardless of race. One PASS representative indicated that staff members do take a cultural competency course.

9. Safety for Female Clients in Co-Ed Facilities

Interview respondents report unwanted sexual attention for female clients staying at the shelter. They say that management at the shelter does not take complaints of sexual harassment seriously. They say concerns are met with a “never mind” response from staff. While there is some security (a supportive housing resident hired for the position) at the co-ed EWR shelter, the protesters feel it is lax and not keeping women safe.

There are a range of allegations from protesters about issues related to women staying or working in PASS facilities. Without a much more intensive investigation it is difficult to prove the accuracy of these accusations, but what does emerge is a general sense of uneasiness amongst women staying at the shelter and indications that the environment can be sexualized at times.

Some service providers have expressed concerns about preferential treatment for men at PASS and a lack of understanding about women's safety. They feel the shelter staff need to recognize that homeless women, especially those who are Indigenous, may have experienced multi-generational trauma, and PASS needs to do better at ensuring their safety in the shelter or that trauma will become more acute.

BC Housing does provide clear direction in the Program Framework for addressing the safety of women in co-ed facilities. The Service Agreements also require training for domestic violence and safety for women in co-ed shelters. These directions and requirements do not appear to be implemented at Our Home.

PASS representatives displayed a limited understanding of how to provide safety for women in Our Home. They simply point out that there is a separate women's dorm room with a women's washroom and security is provided at the co-ed EWR/CES shelter. One would expect to see a deeper understanding of the impact of trauma and violence on women experiencing homelessness and their vulnerability to exploitation and further violence reflected in shelter practices and standards.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Policies, Procedures and Guidance

- PASS must revise their policies and procedures to be more client centered, with standardized protocols which are clear and unbiased.
- PASS must develop practices and standards that minimize the risk of violence and ensure the specialized safety and security needs, specifically for women, are met. BC Housing should ensure PASS adheres to principles of safe access, safe shared spaces, safe sleeping areas, and privacy.
- BC Housing should work with PASS to ensure the Program Framework is followed and compliance with the Service Agreements including safety of women in co-ed facilities.
- Embed local First Nations culture at PASS facilities to create a more welcoming environment for Indigenous clients. This could be achieved through building stronger relationships with local First Nations communities and organizations.
- BC Housing should provide clearer guidance in service agreements regarding best practices for actively welcoming Indigenous people to use shelter and housing services.

Training

- PASS must provide more in-depth training to their staff and Management:

- to be more client-centred, work with sensitivity and be trauma informed.
- for cultural safety, specifically for Indigenous clients, including awareness of local First Nations history.
- for domestic violence and safety for women in co-ed shelters.
- PASS must ensure all training requirements in the Service Agreements with BC Housing are met on a timely and ongoing basis.

Resources

- PASS must enhance their staff support and safety provisions including providing clinical supervision, where needed, and limit working alone.
- PASS should improve Indigenous representation in their front-line staff, Management and Board members.
- First Nations representatives say that some clients will require intensive support to stay successfully housed; Indigenous supportive housing with a high level of support would help the most vulnerable in Port Alberni to stay housed. If an alternate low barrier shelter is developed in Port Alberni for those with severe mental health concerns and substance use issues (as recommended in the section above), the service plan and size should be developed collaboratively with local First Nations, the NTC, and the Port Alberni Friendship Centre.

3. GOVERNANCE

10. PASS Board Transparency, Engagement and Accessibility

Some interview respondents say that they do not think that the PASS Board is fully aware of what is happening at Our Home. The Board is described by several respondents as informal. Some local service providers and community partners stated the PASS Board has inadequate oversight and are too detached and unaware of the current challenges being experienced by some PASS clients.

Service Providers and Community partners report that the Society seems to operate in a secretive manner. While the Board does meet monthly and receives reports from PASS Management, there is no public invitation to the AGM, and no publicized process to lodge complaints with the organization at the Board level. Some interview respondents say that the lack of transparency that PASS demonstrates contributes to some of the broader issues in the community.

Community partners and service providers have had their requests to meet with the Board ignored or result in a meeting with the Executive Director and senior management. The Board is not actively involved in developing community relationships with other non-profits in the community. The Board does not regularly receive delegations, only when the Executive Director brings forward a request he has received. From reports in the community, the Executive Director does not always bring requests

that he receives to the Board. Also, the Board has had no direct relationship with BC Housing, instead the relationship has been handled primarily through the Executive Director.

The Board membership consists mostly of long-term members included a husband and wife, with some members being in place since 1992. In the last two years, there were two new board members. The Board was not apprised of the 2019 Operational Review process conducted by BC Housing to assess the BC Housing -funded operations and facilities.

Complaints from staff and clients and community are not received by the Board nor are any appeal requests. This is viewed as an Executive Director's responsibility. This may be problematic if staff or clients have complaints about the Executive Director, himself. There is currently no annual review of the Executive Director. Board members feel that regular meetings and reports suffice. The Board appears to be under the direction of the Executive Director.

