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March/April 2011

partners in touch

Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Newsletter

Monday, May 2 is an important day for all Canadians. As we deliberate on our votes in this federal election, I'd like to update you on two bills that were before Parliament for some time.

Bill C-304 would have given the federal government six months to consult with the public and report back on how it would develop a National Housing Strategy. The bill was on track for final reading in March, but with the federal election call, this private member's bill (tabled by MP Libby Davies) falls off the list. If Ms Davies is not re-elected, the bill disappears and will only re-emerge if another MP decides to champion the idea and re-creates a new bill for submission.

Similarly, Denise Savoie (MP Victoria) developed and sponsored a bill to stimulate private investment in affordable housing, and to allocate \$2 billion in unused Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation surplus to affordable housing projects. This is also dead.


A lot of research and hard work went into those two pieces of draft legislation and we can't afford to lose that effort. Canada needs a National Housing Strategy and ongoing federal funding, and these issues must remain a top priority.

While delivering presentations across the Capital Region over the past year, I have been struck by the growing awareness and understanding of the depth and reach of homelessness. Research evidence from across Canada confirms a significant mismatch between what people can afford and the expensive housing that is available.

Please urge all federal candidates in your area to make affordable housing a national priority. At the Coalition, we are seeking opportunities to meet with regional candidates to discuss the importance of an affordable housing agenda and how they intend to address it if they are elected.



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In this issue

[Coalition Updates](#)

[Partner Updates](#)

[Kudos](#)

[Partner Profile](#)

[In the News](#)

Get informed

[Coalition website](#)

[Reports and Studies](#)



Many thanks to our funders!



COALITION UPDATES

Staff Update

This is one of those bad news-good news stories. We are sad to say that our executive director **Jill Clements** is not returning from parental leave. In fact, she's off to Edmonton to spend time with her young family and pursue new projects. We are so grateful for her contribution in setting up the Coalition, leading us through the development of our strategic and business plans, and her passion and ideas that helped shape the framework of the Coalition.

The good news, however, is that **Debbie Thompson** has agreed to extend her contract and continue working with the Coalition and our partners.

Homeless Count Trends

We've been watching the results as other cities return their numbers for annual counts. While we know they likely use differing methodologies, the results are largely the same: homelessness is increasing in 2011 in many North American cities.

- **New Hampshire** revealed an **18% increase** since 2010, employing the same point-in time count both years.
- **Seattle** shows a **decrease of 11%** in people who are homeless, again employing the same methodology.
- **Vancouver** completed its count in March, using the same methods as in 2008. While the numbers aren't in yet, anecdotal evidence suggests there is an increase.

Hold the Date!

June 28th will be the **Coalition's 3rd Annual General Meeting** at St. John the Divine Church Hall from 11:30am to 1:30pm. More details to follow. If you haven't **renewed your membership**, please do so in order to vote.



Fast Fact

Imagine Canada

released their **2011 Election Kit**, which includes a number of briefing notes on key issues facing the sector, identified through their National Engagement Strategy. The kit also provides information on what charities can and can't do during an election campaign. For more information, visit: www.imaginecanada.ca.

Who Are We?

The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

is a partnership of service providers, non-profit organizations, all levels of government, business and the faith community.

Our mission is to end homelessness in the Capital Region by 2018.

Streets to Homes Continues Success

Coalition partners were sad to bid goodbye to **Coral Trisko**, the strategic coordinator for **Streets to Homes Pilot Program**. Replacing her is **Brad Crewson**, who comes to us with many years of experience in the field. Testament to the program's success, 65 people have been housed through Streets to Homes, with 42 in private market housing. Thanks to **BC Housing** for the rent supplements that are integral to the Streets to Homes success story.

Youth Video Contest on Now

Y.A.H. (Youth Action for Homelessness) is seeking youth aged 14-21 to submit videos of up to five minutes long. The criteria is simple: for youth to explore the issue of homelessness through their perspectives and voices. The focus of the videos can be to educate, challenge myths, or simply raise awareness about homelessness in our community. Contest closes April 30th. See our website for [more details](#) and how to submit.

