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message from BC Housing

Welcome to 2009. Last year was a time of great change for BC Housing's programs that serve to help people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. The Emergency Shelter Program implemented its program framework, and saw 87 per cent of its funded year-round beds move to 24/7 operations. The Homeless Outreach Program and Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program grew from 27 to 50 providers in 48 communities (up from 30) and 810 rent subsidies were made available to homeless people. We completed performance-based contracts in the Outreach and Shelter programs. We also conducted a review of the role an umbrella organization could play to represent shelters, outreach and drop-in services across B.C. Most importantly, we saw many people in need find housing (3,442 in the first three quarters of the fiscal year).

In late 2008, BC Housing's Operations Branch underwent a reorganization to better match our heightened focus on people who are living with multiple barriers and require support for successful living. The new structure is less centralized and, over the next few months, staff in the regions will become your primary points of contact. These changes will allow us to be more responsive and flexible to your needs as well as those of your clients. For the Emergency Shelter Program and the Homeless Outreach Program, the major change is that all homelessness programs now fall under the same department. In the coming months, we look forward to further integration between our two programs and developments funded under the Provincial Homelessness Initiative.

Sincerely,

Michael Anhorn
Manager, Emergency Shelter Program

Lori Dennis
Manager, Homeless Outreach Program

More temporary shelter beds for Vancouver

On December 16, Premier Gordon Campbell announced a partnership between the Province, the City of Vancouver and the Streethome Foundation to provide \$1.5 million to create up to 200 temporary over-night shelter beds for homeless people living in Vancouver. Each partner is providing \$500,000 to fund the temporary overnight shelter beds for 90 days.

This short-term response complements other provincial housing strategies already underway in Vancouver, including the purchase and renovation of 17 downtown single room occupancy hotels, the development of over 1,400 new affordable housing units on 14 city-owned sites, 687 beds funded through the Emergency Shelter Program, and 498 beds provided through the Extreme Weather Response Program.

Shelter and Outreach reporting

Keeping up with reporting and data entry can be a daunting and frustrating experience. Most outreach and shelter staff prefer to spend time with clients rather than with paper work and computers. Understandably so. After all, helping clients stabilize their lives and regain housing is the core work of both programs. So, what benefit do clients gain from agencies providing timely and accurate information?

Information provided through the database is used to help identify what practices and programs are most effective getting people inside so that these can be used in other areas of the province. Both the shelter and outreach programs have gone through significant increases in service levels and number of sites over the last couple of years. The information gleaned from the database is critical to demonstrate the continued need for the increased funding. It helps to maintain and build the strength of the programs over time.

We encourage you to enter your stats on a daily basis – to set aside a few minutes each day for this rather than scrambling at the last minute and needing to find a much greater amount of time to enter a complete month's worth of information. The absolute latest you must have the information inputted by is the fifth business day of each month.

If you are experiencing difficulties using the system or have questions about it, please call the Outreach and Shelter Database Support Desk at 604-454-5435 or toll free at 1-866-465-6873 (ext. 5435). You can also send an e-mail to OSDBSupport@bchousing.org.

Our guiding principles in action

At the heart of the frameworks for the Emergency Shelter Program, Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program and the Homeless Outreach Program are four guiding principles: core services that are accessible and client-focused; transparent and accountable operations; a welcoming, safe and secure service environment; and a collaborative and innovative sector environment. We are highlighting one of the principles in each issue of Building Connections, looking at ways various agencies demonstrate these.

A collaborative and innovative sector environment

Among its many roles, Mission Community Services Society operates an emergency shelter and provides services through the Homeless Outreach Program. As an integral part of its community, the society also administers the award-winning Heart of Mission program.

Heart of Mission was introduced in 2004 as a way of addressing the



needs of local panhandlers and homeless people, while also giving area residents something to hand out instead of cash when approached for money. The program was developed in conjunction with the Mission Downtown Coalition and has involvement from many other community partners.