PASS is not an accredited organization. Accreditation is a rigorous process that measures the service delivery, management practices and governance of an organization against a set of standards based on best practices in the sector.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- BC Housing should work with PASS to ensure there is a succession plan for the Board members and Executive Director. Consider an annual review of the succession plan.
- BC Housing should provide support to the PASS Board of Directors to develop capacity and improve governance procedures and practices.
- The PASS Board should improve transparency and accountability to the community by receiving delegations and allowing the AGM to be public.
- The PASS Board should engage in community relationship building with other non-profit organizations, local government, and local First Nations communities.
- In the longer term, BC Housing should consider requiring Council on Accreditation (COA) or Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditation for PASS to ensure adequate organizational development at the Board level.

4. OPERATIONS

11. PASS Senior Management

Some interview respondents attribute the negative tone at Our Home and the lack of dignity and respect for clients to the senior management at PASS. Several service providers and community partners interviewed report to varying degrees, that there is limited/low confidence in PASS senior management in the community. While some service providers stated that management has pressed

hard to get the new shelter and housing in Port Alberni, they still find the management's manner with vulnerable populations is abrasive and some of the practices at Our Home indefensible.

Specific concerns about PASS management from interview respondents includes but is not limited to use of oppressive means to manage clients, lack of interest (and ability) in creating a service that welcomes and provides safety to Indigenous and female clients, and inflated shelter bed statistics.

Several interview respondents in the community stated that the Executive Director should consider retiring. Interview respondents have suggested that a change in organizational leadership would be a positive move for the homeless population and would win back the confidence of the community and service providers. They say that the community needs a signal that the organization has responded to concerns.

12. PASS Staff

Interview respondents emphasized that PASS staff need more training and skill development in several areas. Service providers stated more staffing would allow shelter workers to provide better support to clients and improve safety overall in the shelter. Former PASS staff have publicly complained about staff harassment and bullying. A WCB process was recently undertaken in partnership with the union regarding the staff harassment and bullying.

The PASS Board says it would be helpful to be able to hire more staff, get more staff training and have more security. The Board would like to help everybody who needs help in Port Alberni, but a representative says that PASS needs to protect their staff first and provide a safe environment for all clients.

A PASS representative did point out that with the new Our Home facility the shelter capacity increased significantly from 12 beds to 23 beds plus EWR/CES. This has put a strain on the organization, especially in terms of finding adequate staffing in a small town. PASS representatives say that they require their case managers have a Human Service Worker diploma. It is not clear how many current staff have this training, or if it is adequate for the workplace demands at PASS. There does not seem to be a system in place for consistent upgrading for all staff training.

13. Employing Residents at Our Home

Former client and staff concerns have been raised about a client at Our Home being hired as the lone security guard onsite. There are concerns that he does not have the required skill level to act as the lone security guard. In addition, some clients are uncomfortable with this person acting in a position of authority at the shelter.

PASS representatives confirm that there are some current residents who work for PASS. One is a security guard, and two are maintenance/caretaker staff. PASS representatives see this type of employment as a positive way to support their clients.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- BC Housing should support the Board of Directors to conduct an immediate review of the Executive Director and other PASS senior management.
- BC Housing should conduct a review of PASS HIFIS statistics and provide database support to ensure data accuracy and investigate any anomalies.
- BC Housing should review staffing levels in BC Housing funded PASS facilities and ensure that adequate staff training, and ongoing upgrading are occurring.
- BC Housing should clarify guidelines for hiring residents/clients to work in the facility where they are living.

5. EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

14. BC Housing Leadership

Service providers and partners in the community who were interviewed stated stronger BC Housing oversight and leadership will help PASS and the broader community through the current challenges. They say the Society needs BC Housing support and attention to improve operations.

The NTC mentioned they would like to develop a collaborative relationship with BC Housing going forward. NTC representatives stated they would like to have a contact person at BC Housing to work with to address homelessness for the NTC members. NTC has developed a homeless strategy (based on observations about successful services in Nanaimo and Victoria).

The BC Housing Non-Profit Property Manager/ Supportive Housing Advisor (NPPM/SHA) relationship with PASS has recently been limited due to staff changes. PASS management confirms that since their last SHA left her position in August 2020, they have not had a regular NPPM or SHA.

15. BC Housing Operational Review

An Operational Review was conducted in 2019, which was expedited because of growing concerns and allegations about PASS and their services. The PASS Board of Directors was not involved in the process. The Operational Review report indicates the Society had some work to do to adapt to the new BC Housing service expectations. Here are some of the relevant points from the Operational Review:

- Stressed importance of operating using a Housing First Approach because PASS has the only shelter in town.
- Should provide harm reduction supplies and welcome clients at any stage in their life.
- Amend maintenance form to include tenant's signature.
- Amend policy against workplace bullying to include alternate avenue and specific process for employees to report complaints by including an email address.
- Create a written policy for tenant /client privacy.
- Create a Notice to Enter for entering client suites.
- Plan a fire drill.
- Develop a spreadsheet to track employee training.

