

Comox Valley Transition Society

Comox, British Columbia

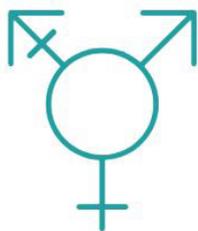


Key Insights:

- Move slowly enough to bring people along, but quickly enough that people are not left without support when they need it.
- It can be helpful to model that change is possible, and not everyone is perfect. Try saying “Hey, I used to know nothing about this, and now I do. You can too!”

Shelter Profile: The Comox Valley Transition Society (CVTS) operates [Lilli House](#), a 14-bed transition house for women fleeing abuse and their children, as well as a recovery house, outreach services, drop-in programs, and counselling programs. They also run a thrift store as a social enterprise to support their work. CVTS is located in a small town and serves a largely rural population.

Making Changes: Lilli House officially **serves anyone who self-identifies as a woman**, and they do not ask for identification documents to prove someone’s identity. In 2016, they ran a **Trans 101 training for their staff** and for other people in the community who work with vulnerable populations. The training helped to open people’s eyes to the need for inclusive services and some of the barriers trans or non-binary people might face when trying to access their services. CVTS is also working on implementing an **ongoing education program** for staff. At Lilli House, they keep a **resource list** at the front desk, so that staff can take time to educate themselves during quiet moments.



CVTS is now **discussing how they might become more overtly inclusive of non-binary people and trans men**. While there is nothing official in place, CVTS has provided counselling and outreach services to trans men. They have arranged for the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre to provide information to the Board and Coordinators, who will work with staff and the local trans and non binary community to set a strategic direction and policies for inclusion. This work emerged from the realization that a non-binary person or trans man in their relatively rural community would not have many places to go for support.

Overcoming Barriers: One challenge CVTS faces is in overcoming the **uncertainty that members of the trans community might feel about accessing shelter services** given that some transition houses in BC oppose the inclusion of trans women at shelters. Once CVTS has set out their policies and practice for serving the trans and non-binary community, they will use multiple avenues to communicate this position clearly.

CVTS also faces challenges **juggling different changes that are occurring at the same time**. They are facing an ongoing opioid crisis and the housing crisis, and as a result, their work is becoming more complex. Staff are dealing with a lot of uncertainty, and often feel that change is beyond their control. In this context, it can be hard for staff to embrace and prioritize additional changes, such as redefining who can access their services. To address this, the management team discusses the changes they are making ahead of time with staff so that they feel included and in control of the process, and they identify champions among the staff to drive the changes from below.



“We are unintentionally forcing people back into closets to access services. People in the trans community feel like they have to present a certain way to gain access to services.”