



Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee

SKOOKUM HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Our Roadmap for Change





Acknowledgements / Statement of Recognition

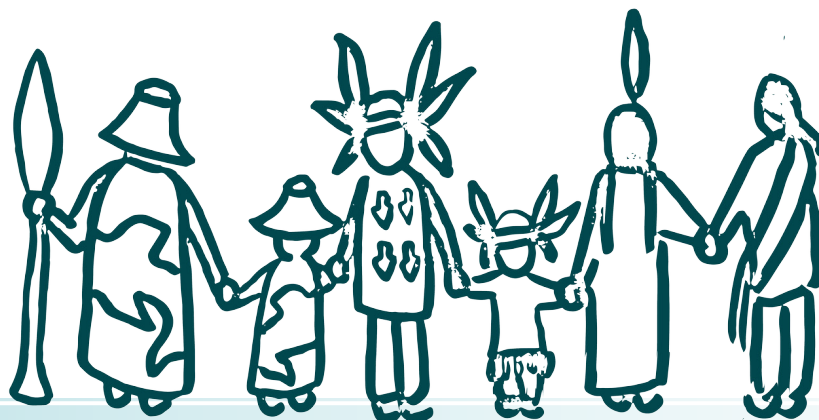
Our work takes place on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish, including the Semiahmoo First Nation, the Kwantlen First Nation, the Katzie First Nation, the Kwikwetlem First Nation, the Qayqayt First Nation and the Tsawwassen First Nation. We recognize their connection to this land and acknowledge that we are newcomers to Surrey like everyone else. Our group, the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee, does not represent these land-based First Nations, and we are careful not to speak on their behalf. Instead, we represent urban Indigenous people that have moved here from all over BC and in fact, from all over Canada to make Surrey their home. Our focus is on making Surrey a great place for Indigenous people living in the city, regardless of where they come from, their legal status, or their particular cultural heritage. As we do this, we endeavour to live in a good way with the land-based First Nations that have called this land their home since time immemorial.

INTRODUCTION

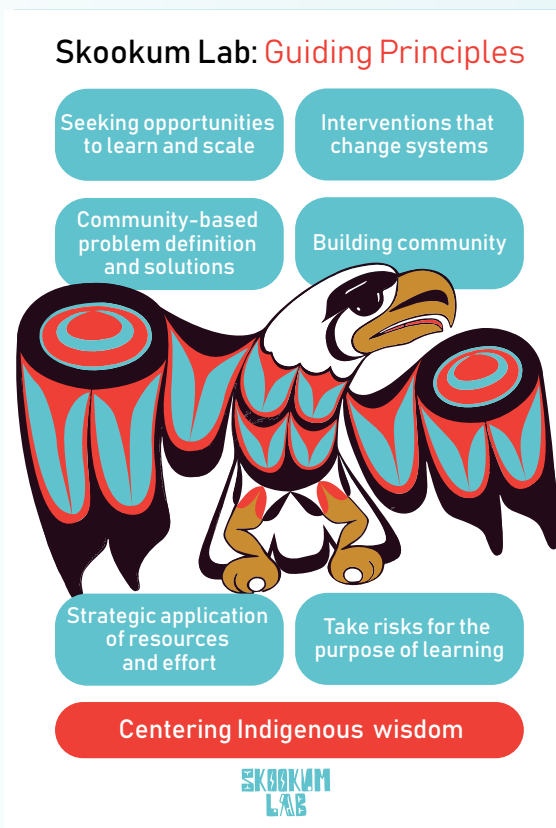
Surrey has the largest Indigenous population of any municipality in BC. Targeted Indigenous investments have not kept pace with this demographic reality. The result: a growing community that doesn't have the social infrastructure to support our most vulnerable. For example, 37% of Indigenous children in Surrey are living in poverty. That's more than 1,600 Indigenous children who are having their future compromised by poverty.

*In 2021 there were
16,300 Indigenous
people living in Surrey.
By 2026 nearly 20,000
Indigenous people will
live in Surrey.*

USING A SOCIAL INNOVATION
APPROACH WE SET OUT TO FIND
A WAY TO AFFECT CHANGE.



ABOUT SKOOKUM LAB



A SOCIAL INNOVATION LAB:

- Creates understanding about a complex issue
- Commits to action and testing solutions (“prototyping”)
- Uses systems thinking
- Incorporates thoughtful experimentation as a design principle
- Includes diverse stakeholders including people impacted by the issue
- Intentionally aims to transform systems that create and sustain the issue
- Indigenous social innovation centres Indigenous wisdom within the methodologies of social innovation labs

SKOOKUM RESEARCH

We engaged over 1,000 urban Indigenous community members. They told us that rising prices, discrimination, and predatory behaviour by landlords compromises their ability to have a safe, affordable, and stable home in Surrey.