“People can purchase \$2 red cards to give to those in need,” said Executive Director Joy Cox. “The card allows recipients to access basic services such as a meal, clothing, shower, small toiletry bag, laundry services, cup of coffee, and bus ticket. The program has involvement from many service providers, social agencies, the United Way, local health authorities, the District of Mission, the business community, schools, and local citizens.”

Two years ago, Heart of Mission introduced a gold card which is intended for homeless Mission residents. The card acts as a form of identification that is recognized in the district and the services available on the card are tailored to a specific client. There is a self-application process for intake into the program and clients and mentors have to make a minimum one-year commitment to the plan and stick to it.

“As part of the gold card program, mentors connect with clients and help them achieve their goals,” said Joy. “The purpose of the gold card is to help the clients re-integrate into mainstream society and participate in positive community activities.”

The program has been successful in reducing the number of panhandlers in Mission and has garnered considerable interest from other B.C. municipalities as well as from groups as far away as Vermont. Joy is happy to share program information with interested providers. You can contact her at 604-826-3634; mcssexecdir@shaw.biz.ca.

Supportive Housing Registration service for Vancouver

BC Housing, in collaboration with non-profit housing providers, the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Coastal Health, and the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, has created a new service to manage the allocation of supportive housing units in Vancouver (initially focused on the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel units and vacancies in the Downtown Eastside). The Supportive Housing Registration (SHR) service will ensure that people applying for supportive housing are matched to SROs and support services that best meet their needs.

A SHR office will open later in January at the Marble Arch Hotel and applications will be available from there as well as from BC Housing’s website. We encourage shelter and outreach providers to assist clients in filling out and submitting applications and will be discussing the process with shelter and outreach providers early in the new year. Once a completed application is received, supportive housing registration staff will contact you to arrange for a client assessment.

Points of view

There are many philosophical approaches to the best way to end homelessness. In an effort to create a constructive dialogue on diverse perspectives, Building Connections invites operators to share their views on a variety of topics.

In this issue, Klee Hunter, Manager of Emergency and Affordable Housing of Stepping Stones in Nelson and Major Maurice Davis, Corps Officer, The Salvation Army Men’s Shelter in Penticton were asked about the benefits of flexible versus fixed lengths of stay at shelters.

Major Maurice Davis (MD): We changed from a fixed length of stay (five days) to a flexible length after we started operating 24/7. At that time, we also dropped the word “emergency” from

the name of our shelter. We have found the new model works better for us as it gives us more options to deal with an individual and where he is coming from.

Klee Hunter (KH): Flexible stays aren't for everyone. Clients need to demonstrate they are working towards goals, particularly finding permanent housing and work. After 30 days, if a client doesn't demonstrate this, we let them go.

MD: Within three days of arriving at the shelter, a client sees a case worker and creates a plan. As long as he is following that plan, he is allowed to stay. He may need some educational upgrades to get a job, after which some time might be needed to save for a damage deposit and the first and last month's rent.

KH: It's hard to create change in people in just 30 days, especially during hard economic times because jobs are more difficult to find. Often clients do not have the ID they need to start working or get a home and it can take a while to get this.

MD: When our shelter had a fixed length of stay, we'd often turn away three or four people a night in the winter. There was a feeling it was better to provide for more people on a short stay basis rather than for fewer people using long stays. Now, when we turn someone away, we refer him to the 1-800 after-hours number or the hostel. We're also hoping that some of the local churches/city/other service providers will help out over the winter too.

KH: It is much harder in winter. We have a partnership with The Salvation Army in Nelson. They have a Winter Emergency Bed program which provides six overnight beds for men, with Stepping Stones providing the staffing.

Terminology

The following definitions are offered in order to clarify what certain terms often used in association with the Emergency Shelter and Homeless Outreach programs mean.

Outreach

Staff make the initial contact with the client "where the client is at" (e.g., the street, the bush, etc.). The client is most likely not to access services unless the services come to him/her; thus making them especially at risk.

