

January 20, 2009

Vancouver Foundation gives \$745,000 to help homeless youth

Vancouver Foundation will distribute \$745,000 in multi-year grants to local organizations that provide innovative housing solutions for homeless youth. The grants will support programs that help at-risk youth secure their own apartments, and help them to become self-sufficient.

“Currently, there are 300-700 youth who are homeless or at risk of being homeless in Vancouver,” says Faye Wightman, President and CEO of Vancouver Foundation. “We believe that if we can address the housing needs of youth, and help stabilize their lives early on, we can prevent them from becoming street entrenched and break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.”

Youth — especially those aged 19-24 — face enormous challenges to finding housing in metro Vancouver. Lack of employment, little income, the inability to pay damage deposits, and discrimination from landlords all make it extraordinarily difficult for at-risk youth to secure housing.

At the same time, these youth no longer have access to the services and supports available to children. Youth who have been in foster system are particularly vulnerable. (A recent University of Victoria report from the Research Initiatives for Social Change — entitled *When Youth Age Out of Care-Where to From There?* — indicated 45 per cent of youth who had been in the foster care system, and were followed for a year, experienced homelessness within a few years of leaving care.)

The Foundation’s Youth Homelessness Initiative recently awarded grants to the following organizations:

Broadway Youth Resource Centre \$222,388

To expand BYRC’s existing housing program to 70 units (from 20). This program helps at-risk youth find market rental apartments, then liaises with the landlord, signs the lease, guarantees rent and damages, and then sublets the apartment back to youth (sometimes offering rent subsidies as well). The goal is for the youth to take over the lease.

Watari Research Association \$330,000

To help find housing for young pregnant and parenting women who are dealing with addictions and/or mental health issues. The organization will use the funding to provide housing subsidies and one-to-one supports. Stable homes for these mothers will promote healthier pregnancies, encourage better parenting, and these women keep their children.

Bladerunners and Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services \$95,000

This grant will help Bladerunners establish a formal housing program to work with young people to secure housing before and after they find employment. This will complement Bladerunners' main service, which is to secure employment on construction sites for homeless, aboriginal youth.

Family Services of Greater Vancouver \$95,000

To fund a staff person in Family Services' 24/7 drop-in centre who will focus specifically on finding and securing housing for homeless youth age 19-24. The grant will also be used to help provide the necessary supports young people need to achieve housing stability.

"Despite the difficult financial times, Vancouver Foundation feels it's important to invest in this vulnerable population," added Wightman. "We do this with the knowledge that what we invest now will have compound benefits – to the lives of youth and to the future of our community as a whole. When the economy is in a slump, it is even more important to help people who live on the margins."

With 1,200 funds, and assets of almost \$600 million, Vancouver Foundation is Canada's largest community foundation. www.vancouverfoundation.ca

Contact:

Catherine Clement

VP Communications, Vancouver Foundation

604.688.2204 catherinec@vancouverfoundation.ca