



## Cowichan Housing Association

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **COWICHAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION LAUNCHED**

Following 7 years of research, planning and community consultation, a new organization has been formed to support affordable housing in the Cowichan Valley. Newly named the Cowichan Housing Association, the new organization will be a coordinating body for affordable housing resources and services in the Cowichan Region, with a primary focus on the prevention of homelessness.

“This marks a new stage in our work,” says Brigid Reynolds, board member with the new organization. “Through the contributions of many individuals and agencies over the past seven years, we have gained a greater understanding of the issues and we have developed a number of programs to serve members of our community who are facing a variety of housing-related challenges. In establishing the new society, we are moving closer toward the goal of developing more affordable housing units in the region.”

The newly formed organization came about following years of work led by Social Planning Cowichan, through its Regional Affordable Housing Directorate (RAHD). From the beginning, the goal of Social Planning was to incubate and support work on affordable housing until a new organization could be formed.

“We are thrilled to be part of the formation of the Cowichan Housing Association,” said Kathleen Sheppard, Executive Director with Social Planning Cowichan. “There is no question of the need for more affordable housing in our community and having an independent organization that can focus all of its efforts on preventing homelessness will greatly benefit the Cowichan Valley.”

RAHD was established as a committee of Social Planning Cowichan in 2007 and brought together a diverse group of community members who were concerned about homelessness and the lack of affordable housing in the region. In its early years, RAHD developed several benchmark reports, such as *Inadequate Shelter in the Cowichan* and a *Regional Housing Strategy*. Recently, RAHD has expanded operations into such programs as Ready to Rent, a small rental assistance fund, hosting

workshops on tenants' rights, Homeless Action Week - Day of Services, and hiring two housing support workers.

“Our homelessness prevention work has grown considerably in the last two years,” explains Regional Affordable Housing Coordinator, Joy Emmanuel. “Through the work that is already happening in the community, and the complimentary programs we offer, the regional safety net for homelessness prevention has been growing stronger.”

In addition to working on homelessness prevention, the new housing society is engaged in developing resources and programs to facilitating the creation of more affordable housing in the region. To that end, a primary focus for this coming year is to engage with local governments around the establishment of a regional affordable housing trust fund.

Activities led by the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate will become part of the new housing society and RAHD will continue to be an open table where interested stakeholders can stay informed and provide feedback on our activities. If you would like to find out more about the work of the new housing society, you are invited to the upcoming meeting on Tuesday, February 10, 2015, from 5 to 7 pm in the Koksilah Room of Island Savings Centre.

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