In reach

The client initiates contact at a shelter, drop-in centre, or other venue for services by the provider. This also includes services that the shelter or drop-in centre initiates for the client with an external agency (regardless of if the services are provided in the shelter or drop-in centre or in the external agency's offices).

Year-round shelter beds

These beds provide support to clients to help them connect to housing and other support services required to break the cycle of homelessness. In addition, they meet clients' immediate essential needs for shelter, nutrition and hygiene until more permanent housing can be obtained. They are open 365 days a year.

Seasonal shelter beds (formerly referred to as cold wet weather beds)

There are very few seasonal shelter beds remaining in the province. Most were converted to year-round operation with funding from the 2007 budget. The seasonal beds that still exist are

available on a seasonal basis based on local demand patterns. They open on a specified date and remain open until a specified closing date. Under the Emergency Shelter Program framework, seasonal shelter beds are required to meet the same standards and outcomes as year-round beds.

Extreme weather response shelter spaces

These are extra spaces for homeless people during periods of extreme winter weather. They are a crisis response to extreme conditions that augment ongoing shelter programs. These spaces are dependent on volunteers, provide limited services (usually just overnight accommodation), and open and close with changes in the weather.

Bedbug information sheet

BC Housing has created an information sheet about everyone's least favourite house guest. You can download the information from www.bchousing.org/resources/Programs/ESP/ESP_Documents/Bed_Bug_Information_Sheet.pdf.

Sample policies

The Emergency Shelter Program and Homeless Outreach Program frameworks require service providers to have policies in regards to specific situations. BC Housing has created some sample policies to help guide you in the development of your own. This document will be posted soon to the resources section for Emergency Shelter Providers on BC Housing's website: www.bchousing.org/programs/ESP/shelter_operators.

news

Simplified application and intake process for income assistance

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development has completed a pilot project to simplify its processes. The changes were rolled out province-wide December 1, 2008.

There are now new procedures which provide a range of options for all client situations. These options include a verbal or signed consent, providing access options and allowing third party checks and other work to be completed before the eligibility interview.

Clients will now only share their situation once, and have the option to have their identity information, including a photograph, entered into the new Client Identification Form. This process is a means of documenting client identity in those situations where formal documents are absent. Together, these options promote quicker access to regular income assistance and direct deposit, and facilitate better long-term planning on the client's behalf.

For more information, contact your local Employment and Assistance Office.

Additional security deposit for people who are homeless

The Province has made changes in Ministry of Housing and Social Development regulations whereby a third security deposit may be issued to people with two outstanding deposits if they are fleeing domestic violence, are required to move because their rental home is being sold, demolished or condemned, or are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

For more information, contact your local Employment and Assistance Office.

Homelessness Resource Center

Shelter and outreach providers may be interested in accessing this American-based online resource centre. A community of providers, consumers, policymakers, researchers, and public agencies share knowledge and promising practices to address homelessness and related issues.

For more information: <http://www.nrchmi.samhsa.gov>.

Relationship between homelessness and traumatic brain injury

A study by researchers at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute shows that more than half of homeless people in Toronto have experienced a traumatic brain injury. For 70 per cent of these people, their injury occurred before their first experience of homelessness. The findings indicated that early screening of people with traumatic brain injuries may help prevent homelessness.

The study's findings were published in the October 7, 2008 issue of the Canadian Medical Association Journal: www.cmaj.ca.

Research on homelessness and social connections

The Sociology of Community Connections by John G. Bruhn contains a chapter on the relationship between social connections and homeless people. The book provides a gender analysis and discusses the value of social networks for people who are homeless and/or poor.

