

**HOMELESSNESS
SERVICES**

**Building
Connections**



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message from BC Housing

Many of BC Housing’s resources are directed towards breaking the cycle of homelessness. To increase our focus in this area, particularly in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, we have made some temporary staffing changes.

In late March, Michael Anhorn joined the Vancouver Coastal Regional team to lead four initiatives: the Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) shelters; Supportive Housing Registration; the Homelessness Intervention Project; and BC Housing’s role with the Downtown Community Court. Over the next 18 months, Michael will ensure these four areas work together in a coordinated response to homelessness.

During Michael’s absence, Lori Dennis is overseeing the Homelessness Services Department while retaining her role as Manager, Homeless Outreach Program. Allison Jones is our Acting Manager, Emergency Shelter Program.

During the current economic downturn, we are all being challenged to meet our goals with the same or fewer resources. At BC Housing, we are committed to maintaining service levels for the Emergency Shelter Program, the Homeless Outreach Program, and the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program.

The new Homelessness Intervention Project will reduce chronic homelessness and integrate service delivery throughout the province. The new Supportive Housing Registration service provides a single portal to the government-owned SROs in Vancouver and will also handle applications for the city-owned sites when these come on line. You can read more about these new homelessness services in this edition of Building Connections.

Please never hesitate to contact us with your questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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program updates

Homelessness Intervention Project

In March, the provincial government launched the Homelessness Intervention Project, making a single government ministry (Housing and Social Development) responsible for coordinating provincial and community social housing and support services, including health and income assistance for the chronically homeless in five communities. The ministry has the lead role to ensure that services for homeless individuals with severe mental illness and/or addictions are delivered in an organized, fiscally responsible and timely manner to reduce chronic homelessness and integrate service delivery.

The goal of the project is to reduce chronic homelessness. It will align several government ministries, health authorities, the non-profit sector and other agencies that address chronic homelessness and establish an immediate integrated homelessness intervention project, which will include priority access to health and social services for the chronically homeless in five communities: Vancouver, Surrey, Victoria, Kelowna and Prince George.

Initially, integrated, cross-agency outreach teams will be tasked with two basic goals: to immediately reduce homelessness in these communities; and to create a more integrated, synchronized approach to the delivery of services to the homeless.

Over time, the government will put in place a management system with enhanced reporting that will enable communities to maximize and prioritize outreach, housing and support services for the chronically homeless. Through this approach, the communities will be in a better position to address the client population that is the most difficult to house: chronically homeless with severe mental health and addictions complications.

It is estimated approximately 2,000 people from the five communities will be housed through the project's integrated approach.

Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program expands to Fort St. John

The Fort St. John Friendship Society joins the list of provincially-funded community partners providing outreach services to Aboriginal people who are homeless and not accessing emergency shelter. The program now serves nine communities in B.C. by providing culturally appropriate supports and services to help Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal people find safe, affordable housing. The Fort St. John Friendship Society outreach worker will assist people in that town as well as the surrounding area.

Spreading the word about B.C.'s Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program

Homeless Outreach Program Manager Lori Dennis was in Ottawa in mid-March giving a presentation on using traditional Aboriginal talking circles as a means to shape the province's Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program. The talk generated interest among other funders and providers who are now requesting further information.

"BC Housing recognized that developing an Aboriginal-centred outreach program required us to hear from First Nation's people. We needed to hear from experts on how to shape the program from the start," said Lori. "Our staff met with hereditary and elected leaders as well as Aboriginal service providers in four communities across the province. Each talking circle started and was closed with a blessing and a feast was a key component."

The outcomes of the talking circles included an Indigenous-centred outreach program with its own program framework and uniquely Aboriginal performance measures. Cultural services were incorporated into case planning and traditional territories acknowledged.

Supportive Housing Registration – what it means to outreach and shelter workers in Vancouver

Outreach and shelter workers in Vancouver are now taking advantage of BC Housing's Supportive Housing Registration (SHR) Service to connect clients with supportive housing. SHR provides a single point of placement to the provincially-owned SROs and other new supportive housing units (such as The Lux) as these come on line. The service was established by BC Housing in collaboration with Vancouver housing providers.

You can read more about the service at www.bchousing.org/programs/SRO/Housing_Registration. The site includes application forms that can be downloaded.

Rules at shelters

One of the reasons given for the success of Vancouver's Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) shelters is the minimum number of rules clients need to follow in order to stay. Jerry Adams is the coordinator for the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre's shelter at 201 Central Street; Aaron Munro is the manager of RainCity Housing and Support Society's shelters on Howe and Granville streets.

Jerry Adams: We try to have as few rules as possible. We won't tolerate alcohol and drugs on site, but we won't turn someone away if they arrive drunk. Clients can bring in their carts and we lock them up overnight. We also have space for animals. The lights are out by 11 p.m. and people have to leave by 10 a.m. They get dinner and breakfast here through our partnership with Potluck Café.

