THE VICTORIA DECLARATION

A Statement on Governance in Housing & Support Services

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We believe in the following:

1 **GOVERNANCE INVOLVES ALL OF US**

The governance of housing and support services begins with each of us and the rules we collectively choose to follow.

2 **ADDRESSING INEQUITIES**

There is no separation between the work of addressing inequities and the governance of housing and support services.

3 **MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE**

To live and work well together requires each of us to help build dialogue within our community and across communities. This requires the knowledges of those who access services and the knowledges of those who provide services.

4 **MAKING COMMUNITY SAFETY CENTRAL TO OUR WORK**

We are all responsible for community safety, and for building a range of community responses to harms and conflicts.

5 **INCLUSIVITY**

It is possible to create policies and practices that protect everyone from harassment and violence.

In light of these guiding principles for our downtown community,

WE COMMIT TO THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

1 Building long-term reciprocal relationships. Where possible, our services will be meaningfully informed by Indigenous laws governing relationships.

2 Creating safe spaces and common ground for the benefit of all involved.

3 Building the capacity to have dialogue that helps us make decisions together across differences.

4 Moving beyond a political and economic culture of scarcity towards building a future based on shared resources and understanding.

5 Creating a community that can work together to provide a variety of housing options that meet the needs of our diverse population.

6 Enacting the kinds of relationships we need that will create the governance of housing and supports we envision.

WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD ON THESE PRINCIPLES

The work of housing and support services requires the wisdom of all to serve the needs of our community. Our community includes people in various positions with multiple backgrounds and experiences. Our differences present challenges but we also have ways of providing care and support for each other through the community we create.

We believe the root of how we run things begins with each of us. We each choose the rules we follow or contest in our relationships. These rules may be said or unsaid and this involves both formal and informal decision-making. This is how we govern our relationships with each other.

The rules we collectively choose to follow determines what the governance of housing and support services looks like.

1 WE START FROM WHAT WE KNOW, BUT WE HAVE ROOM TO GROW

We recognize there are real power imbalances between different members of our community, which arise from our differences. These differences occur for many reasons, including race, Indigeneity, gender, sexuality, class, and ability. There are also systemic power imbalances between people who provide services and people who access services. We acknowledge all of the work people have undertaken to mitigate the inequities that arise from these differences. We must never turn away from the injustices that lie at the heart of these inequities. We commit ourselves to the hard work of finding ways to overcome these imbalances.

Most importantly we believe that there is no separation between the work of addressing these inequities and the governance of housing and support services.

We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonialism. As a result, Indigenous peoples face significant and distinct experiences of displacement and homelessness.

We believe that reconciliation will involve a substantial transformation on the part of non-Indigenous individuals and our society's institutions and systems. We will work to implement the relevant TRC Calls to Action. We will make space for services created by and for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous legal traditions contain important resources for responding to pressing issues in our communities.

Services can and should be informed by Indigenous approaches to developing long-term reciprocal relationships.

We aim to build supports that are shaped by our different experiences and cultures. We acknowledge that this is unceded Lekwungen (Songhees and Esquimalt) territory, where many Indigenous peoples live. This acknowledgement should be part of our conversations about governance. Our different perspectives are impacted by our identities and backgrounds. Our perspectives also come from the street cultures created when we live in community with each other.

Through education and action, we will work to create culturally safe spaces and common ground for the benefit of all involved.

2 NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

Listening is a practice and a skill. We commit to expanding our ability to hear the concerns of others. We will respond to issues and build common understanding through clear communication.

We will gather, seek wisdom, and listen to everyone impacted by a decision. It is difficult to make decisions together, including people who deliver services and people who access these services. Still, we believe that more shared decision making is necessary to make the best decisions.

We recognize the need to build collaboration and solidarity among large inclusive groups to address collective issues. We also recognize the need for smaller groups coming from specific communities or addressing a specific issue. This requires participation and decision-making with peers who have experienced the issues.

We call on everyone to commit to building our capacity to create dialogue and make decisions together across differences.

3 NO UNITY WITHOUT DIVERSITY, NO DIVERSITY WITHOUT UNITY

In order to build inclusive services, we will honour different forms of knowledge. Balancing multiple perspectives will not be easy work. The difficulty lies in creating ways where both sides are able to communicate their challenges to each other. We will acknowledge the different places we are coming from.

We value the knowledges of those who access services and the knowledges of those who provide services.

To live and work well together requires each of us to help build dialogue within our community.

Police hold a position of power in our society. The inequities faced by our community have resulted in criminalization and traumatic interactions with police. Sometimes the only response available in crisis situations is calling police. These relationships are complex. In some cases, we will build understanding and work to improve relationships among community members, service providers, and police or bylaw officers. This should happen within a context of decolonization and decriminalization. Further, this work should not shift our attention away from community accountability and safety practices that do not include police.

We believe that we are all responsible for community safety, and for building a range of community responses to harms and conflicts.

Like all communities, we deal with conflict and have our own ways of responding to conflict. We also have work to do in order to create practices and solutions to help us work through issues in our community. Sometimes policies that are meant to protect, focus on protecting service providers more than on those accessing care. We believe it is possible to honour personal boundaries while questioning the divisions that exist between those who access and provide services.

We believe it is possible to create policies and practices that protect everyone from harassment and violence.

4 HONOURING WHERE WE ARE, BELIEF IN A NEW TOMORROW

A declaration is a tool and a living document. We hope our declaration can be a tool to help us build the relationships needed to create healthy communities and make social change. This requires collaboration across differences and across organizations. We believe that everyone has a right to dignity and to a safe and affordable home. Our economic system treats home ownership as an asset, but we can also fight for housing as a social good.

For the benefit of the community, we commit to moving beyond a political and economic culture of scarcity towards building a future based on shared resources and understanding.

The work of creating our community should not fall solely on us. We should be supported by both service providers and by governments at all levels. We are a diverse community and we need a variety of housing options that meet people where they are at. Implementing "rights-based" and "Housing First" approaches are an important part of this. We also need integrated models that ensure we are working together and sharing information. We need education on Indigenous and colonial histories and understanding of how race, class, ability, age, gender and sexual orientation intersect.

We are committed to creating community by working together to provide a variety of housing options that meet the needs of our diverse population.

Housing makes a material difference in people's lives. Our work in the governance of housing and supports binds us together by higher ideals. For some, these are spiritual in nature, involving religious values and connections to forces beyond ourselves. For others, these are the values we owe to each other, of mutual respect, tolerance, trust and equality. And for others, these are deeply-held political values of self-determination for Indigenous and other communities. We share the belief that democracy is not only a political system, but a way of equally valuing each other by valuing each other's voices.

All of these values are necessary to enact the kinds of relationships we need that will create the governance of housing and supports we envision.

ADDENDUM: WHO WE ARE

This declaration was created by the Home in the City project, which includes people with current and previous experiences of homelessness and people facing diverse issues related to housing – marginally housed, inadequately housed, unstably housed, or unsafely housed. Our project includes people living in poverty as well as some housed allies who are not. Many of us access services and some of us provide services. We are connected to a range of organizations and groups; although, many of us came only representing ourselves. The group that contributed to the declaration includes community members from diverse backgrounds and communities: visitors to these territories as well as Indigenous peoples, including Elders, from a number nations close and far. We do not claim to sufficiently represent all of these groups, nor do we all agree on all matters.

This process was facilitated by Renee Beausoleil, as part of her phd research, with Matthew Wildcat and the UVic Indigenous Law Research Unit.

Signers agree with the spirit and intent of this declaration. We hope many organizations and individuals will sign on and support its implementation.