For more information: <http://www.springer.com/social+sciences/sociology/book/978-0-306-48615-9>

CMHA Community Navigator Program

Staff with the Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division are working as community navigators to provide people with mental illnesses with improved access to supports such as mental health services and a higher level of income assistance. Community navigators in CHMA's branches in Kelowna, the Kootenays, North and West Vancouver, Williams Lake/100 Mile House, and Prince George are working with homeless outreach workers to identify people who may require assistance and to help them to fill out application forms, secure accommodation, and find doctors who can assess and treat their mental illnesses. The program focuses on people currently receiving income assistance who may also be eligible for higher levels of income support, such as persons with persistent multiple barriers or persons with disabilities through the BC Employment and Assistance Program.

Youth outreach workers at SkyTrain stations

The Ministry of Children and Family Development is providing funding for several community-based crime prevention pilot programs for at-risk youth. The first of these, I-RAYL (Inter-Regional At-Risk Youth Link), was launched December 8, 2008. I-RAYL works to prevent youth crime before it starts by linking young people to community supports and resources in hopes that early intervention at a younger age will prevent future incidents of crime while keeping them safe.

I-RAYL focuses on youth aged 10 to 15 who find themselves drawn into the increasingly popular "social hubs" for homeless and at-risk youth at the SkyTrain stations. I-RAYL's youth workers will connect these vulnerable youth with existing outreach resources to help positively affect their behaviour. The goal of I-RAYL is to prevent more serious incidents of crime on the SkyTrain, in the community, and in the lives of youth as they become older.

Charities and Not-for-Profit Law Conference 2009

The Continuing Legal Education Society of BC is hosting this comprehensive one-day conference on February 13 at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver. Participation is recommended for people who advise, volunteer for, or work with charities or not-for-profits, specifically lawyers, directors and officers, executive directors, accountants, trustees, fundraisers, and gift planners. Advising charities and acting as a volunteer or board member for a not-for-profit or foundation has become a complicated matter with implications attached. It is critical to understand the rules and responsibilities surrounding these organizations.

To download the conference brochure:

www.bchousing.org/resources/Programs/ESP/newsletter/January_2009/Charities%20AD_and_Not-for-Profit_Conference_2009.pdf.

Financial Fitness workshops

United Community Services Coop is presenting Vancity's series of three day-long sessions on financial, accounting, and legal matters beneficial to not-for-profit organizations. These Financial Fitness workshops are happening February 17, 18 and 19 at Surrey Community Services Society. The focus on February 17 will be Building a Financially Healthy Not-for-Profit Organization. On February 18, participants will learn more about Running a Financially Healthy Not-for-Profit. And, on February 19, the topic is Maintaining a Financially Healthy Not-for-Profit. These workshops are designed to provide senior staff and board members with tools to develop more financial stability and sustainability.

Space is limited and a waitlist is expected. For more information and registration details, check this link:

www.ucscoop.com/uploads/vw/LP/vwLPeXsm0T5RVXNIez2DJA/FinancialFitness_PromoFnl.pdf

service profile

The Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program in Kamloops

When BC Housing announced the creation of its Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program, the Kamloops Native Housing Society (KNHS) was eager to get involved. The society provides low-income housing to Aboriginal families but was not set up to provide outreach services. KNHS staff approached their colleagues at the AIDS Society of Kamloops (ASK) Wellness Centre for support. ASK has several outreach workers in the region and also manages the Whistler Inn (currently under renovation), a 28-unit development for people at risk of homelessness. ASK was happy to partner with KNHS to provide mentorship and guidance.

On ASK's recommendation, KNHS hired Rhyannon Alexander as its Aboriginal Homeless Outreach worker; she started in May 2008. From then until mid-December, Rhyannon estimates opening over 140 cases and finding housing for about 25 per cent of those people. It's a difficult job in a tight rental market and where rents often far exceed what people on income assistance can afford.

