



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SOCIAL PLANNING COWICHAN SEEKS COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

DUNCAN - Social Planning Cowichan is currently involved in many initiatives and is seeking community input on the work being done.

Those in the Cowichan Region remember well the tragic fire in September, 2005 that occurred in a vacant building in Duncan injuring six people and resulted in one person losing his life. As a result, the issue of inadequate shelter was brought to the forefront in the Cowichan Valley.

At the time there were a number of inter-related initiatives underway that were attempting to address immediate needs, primarily centralized through MLA Doug Routley's office. These initiatives encompassed the topics of temporary emergency shelter, permanent homeless shelter and affordable housing. However, service providers and decision makers faced ongoing challenges of developing and implementing viable solutions to the multifaceted range of issues that surrounded homelessness in the Region. It became apparent that research and collaborative planning would be essential to provide the foundation for addressing this issue.

Social Planning Cowichan was identified by the community as the organization to lead a coordinated, well-researched, strategic action plan with short and long term solutions. Social Planning Cowichan developed partnerships and worked collaboratively with the community to secure the location and the funding of a permanent Homeless Shelter and Resource Centre. The location of the shelter was chosen to allow easy access to supportive services such as the Employment and Income Assistance Office, Canadian Mental Health Association, The House at Cowichan District Hospital, etc. Once established, Social Planning Cowichan transitioned the Homeless Centre Project to the Cowichan Valley Branch of Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) to oversee construction and operation. It is expected that CMHA will break ground on the project this month.

The Homeless Shelter will have 15 permanent emergency beds, plus small transition apartments, to serve the community needs in this area. Social Planning Cowichan is very proud of this accomplishment. As Laura Stark, chair of Homeless to Opportunity (H2O) has said, "Social Planning Cowichan was the critical conduit in enabling the Resource Center to evolve. The organization was able to hub information, secure funding and contractual commitments and prepare for CMHA to take over."

However, the community has said that there is still a need for adequate affordable housing in the Region. With this in mind Social Planning Cowichan is working on recommendations from research conducted for the Adequate Housing Report and has established the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate. The



135 Third St.
Duncan, BC V9L 1R9
Tel: 250.746.1004 Fax: 250.746.8819
E-Mail: info@socialplanningcowichan.org
Web: www.socialplanningcowichan.org

Directorate contains representation from a broad range of service providers, local government, community members, and business representatives. The Directorate is now moving forward with research and strategic planning to create a plan of action to address the housing needs of all communities in our Region.

Homelessness and Affordable Housing are a complex issue interrelated with systemic causes such as poverty, overextended community services, lack of available housing, high property and construction costs, lack of daycare and training opportunities, etc. Looking at this broader picture of social issues and with input from the community, Social Planning Cowichan undertook the next step of completing the report Child Care in the Cowichan Valley Region. Quality, affordable, accessible child care is crucial to the social and economic welfare of the Cowichan Region. The successful development of our children, especially in the early years, has a long term impact on our region.

Currently there is a critical lack of licensed child care spaces in the Cowichan Region, with enough spaces to serve only 48 percent of the estimated 4,862 children under the age of 12 who need child care. For the estimated 1,047 children aged three and under who need child care, there are only 165 licensed spaces.

Three main areas of concern were identified by key stakeholders and other community informants on the issue of childcare. These three areas of concern are: shortage of child care spaces, lack of funding and staff recruitment and retention. To date, under Social Planning Cowichan's guidance, a Regional Childcare Task Force has been formed and is moving ahead with action to address these main areas of concern. Representation on the Regional Child Care Task Force is broad, with representatives in the Child Care and Education fields from Lake Cowichan, Ladysmith, First Nations, Malaspina University-College (now Vancouver Island University), Duncan, Mill Bay, Cobble Hill, and North Cowichan. This is a group of dedicated professionals who understand the implications of receiving quality early childhood education. One such professional, Mary Dolan of Growing Together, states the following, "Early Childhood Educators in the Valley, and in fact around BC have been very impressed by the work done on the Childcare in the Cowichan Valley Region report. It has been very helpful to families to have the information clarified and shared. Social Planning Cowichan is a very credible organization and is very concerned about social issues. This group is concerned with social issues such as affordable housing and quality childcare, and must move forward with their work. The community gave Social Planning Cowichan the mandate to address these issues and they are listening."

The Chair of Social Planning Cowichan, Candace Spilsbury, is also involved in Cowichan's literacy initiative which aims to create a Community Literacy Plan. The Literacy Now Cowichan vision statement is: Literacy, as a lifelong journey, will be enhanced for everyone in Cowichan. "Life-long journey" shows that literacy continues throughout one's life. "For everyone" means across all communities, among all cultural groups, and among all age groups. Three goals have been established by Literacy Now Cowichan to achieve the vision:

- Goal 1: To coordinate and integrate literacy programs and services.
- Goal 2: To support literacy programs for those most in need.
- Goal 3: To encourage employer-supported literacy programs.

This year Social Planning Cowichan intends to continue with work in the areas of priority and update the 2006 Status of the Community Report, which measures the ten determinants of social health in the Region: Arts, Culture & Recreation; Community Involvement; Economy and Employment; Education; Food Security; Health, Community & Social Services; Housing and the Built Environment; Natural Environment; Public Safety; and Transportation. Working with new statistics from the 2006 Canadian census data and from the recommendations received in seeking feedback from the Community on the



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report, Social Planning Cowichan intends to broaden the scope of the first report to better represent the needs of each of the areas in our broad Region. Social Planning Cowichan intends to take this a step further and work on gaining commitment from service providers, local government, individuals, service clubs, businesses and churches to build on the strengths in our community and address gaps and limitations that exist.

Social Planning Cowichan is working on a new initiative related to community implications and planning for regional growth, especially the aging population. A researcher is currently compiling information on growth projections and impact on the ten determinants of social health for each of our geographical communities in the region.

Social Planning Cowichan is also working closely with the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) and intends to assist with its social legacy of building strong cross cultural relationships and harmony post-games. This cross cultural relations initiative will focus on celebrating multiculturalism in the Cowichan Region.

Social Planning Cowichan is always looking to involve the Community in the work it does. We are seeking feedback on the above activities and on any other thoughts or concerns that the community may have. Community members are encouraged to contact Social Planning Cowichan at 135 Third Street, Duncan.

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Media Contacts:

Candace Spilsbury (250) 746-1004

Michelle Nowzek (250) 746-1004



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Duncan, BC V9L 1R9
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