

Understanding evictions in B.C., one survey at a time

British Columbia has the highest eviction rate in Canada due to its weak tenant protections. That's why Sarah Marsden, FIRST UNITED's Staff Lawyer, is leading a B.C. eviction mapping project to help advocate for better legal protections for tenants in the province. "In our frontline work, we see the impacts of eviction every day," Sarah explains, referring to our legal advocacy program that provides free legal advice for people in the Downtown Eastside.

"Eviction is a critical issue in B.C.'s housing crisis. It contributes to homelessness, displacement, and health risks. These risks are amplified for Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. Thousands of people are evicted every year."

Through her eviction survey, Sarah is hoping to get enough responses to find out where evictions and forced moves are happening, who is affected by them, and what the impacts are. This data will be visually represented on a map, and the goal is to use this information to understand how laws can improve.

And there is a lot of room to improve. In B.C., hearings are not required when a landlord wishes to evict a tenant. The only time a hearing happens is if the tenant files an application within short timelines.

"This means that many tenants in B.C. are evicted without a hearing to determine if the eviction is lawful."

Although the project has just started, Sarah is already noticing patterns and themes from the responses that she's



seen so far. For example, more than half of our survey respondents categorized their eviction as "landlord's use of property".

"But sometimes this is not genuine. A landlord will state a family member is moving in, but they don't, and instead, the unit is re-rented for a higher rent."

Whatever the reason for being evicted, the impacts can be devastating. Over a quarter of respondents stated that they had not yet found a new place to live. Some reported having to sell their belongings. Others have been forced to split up their families by sending their children to live elsewhere. And some people have had to settle for unsafe or unsanitary housing to survive.

"Access to safe, adequate housing is a basic human right, and it is our hope that this project will help move B.C. closer to protecting this right for all people," Sarah says. "I hope we will give people a chance to tell their story and to know they are not alone, and I hope that what we learn can help advocate for better tenant protections."



Have you been evicted, forced to move, or know someone who has? Please share or take our survey by scanning the QR code, or visiting firstunited.ca/resources/evictionsurvey.

Cohesion through transitions

Dear Friends,

In my last message to you, I was ending my time as Acting Executive Director. For this issue of First Things First, I'm humbled to address you as FIRST UNITED's Interim Executive Director for a three-year term.

We're now a month into a new fiscal year, and I'm happy to share that we finished the last fiscal year strong. The dedication of our staff and their hard work through all the transitions, as well as the support from the Board, volunteers and donors has made this possible.

We're also well into the transition period of the redevelopment. While our team is deployed across six different sites until the new building is complete, we're more committed than ever to strengthening team cohesion. Our leadership is confident that our team will be even stronger when we're on the other side of our redevelopment. Until then, we'll continue to provide essential services, community connection, and healing through meals, legal support, shelter, spiritual care, and tax support.

I've been stressing the point that our neighbours in the Downtown Eastside deserve our attention, care and support. Especially now. Encampments are a regular feature in the news, but there has been no real action on housing. And the frequent fires that have been displacing even more residents in the neighbourhood only highlight the consequences of the ongoing housing crisis. Not to mention the effects that the worsening overdose crisis continues to have on our community. As these struggles continue, so does our team's commitment. With our staff spread throughout various locations in the DTES, our presence on the frontlines isn't wavering. Just as we've done for almost 140 years, we'll continue to serve the community with wholehearted dedication.



Amanda Burrows
Interim Executive Director

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Change starts with every single one of us

Maryam has been a Frontline Monthly Donor to FIRST UNITED for over a year.

"It's very hard to walk or drive by and see all of these people struggling, but not much really happening for them, or it's not enough," Maryam said. "It's hard to see that many people on the street. It shouldn't be the way that it is right now."

With a lot of her time dedicated to her business, she found that the best way she could help make a difference was to become a monthly donor to FIRST.

"As a business owner, it's busy for me. There's a lot going on for me, so it's hard to give my time to volunteer. So, giving monthly is the least I can do to help as much as I can."

Maryam recognizes that there is great need in the DTES and a lot of work that needs to be done. Her hope for the community is for more housing and safer, cleaner spaces for community members. But until then, she chooses to support FIRST's programs, which provide essential services to help the neighbourhood stay connected and heal.



"Every little bit probably helps. I think it's a good way to give back to let the community know that we care for them as well; for people who don't have homes or facilities or family. We do as much as we can."

"We can all make a change. It starts with every single one of us."



Creating a ‘ministry of presence’

At the time of our conversation, FIRST UNITED’s new Interim Spiritual Care Director Jennifer Goddard-Sheppard was preparing to lead a memorial service the next day. Our housing community residents had just lost a couple of long-term neighbours within a few days of each other. “I feel the deep privilege but also the humility of stepping in and doing this holy work with this community,” Jennifer expressed.

Jennifer was ordained as a minister in 2005 but had been working in the church long before then. “I think I was born into ministry,” she said. In 2020, she joined FIRST UNITED’s Board of Directors, before she was asked to take a leave from the board in June 2022 to join staff in an interim role.

The work of our Spiritual Care program is crucial to our overall mission. The program’s work is not just limited to memorial services. By providing pastoral or spiritual care for people of any faith or none, the ministry provides support for community members in whatever area they need.

“Spiritual care is about the fullness of the human,” Jennifer explains. “It’s saying ‘whatever your needs might be, how might you get those needs met so that you can be your highest and best self, right here, right now?’ Whatever might facilitate that or help you to grow along your path, we might be the resource to [help make recommendations].”

With decades of leadership and ministry experience, Jennifer knows that her job starts with a simple conversation.

“It’s very relational. [Our work] happens because we start a conversation or someone says, ‘I think you need to talk to [this person].’ Spiritual care is ultimately about the relationship and we have those by getting to know one another. That’s how it starts.”



And the best way to make connections is to be in the community. It’s what Jennifer calls the “ministry of presence.” In the context of Spiritual Care at FIRST, Jennifer plans to create those opportunities so that people don’t have to come to us, but we go to them.

This is something we’ve been focusing on after having to scale back in-person events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now that we’ve been meeting in person again, Jennifer is dreaming up new and exciting ways to connect with the community. Whether that’s creating new weekly social or spiritual gathering opportunities, meeting community members during lunch at the Food First food truck, or attending community events, such as the International Overdose Awareness Day march, Spiritual Care aims to create authentic and organic opportunities to be with the people.

“We’re trusting that we’re going to be adaptive and responsive to the needs of the community and the needs of the organization, and to hold the spiritual care of the entire organization.”



FIRST UNITED

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*Located on unceded Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm
(Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish),
& Səlílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) lands.*



Shelter Gala

This Giving Tuesday, November 29th, we're hosting our third annual Shelter Gala. This year, in addition to providing 50 FIRST UNITED shelter residents with a five-star meal, we're also providing over 200 gourmet meals to community members via our Food First food truck. Visit firstunited.ca/events for more information.



Email updates

We have a lot of news, updates, and events coming up that you won't want to miss! Subscribe to our emails to stay in touch and to help us save paper! You can sign up at firstunited.ca.



Interested in volunteering?

Are you looking to make a difference in the lives of DTES community members? Our programs and operations can always use the help of volunteers and might be a good fit for your skills! Call 604.681.8365 or email volunteers@firstunited.ca for opportunities.