We did our research. 59% of Indigenous renters in core housing need are families with children. The majority of these families are single-parent families. In 2016 that was 772 single-parent families in core housing need. Most single-parent families are led by women. To be affordable to these single-parent families, the maximum rent needs to be \$649 per month or less.

We assessed best practices from across Canada.

*Skookum
received the
2021 CMHC Gold
Roof Award for
housing research
excellence in
Canada.*

We determined that new Indigenous housing in Surrey should have the following characteristics:

- Long-term tenure and affordability (not just transitional or shelter)
- Supportive wrap-around services (child-care, training & employment, mentorship, etc.)
- Cultural features (gathering space, green space, cultural-positive policies, etc.)
- Foster community connections (integrated into an urban kinship network)
- Indigenous designed and controlled projects (nothing about us without us)

Overall, our research shows that Surrey needs at least 1,880 units of deeply affordable rental housing for Indigenous households. We have also demonstrated that unique to Surrey, the majority of Indigenous renters in core housing needs are families with children. Our conclusion is that social housing investment targeted to single-parent families is one of the most effective levers we have to dramatically improve the lives of Indigenous children living in poverty.

Surrey needs at least
1,880 units
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THE CHALLENGE

We feel there is a compelling case for new construction of non-market housing units for Indigenous families in Surrey. And yet, Surrey is not attracting targeted Indigenous housing investments. For example, there are currently 270 non-market housing units dedicated to Indigenous households in Surrey. Vancouver by comparison, has a similar size population but currently has 1,471 units of non-market housing units dedicated to Indigenous households.

Why the disparity?

Housing experts familiar with Surrey identified seven reasons why Surrey has so little Indigenous housing:

- 1. Invisibility of the community to funders**
- 2. Absence of community organization and vision**
- 3. Little Surrey-based Indigenous capacity**
- 4. Lack of collaboration between Indigenous housing providers in Surrey and BC Housing, CMHC, and the City of Surrey**
- 5. Lack of Indigenous-owned assets and an over-heated real-estate market make it nearly impossible to acquire land for Indigenous housing projects**
- 6. Funding processes that give preference to higher capacity organizations and shovel-ready projects**
- 7. Size and scope of the housing need in Surrey**

Since 2016, the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) has been addressing the first three challenges. We are using our voice to make decision-makers aware of our growing community, we have organized ourselves and documented our vision, and we are demonstrating that there is capacity in Surrey that can succeed with targeted support.

The remaining challenges – lack of collaboration, inability to secure land for housing, funding criteria, and size of the need – are systemic barriers that keep us from moving ahead.

A recent example is the Rapid Housing Initiative. The \$1 billion fund was designed to address urgent housing needs of vulnerable Canadians through the rapid construction of affordable housing. Despite best efforts, none of the Indigenous housing providers in Surrey could meet the timelines and criteria for eligible projects. Another \$1 billion of funding is expected soon and Indigenous housing providers in Surrey will once again be shut out of the opportunity.

This isn't exclusive to federal funding. In general, decision-makers want quick success on housing projects and have a low tolerance for risk. While this is understandable it creates a catch-22 for Surrey. We can demonstrate the need, but do not have the capacity to win projects.

We are painfully aware that all communities can demonstrate housing need. Our argument is that the situation in Surrey is different by an order of magnitude. The existing deficit of affordable housing for Indigenous families coupled with the growing Indigenous population means that we are condemning a generation of Indigenous children to grow up in poverty. We need to take bold steps to prevent the problem growing bigger and worse in the near future.

*See Appendix A
for a description
of the existing
Indigenous
housing providers
in Surrey.*

THE SOLUTION

The current system for social housing investment is not working for Indigenous people in Surrey. It created the deficit we now have. We can not do the same thing over and over and expect different results. We need an intervention in the system.

Our proposal is for a 10-year, targeted initiative to oversee the creation of at least 772 units of deeply affordable housing designed for single-parent Indigenous families. The objective is to dramatically increase the number of Indigenous non-market housing units in Surrey while creating a healthy ecosystem of Indigenous housing providers operating in the city.

THE GOALS OF THIS INITIATIVE ARE TO:

- Collaborate across jurisdictions and with the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee
- Secure land for the purpose of building Indigenous controlled assets in Surrey that can be leveraged for new housing projects in the future
- Make targeted funding available to ensure that new Indigenous housing units get built in Surrey without diminishing the funding available to other urban Indigenous communities
- Build Indigenous capacity in Surrey through training, support, mentorship, and core administrative funding
- Align policy, reduce red-tape, and expedite construction

Success will be measured by the number of units constructed and by the reduction of Indigenous children living in poverty.