Aaron Munro: Both of our shelters are low barrier and we'll let in pets and carts. You need some structure when 36 people [the capacity of each RainCity shelter] live together; our rules are no violence and no drug use in the buildings. Clients can be intoxicated when they stay here. We have no curfew; clients can come and go as they please. The doors open at 6 p.m. which is when we find a bed for everyone. They can use the bed for as long as they want until we close at 10 a.m. Our population needs this flexibility.

JA: We're pretty flexible with our rules. If someone's abusive to other clients or staff, we give them chances to behave. If they have to leave, we let them know they can come back another

time. It's a fairly core group who uses the shelter and they know the rules and expectations. They respect these and our staff are very gentle with them.

AM: If someone breaks a rule, they could be asked to leave, but we try not to do that. Instead, they might go for a walk with a worker who will try to get them to understand why what they did can't be allowed. We've found if we put up barriers, we create issues. When we remove these, we empower our clients and have fewer issues. Lots of our guidelines come from the clients; there's a big sense of ownership. We've tried to appeal to their sense of community and it's been really successful.

JA: The clients are very proud of the shelter and volunteer with cleaning. We've had notes left by clients saying they feel at home here and safe.

AM: It's about meeting people where they're at. This is their space and once they feel entitled to it they take care of it.

Shelter "petiquette"

With Vancouver's Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) shelters accepting pets, the role of the SPCA in providing food and crates has been vital to ensuring animal welfare is looked after. The BCSPCA's Regional Animal Welfare Supervisor is Kim Monteith. She visits the HEAT shelters regularly, along with other places where people who are homeless and have pets gather.

"It's important homeless people and their pets stay together because the bond between them is so strong," said Kim. "For a homeless person, their pet is often their only source of unconditional love. Their pets provide support and security. Without their pet, they won't come indoors."

Pets are usually not allowed at emergency shelters. Concerns include aggressive behaviour, unruliness, and sanitary issues. But contrary to what people often think, said Kim, these pets are usually extremely well socialized. If not, they are quickly targeted by police and animal control.

"I had a concern at one of the HEAT shelters early on about a pit bull," said Kim. "I was able to reassure them the dog was fine to have there. These shelters have helped so many animals who otherwise would have been outside all winter."

Kim has been in touch with shelter providers in Surrey to discuss ways they could accommodate people with pets. She encourages providers throughout the province to contact their local animal shelter or SPCA to find out how they can get similar support.

Green cleaning products

BC Housing has done some research and testing of green cleaning products to determine which ones work well and are environmentally friendly as well as cost effective. We have identified [Janitors' Warehouse](#) as a supplier that you may wish to work with if you are considering switching to less harmful cleaning products. The specific products that BC Housing is now using at its public housing sites are manufactured by M-Chem, a B.C.-based producer of green cleaning products.

Here are the products BC Housing has tested and is now using:

- Multimax all-purpose cleaner;
- Oxigenic washroom sanitizer/cleaner;
- Glassmax glass cleaner;

- Neutramax neutral floor cleaner;
- Burlesque floor stripper;
- Evolution floor finish;
- Orderly germicidal/disinfectant cleaner;
- Good Riddance odour eliminator.

Janitors' Warehouse carries M-Chem's full product line; please refer to their catalogue for additional products.

news

Enumeration of homeless people for May 12 provincial election

Beginning this month, Elections BC enumeration staff are visiting homeless shelters, social service agencies and other facilities to register eligible voters and to provide information about voting opportunities. The objective of this field outreach is to make registration accessible for those who may otherwise face barriers to participation in the provincial electoral process.

For more information: www.elections.bc.ca.

Growing Home: National conference on housing and homelessness

The second national conference on housing and homelessness took place in February in Calgary. The forum offered fantastic opportunities for services providers, people who have experienced homelessness, academics, and government to learn from each other and share successful practices from various jurisdictions across Canada.

Presentations ranged from politicians' discussions on homelessness reduction to proven program successes. Leaders from one of British Columbia's Homeless Outreach Program agencies, ASK Wellness in Kamloops, gave a presentation entitled "*Housing is Health Care: Findings from the Kamloops Integration Project.*" This presentation highlighted the strong partnership that the Homeless Outreach Program has formed with diverse service providers across the province.

Other presentation topics included the trend that more and more cities are developing plans to end homelessness. The conference proceedings made clear that ending homelessness requires multi-level partnerships and engagement with private sector landlords.

To read more about landlord and housing worker engagement for housing clients with multiple barriers, check out www.landlordconnect.ca developed by RENT in Toronto. RENT is a collaborative program for community based homelessness prevention.

For more information on Growing Home conference presentations, follow the link to the website at www.nhc2009.ca.

TechSoup Canada launches website

TechSoup Global is one of the oldest and largest non-profit technology assistance agencies in North America. For almost 20 years, it has served as a one-stop technology resource centre, providing a wealth of technology information and support to non-profits and charities worldwide and partnering with leading technology providers to offer product donations to eligible organizations at the lowest possible cost.