"I get a lot of my referrals from ASK and the Ministry of Housing and Social Development," said Rhyannon. "When I first meet clients, I talk with them about their immediate needs



Rhyannon Alexander

and connect them with income assistance and find them a place to live. Last week, I settled Mary into a motel because it was the only place available. We got her some money for shelter and I went to the food bank to find her some basics. My husband hunts and I was able to give her some moose meat, which she really appreciated. My goal with all clients is to establish a relationship and gain trust. Then I can see if they are willing to go to treatment and detox.”

Rhyannon also spends time networking with private landlords and explaining the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program to them. She spends some time advocating for people experiencing situational homelessness but is shifting her focus more to helping those who are chronically homeless.

“I work a lot with ASK Wellness as they have so many resources already in place with landlords as well as for fast-tracking people with the ministry,” said Rhyannon. “Working with them has made the job much easier.”

ASK Executive Director Bob Hughes agrees. “It’s been a really incredible partnership. Rhyannon brings so much to the table, particularly cultural sensitivity. It’s been very important to add an Aboriginal component to the Homeless Outreach Program in Kamloops.”

new faces

With the reorganization of BC Housing’s Operations Branch, there have been changes in who is responsible for the Emergency Shelter Program in the Vancouver Coastal Region. Please update your contact information accordingly.



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tips and tools

Self-care for providers working with homeless people

Helping people who are homeless can be very rewarding. It can also be incredibly demanding and stressful and exact a large personal toll. When people are passionate about their work, it’s easy to overlook signs of burnout. But, without conscious attention to self-care, your effectiveness and ultimately your health will suffer.

The inability to set appropriate boundaries, working long hours, limited resources, competing priorities, trying to live up to clients' and your own high expectations all contribute to an unenviable stress load as well as fatigue.

Recognize the signs

Physical signs: loss of appetite; difficulty falling asleep; restlessness; headaches; changes in sleeping; increased blood pressure; changes in eating habits; increased susceptibility to colds, flu, and infections; change in libido; changes in smoking habits; and changes in alcohol and drug consumption.

Emotional signs : feeling helpless, overwhelmed, inadequate, fragile, ambiguous, and/or vulnerable; unable to cope or go on; increased mood swings; decreased motivation; feeling burned out; crying more frequently and easily; isolation; changes in communication patterns and other relationship dynamics; and withdrawal.

Cognitive signs: confusion; difficulty making decisions; difficulty problem solving; memory blanks; difficulty concentrating or paying attention.

How to cope

You can increase your resistance to stressful circumstances by taking care of yourself and staying healthy.

- Go for a walk during a lunch or coffee break. Make physical activity a priority and a regular habit.
- Eat sensibly. Drink plenty of water; avoid excessive use of caffeine and alcohol.
- Know and respect your limits. If you feel exhausted, take time off. Take your vacation time.
- Spend time with family, friends and mentors.
- Spend time on your own (if it's right for you, meditate or pray).
- Read (preferably something not related to your work).
- Laugh. There are many documented physical benefits to laughter. A good and appropriate sense of humour can also go a long way to defusing stress. Just be careful not to make fun of or degrade other people.
- If you can't sleep, get up and do something relaxing and enjoyable.
- Share your feelings and issues with your colleagues or close friends. Ask them for advice.
- Listen to your friends. They can often see if you are stressed out before you can.
- Engage in hobbies or activities you are passionate about but are unrelated to your work.
- Consider and take care of all aspects of your health (mental, physical, emotional and spiritual).
- Take time to do things for you – taking care of yourself will make it easier to take care of others.

Seeking help

If you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope, it is important to seek assistance. Speak to a health professional such as a psychologist, family doctor, psychiatrist, social worker or nurse.

Since April 2008, BC Housing and service providers for the Emergency Shelter Program, Homeless Outreach Program and the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program have been keeping track of the number of people housed through these programs in a common format. The stats below reflect the combined stats for these three programs.

Statistic 1

Number of people housed in the first three quarters of 2008/09 (April 1 – December 31, 2008): ~3,400.

Statistic 2

Number of people who remained housed at the end of December: ~2,800 (>80%).