To be effective, the partners to this initiative must include CMHC, BC Housing, the City of Surrey, and the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee. Each level of government brings with it critical ingredients needed for success.

At the site-specific project level, working groups can be established to support specific development proposals. Working groups could involve the four existing housing providers in Surrey, other existing Indigenous housing providers based in the lower-mainland, along with key service organizations like the Ministry of Children and Families or Fraser Health.

All partners, however, need to bring new, flexible mandates to enable innovation and creativity in meeting the overarching objective. We must find ways to move beyond existing programs and funding parameters. The approach being proposed is consistent with the implementation of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canada – specifically that Indigenous peoples enjoy full participation in all aspects of the economy with a particular focus on the rights of Indigenous women, youth, and children. In BC, one of the explicit goals of the UNDRIP draft action plan is to create more off-reserve housing for Indigenous peoples.



A ROAD MAP

While our proposal is outside of the current approach to housing investment in BC, we believe that it can work. Furthermore, we know of other precedents for similar collaborative action where a compelling social or economic objective exists. We think providing Indigenous children in Surrey with safe, affordable housing is exactly the opportunity for working together.



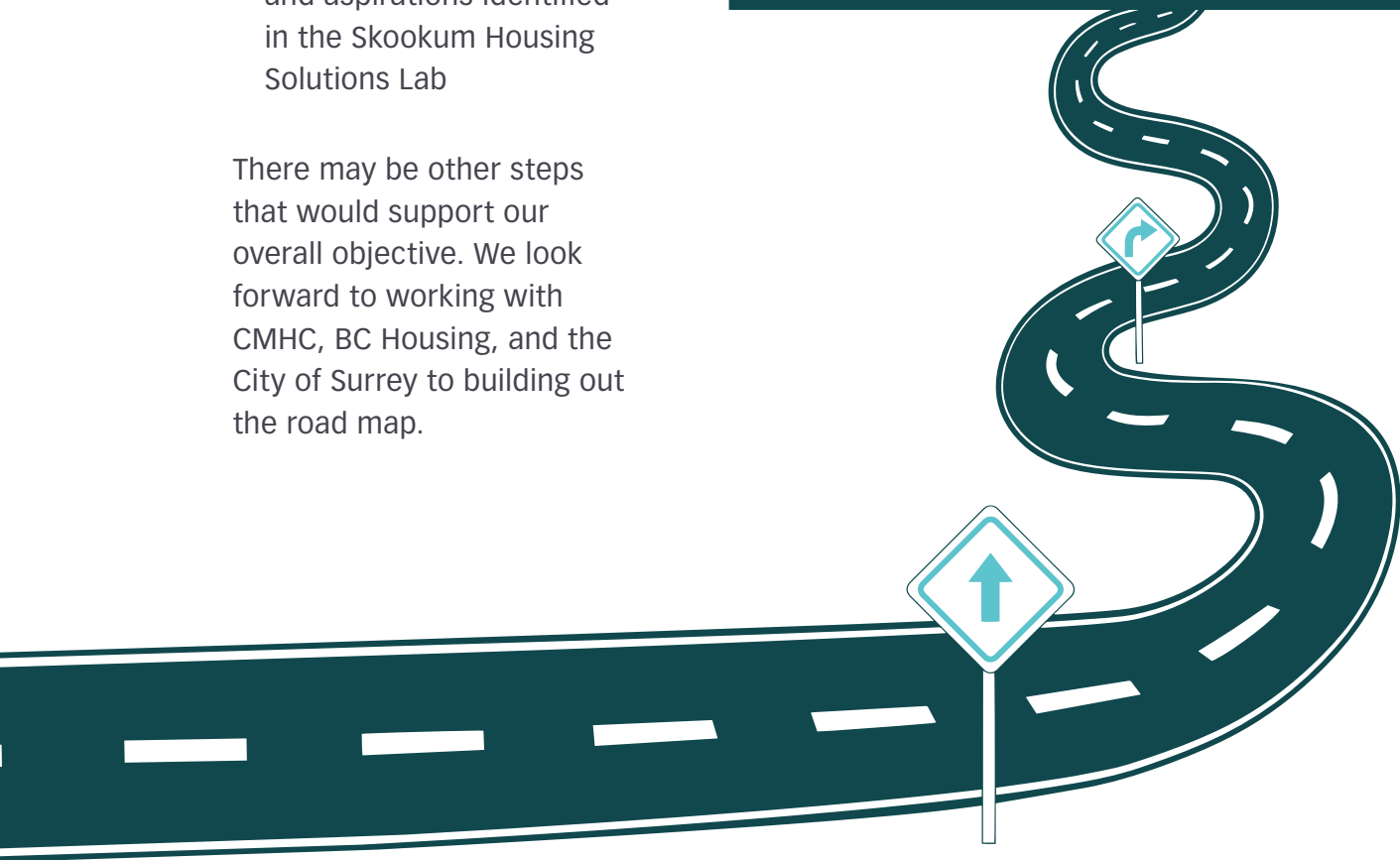
SOME OF THE KEY STEPS WE SEE TO MOVE THIS INITIATIVE FORWARD INCLUDE:

- Developing an agreement that establishes a partnership between SUILC, CMHC, BC Housing, and the City of Surrey to plan and build more than 600 units of housing for Indigenous single-parents
- Acquiring land for Indigenous housing in Surrey – preferably along public transportation corridors
- Expediting local approvals for Indigenous housing by reflecting the priority in key City policy documents like the Official Community Plan
- Providing funding to existing housing providers to strengthen their core capacity & competencies
- Working with post-secondary institutions to support organizational capacity of Indigenous organizations in Surrey
- Establishing working groups with community partners to design site-specific housing using the design principles articulated by the community

- Exploring the role of local First Nations like Semiahmoo First Nation, Katzie First Nation, and Kwantlen First Nation as well as other non-local First Nations that have sizable citizen populations living in Surrey
- Spearheading new Surrey-based housing research and planning to support additional housing needs and aspirations identified in the Skookum Housing Solutions Lab

There may be other steps that would support our overall objective. We look forward to working with CMHC, BC Housing, and the City of Surrey to building out the road map.

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CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, our work demonstrates that the lack of affordable housing options is perpetuating a cycle of Indigenous child poverty in Surrey. To break the cycle we need CMHC, BC Housing, and the City of Surrey to join us in a 10-year, targeted initiative to oversee the creation of at least 772 units of deeply affordable housing designed for single-parent Indigenous families. The objective is to dramatically increase the number of Indigenous non-market housing units in Surrey while creating a healthy ecosystem of Indigenous housing providers operating in the city.

All people need a house.

Our children deserve a home.

Work with us to make it a reality.

Appendix A

Existing Indigenous Housing Providers in Surrey



Appendix A – Existing Indigenous Housing Providers in Surrey

Surrey has only a small handful of Indigenous organizations that develop/manage non-market housing units for Indigenous people.

Kekino Native Housing Society (Kekino) is the only organization with a clear mandate and history of providing non-market housing units dedicated to Indigenous people. Currently they operate 5 housing sites in Surrey (3 in Newton and 2 in Whalley) currently providing a total of 239 affordable rental housing units. Kekino's housing projects were developed in the 1980's with all townhouse units. Kekino is interested in redeveloping these existing sites to provide additional units, as well as more variety of unit sizes to accommodate a wider range of Indigenous households. Kekino is also actively seeking to add new property to its portfolio for development.

Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Center (FRAFCA) is a multi-service Indigenous agency providing a wide range of programs in Surrey. It currently operates a single-family residence in North Surrey funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. FRAFCA has partnered with the Elizabeth Fry Society on a project that will be completed by spring 2022. The project will provide 40 shelter beds and 42 apartment units for women that will be operated by E. Frye and another 15 apartment units for young Indigenous women. These 15 units will be operated by FRAFCA. FRAFCA has a development manager on staff and is actively seeking to add new property to its portfolio for development.

Seven Sacred Fires supports Aboriginal men recovering from addictions. The Society operates a 12-bed supportive recovery residence in a duplex in Whalley. Funding for residents' room and board is provided by the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction on a per diem basis. Seven Sacred Fires would like to expand the number of units they operate allowing for more flexibility of treatment options.

One other Indigenous organization based in Surrey has some potential to be involved in future housing developments.

Métis Nation BC (MNBC) is the provincial government of Métis in British Columbia. While the organization has a province-wide mandate, it is interested in developing a Métis-government hub in Surrey that will include non-market rental housing. In addition, it is exploring ways to support MNBC Chartered Communities (i.e. community-level Métis governments) to develop non-profit housing organizations.



Vancity
Community Foundation

vancouver
foundation



Indigenous Services
Canada

Services aux
Autochtones Canada



The project entitled "Skookum Lab: Urban Housing Solutions for Indigenous Youth and Young Families" received funding from the National Housing Strategy under the NHS Solutions Labs, however the views expressed are the personal views of the author and CMHC accepts no responsibility for them.