- Review all letters, correspondence, and signage for positive and welcoming messaging.
- Review complaint procedure to include specific steps if a conflict is not resolved between guests – post forms on a bulletin board for guests to access.
- Housing/shelter should be based on the Housing First model.
- Having harm reduction supplies accessible to tenants and guests.

The Action Plan for this Operational Review is dated January 6, 2020 and it indicates that some of these directions are being addressed and the status is “assigned” or “in progress”. Broader directions about Housing First, harm reduction, positive and welcoming messaging, are not mentioned in the Action Plan; however, BC Housing staff confirm that harm reduction supplies are now available at Our Home. Due to staffing changes at BC Housing the Operational Review follow up has not been completed.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that a BC Housing SHA or NPPM is assigned to PASS to provide ongoing support as needed and monitor the situation closely.
- BC Housing should work with PASS on their action plan for the August 2019 Operational Review. Also, BC Housing should conduct a new Operational Review in 2021.
- BC Housing should provide a contact person for the NTC and develop a collaborative relationship to address homelessness for their members.
- BC Housing should consider establishing a Community Homeless Group in Port Alberni with oversight and advisory functions. One of its responsibilities could be to monitor service provision to people experiencing homelessness in the community. Membership should include the City of Port Alberni, local Indigenous leadership, and Vancouver Island Health Authority.

Appendix A

Our Home Services

Supportive Housing – 30 units

Originally tenanted in March 2019 with 16 PASS clients from the former facility and 14 clients from the Coordinated Access Assessment (CAA) process. 50% of the initial tenants were Indigenous. Since then, there have been 12 evictions (6 original PASS tenants and 6 from the CAA). Of those 12 evictions, 7 were Indigenous clients. Currently, 28 units are filled consisting of 8 females (2 Indigenous) and 20 males (8 Indigenous). Initially, Indigenous clients made up 50% of the tenants compared to 33% currently.

Shelter – 23 beds (21 beds funded by BCH)

Statistics April 1, 2020 – October 30, 2020

- Occupancy rate of BCH beds– 95.42% and all active beds 81.25%
- Percentage of nights BCH beds full – 28%
- 126 unique clients served.
- 19.5% of bed stays by females.
- Bed count reduced to 21, on August 1, 2020, due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements.

Community Expansion Shelter

- 15 emergency shelter spaces at Our Home
- 12 emergency shelter spaces at 3978 8th Ave.

Appendix B

The PASS Shelter Policy Manual

In reviewing the Policy Manual, dated May 6, 2019, several entries appear to contravene the BC Housing Service Agreements for the Emergency Shelter Program and Rapid Response to Homelessness signed by PASS management. The following issues have been identified (list is not exhaustive):

- PASS Policy and Procedure Manual states in the section entitled “Admission Policy – Low Barrier” (p1) that a person who is currently using drugs or alcohol cannot stay at the shelter. “To be eligible for services, clients must be homeless and cannot have over consumed alcohol or drugs on the day they are seeking entry into the Shelter. Once a client is admitted to the Shelter, if Shelter staff becomes aware of further information or observations that the client is unable to participate effectively in the Shelter programs (including consuming alcohol or drugs), they should contact the Program Supervisor for direction to ensure the client is referred for appropriate services.

This policy contravenes the BC Housing Service Agreements which call for accommodation of clients who are currently using substances and may require harm reduction supplies and supports such as wellness checks and overdose prevention measures.

- The PASS Policy manual states that clients can stay for 30 out of every 90 days. This contravenes BC Housing’s practice of not limiting shelter stays.
- The list of staff training requirements in the PASS Policy Manual is not current with BC Housing staff training requirements as listed in the Service Agreements.
- According to the PASS Policy manual (p 20) new employees can work without orientation for up to 2 months or training for up to 1 year.
- There are no harm reduction policies, pet policies or policies regarding storage of client possessions in the PASS Policy Manual.

Appendix C

List of Interviews for the Review

Representatives from the following service provider and community partner organizations were interviewed:

- City of Port Alberni,
- Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council,
- Vancouver Island Health Authority,
- Alberni Community and Woman's Services Society,
- Port Alberni CMHA,
- Port Alberni Friendship Centre,
- Port Alberni Community Action Team, and,
- Alberni Valley Drug and Alcohol Prevention Service.

In addition, seven protesters or concerned community members were interviewed.

From PASS, the Board Chair, Acting Executive Director, Executive Director (on leave), and two current employees were interviewed.

Finally, three BC Housing staff, who have worked directly with PASS, were interviewed.