TechSoup Canada, a collaborative effort by the [Centre for Social Innovation](#), [TechSoup Global](#) and the [Information Technology Association of Canada](#), has launched a website. You can visit it at www.techsoupcanada.ca.

Street Smarts: Improving Relationships with Street Youth

Metro Vancouver's Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness's Youth Working Group recently identified a need for a comprehensive training tool to assist professionals such as police and security employees, health care providers, and business owners and employees to improve their relationships with street involved youth. The result is a video, Street Smarts: Improving Relationships with Street Youth, which identifies what approaches might work to improve interaction.

A number of young people from the Metro Vancouver area participated in this project through focus groups and interviews. Their perspectives, in addition to input from professionals and business owners, provide a thoughtful look at the skills needed to produce respectful interactions. The video is approximately 22 minutes and is divided into five sections that can be viewed independently or consecutively.

To view the video: <http://stophomelessness.ca/resources/street-smart>.

Management assistance from the Voluntary Sector Knowledge Network

The [Voluntary Sector Knowledge Network](#) is a program of the Centre for Non Profit Management in Victoria. It offers management assistance for staff and volunteers with Canadian non-profit and voluntary organizations. Its website has information on leadership and governance, community and government relations, fundraising, financial management, accountability and evaluation, managing people, and information and communications technology.

agency profile

Island J.A.D.E. Society

This past March, Sian Thomson, the executive director for the [Island Justice, Advocacy, Dignity and Empowerment Society](#) (J.A.D.E.), travelled to Victoria to accept a British Columbia Community Achievement Award from Lieutenant Governor Steven Point. Sian was honoured for developing “positive solutions for individuals and families in crisis or struggling with such issues as homelessness, poverty and physical or mental challenges.”

“I was humbled,” said Sian from her office in Campbell River. “I’ve worked in this community since 1983 and this award tells me people – and not just those who are marginalized – have noticed the work I do and feel it makes a positive difference in people’s lives.”

Sian established the Island J.A.D.E. Society in 1995 after the legal advocacy program she was working with at a women’s centre closed. Since then, the society has served thousands of people and offered advocacy services of every description.

In 2008 the society organized a Sleep Tight Campaign which raised enough money in three months to create 81 rough sleeper kits. The kits included essential provisions (sleeping bag, tent, camping and care supplies) for homeless people sleeping outdoors. Later that year, Island

J.A.D.E. became a partner in the Homeless Outreach Program. “It was a natural extension of the work we were already doing with homeless people in our community,” said Sian. “The program has made a monumental difference to them. Because of the Sleep Tight Campaign, we had 81 individuals already identified and we were able to track some of them down and find them homes. We still have a few items left over from the kits and we use these when we first make contact with someone. They help open the door for us.”



From left: Sian Thomson with Sophie and Stephanie Kihn.

Island J.A.D.E.’s homeless outreach worker is Stephanie Kihn, who is ably assisted by eight-month-old Sophie, a Retriever/Sharpei/Husky cross. Stephanie rescued Sophie from an abusive situation and now brings her to work in both the office and the field. “Sophie is a huge hit with our clients,” commented Sian. “Many of them are scared and nervous. Sophie puts them at ease and has helped in a number of crisis situations.”

Affordable accommodation is difficult to come by in Campbell River and Sian has found some landlords would rather have units remain vacant than rent to a homeless person. Several, however, restore her faith in humanity by contacting the society with offers of units. Since joining the Homeless Outreach Program, Island J.A.D.E. has housed 54 people, all of whom have stayed housed.

tips and tools

Succession planning

Succession planning is the steps taken to prepare to replace an organization’s senior managers when they leave. It can take several shapes: from emergency planning when an executive leaves suddenly to a succession that is planned over a number of years as a long-time executive reaches retirement.

While succession planning has become commonplace in business, it is still rare among non-profit organizations. Many societies are small and natural candidates for management may not be obvious. Non-profit boards need to be encouraged to approach succession planning as a risk-management tool and as an opportunity to increase the organization’s long-term stability and sustainability.

Fortunately, there are many free resources available online to help community organizations with succession planning. Here are just a few:

- Volunteer Vancouver’s website offers case studies and links on succession planning from a Canadian point of view: www.volunteervancouver.ca/library/succession_planning.asp
- The Federation of Community Organizations and Dalhousie University’s Non-Profit

Sector Leadership Program created a succession planning checklist for executive directors and boards in 2008. Check it out at www.bchousing.org/resources/Programs/ESP/newsletter/April_2009/Succession_Planning_Checklist_FOCO.pdf.

- The American Annie E. Casey Foundation makes its publication “Building Leaderful Organizations: Succession Planning for Nonprofits” available. You can link to it at www.bchousing.org/resources/Programs/ESP/newsletter/April_2009/Building_Leaderful_Organizations.pdf.

To access more online resources, google “succession planning for non profits” and follow the links.

new faces



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Housing solutions for healthier futures

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