Personal and Household Items Needed

We are seeking **donations of small items** such as combs, brushes, socks, deodorant, shampoo, diapers and feminine hygiene products for a family event at the end of April.

Coalition Connect for Families will provide services such as haircuts, ID replacement, foot care, acupuncture and more, plus a hot lunch and a gift bag full of items vital for daily living. Please email Coalition Connect coordinator [Mary Gidney](#) for a list of items we need donated, or check the Coalition website for updates. This event is for families served by the **Victoria Native Friendship Centre** and **Burnside Gorge Community Association**.

Homeless Prevention Fund Saves Housing

Launched on December 31, 2010, the **Homeless Prevention Fund** has provided grants to 20 individuals and

6 families. Most of the recipients are employed and don't make enough money for rent, hydro and food. Those who receive income assistance will not have any money deducted from their cheques thanks to an agreement with **Ministry of Social Development**. A [number of partners](#) are working together to make this fund possible. Our thanks to the **donors** for the challenge grant through **Victoria Foundation**.

Victoria Street Soccer Needs Players and Volunteers

The newly-formed [Victoria Street Soccer](#) team is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization that provides an opportunity for the vulnerable members of our community to play soccer in a fun and supportive environment. It is free for soccer players, who includes people who are homeless, in transition or living in low-income housing, First Nations, people struggling with mental health or addictions, and youth at risk. The team is looking for people to play on the team, and volunteers to help with outreach and financial support.

PARTNER UPDATES

Client Voter Registration

People who are homeless or have unstable housing can still vote - but many are not registered. Please refer your clients to the following registration clinics sponsored by **Elections Canada**:

- Monday, April 11th at Salvation Army, 525 Johnson Street, from 10am to 2pm
- Tuesday, April 12th at Rock Bay Landing, 535 Ellice Street, from 12:30 to 5pm
- Wednesday, April 13th at Our Place, 919 Pandora Avenue, from 12 noon to 5pm.

Further clinics will be posted on the Coalition's [website](#) when the dates are determined.

Twestival Funds Lunches and

Computers

Local twitter folks tried to get their hands on tickets for the sold out Victoria Twestival, the third iteration of the twitter fundraising event held around the globe each March. The \$7,608 raised for **Cool Aid** will pay for lunches for women at **Sandy Merriman House** emergency shelter and for new public access computers at the **Downtown Community Centre**.

Camas Gardens Opens

Pacifica Housing is welcoming its first tenants into [Camas Gardens](#) at 950 Humboldt Street. The building has 44 suites, with some reserved for couples and persons with disabilities.

Community Writers Invited to Tell Stories

University of Victoria is inviting beginning writers to participate in a free program that will help them tell their stories. This exciting [course](#) pairs people in the community who have a story to tell with students in UVic's creative writing program. Each community writer will attend weekly one-on-one meetings with a UVic writing mentor who will help them explore imaginative exercises and writing techniques as they learn to craft language into a powerful expression of their experiences.

Social Inclusion Policy Development

UVic has received funding from the **MITACS** Accelerate Program to support the research and development of social inclusion policies and practices. This will dovetail nicely with the [Housing and Harm Reduction policy framework](#). The MITACS program provides 50% of the project funding and requires a 50% match from an industry partner. **Vancity** will be the industry partner. Thank you, Vancity!

EVENTS

A public forum on the living wage is being hosted by the Victoria Labour Council on **Thursday, April 7th**. Location: BCGEU Offices, 2994

Douglas Street, Victoria. 7-9pm. Click here for [more information](#).

Federal all-candidates meeting takes place on **Monday, April 18th** 7:45am at the Ambrosia Centre on Fisgard Street. **Please come out to ask your questions about affordable housing in our region.**

Hosted by Victoria Real Estate Board and Canadian Home Builders Association, tickets are \$22 and include a delicious breakfast. [Email Jim Bennett](#) for tickets.

There are still a couple of seats left in **Cool Aid's** upcoming **Mentor Training** session, a free, community-based training program for individuals interested in supporting someone facing mental health and/or addiction challenges in their "recovery journey." Sessions take place on Tuesday evenings (5:30-8:30) from **April 12th to June 14th**. For more information or to apply please email [Marna](#) or call 250-595-8619.

2nd Annual Divine Sock Hop will raise money for St. John's emergency food and shelter services. Snacks, no-host bar, 50/50 tickets, silent and live auctions and surprises await you. Dance your socks off to Rukus while helping to fill the food bank.

Saturday, May 28th at St. John the Divine Church Hall. Tickets are \$20 at the church office or call Maggie Hayes at 250-592-6807.

PARTNER PROFILES

The **Mustard Seed Street Church** began from a prayer closet on Government Street in the late 70s and was incorporated as a society in 1980. The ministry quickly expanded to a building on Pandora Avenue to meet growing needs. Its outreach to the community continued to grow and, since 1995, the facilities on Queens Avenue have enabled broader services within the existing ministries.

Today, the ministry serves over 7,000 people each month, primarily families (including over 1,500 children).

Mustard Seed services are:

- [Food Bank](#) - the largest on Vancouver Island
- Advocacy Services - referrals re: legal and social matters
- Clothing Bank - free clothing for those in need
- Counseling - services available to clients, families and church members
- Volunteering - dedicated people required for daily operation
- Public Health Nurse - medical advice and over the counter medications
- Prison Visitation - visits to William Head institution
- Christian worship, and children and youth programs
- Friday and Saturday evening meals and ministry
- Wednesday evening bible study
- Senior pastor/Associate pastor/Outreach pastor/Youth pastor
- Daily outreach
- [Hope Farm Healing Centre](#)

The Victoria Real Estate Board

(VREB) was one of the first private sector organizations to join the Coalition and has been a strong supporter and source of volunteers ever since. Here are just some of the ways that VREB has worked hard to help end homelessness in the Capital Region.

- Contributed a cheque for \$10,000 to the Honourable Ted Hughes to help establish the Coalition. It was presented by then-president of VREB Tony Joe.
- Contributes annually to Our Place, Mustard Seed and Victoria Cool Aid Society.
- Established the *Christmas in July* food drive for local food banks, which has contributed over one ton of food.

- Volunteer tirelessly to help end homelessness in the Capital Region. Realtor Tony Joe is our Leadership Council Co-chair and staff member Jim Bennett sits on our Housing Working Group, the CRD Housing Action Team and the United Way Impact Council.
- Over the last five years, VREB has worked with its REALTORS® to locate properties for non-market housing and worked to find creative solutions to housing challenges.

IN THE NEWS

The breakfast program at **Our Place** will [continue](#) for another three months, and possibly longer. Breakfasts at the Pandora Avenue facility were to stop on March 30, the final day of a one-year pilot project that allowed the doors to be opened at 7 a.m.

Pacifica's Camas Gardens attracted local [media](#) attention as the first of 50 new residents settled into their supportive housing suites.

No wonder people wind up in poverty and can't get out! Play this game (from Urban Ministries of Durham, North Carolina) and see if you can make it to the end of the month without going broke: [Playspent](#)

More than 2,000 non-profit community groups across British Columbia will benefit from an immediate injection of \$15 million in new grant funding, **Premier Christy Clark** [announced](#) at the end of March. The restoration of funding will bring more than 500 organizations back up to historical funding levels, including youth arts and culture groups; community service groups such as Rotary and Kiwanis; fairs, festivals and museums; and organizations involved in community education such as parent support services. However, Ms Clark did

admit to the *Globe and Mail* that funding is still about \$20 million short of 2008 funding levels.

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