

a home for every person



the true cost of homelessness

Homelessness in the Lower Mainland is on the rise.

The 2008 Homeless Count revealed there are 2,592 homeless people living on the streets of Metro Vancouver – an increase of 19% since 2005. Over 1,500 people are homeless in Vancouver alone. And this shocking number doesn't even include the nearly 400 people on the streets during the wee hours of the homeless count in March who refused to be interviewed or were sleeping.

On the night of the homeless count, organizations such as RainCity Housing were able to provide emergency housing and support services for about 1,000 of these men and

women. However there were still over 1,500 people out on the streets without adequate shelter or support.

The true costs of a homelessness problem of this magnitude are huge. Over half of the region's homeless population live with mental illness and addiction. The average homeless adult with addiction and/or mental illness costs the public in excess of \$55,000 per year, according to a report commissioned by the BC Ministry of Health in 2006.

If adequate housing and support services were provided, the cost per person would drop to \$37,000 – a savings to taxpayers of tens of millions of dollars *every*

year. And long-term, savings could reach upwards of a \$100 million – *annually* – as capital costs are spread out and provincial costs for health care, jails and shelters decrease.

RainCity Housing's facilities such as the Princess Rooms and the Vivian offer affordable alternatives for the most marginalized among the homeless, with the goal of their return to health, hope and stability. Even the hardest-to-house individual can find a home at RainCity Housing – if room is available.

Unfortunately the demand for housing and support services outstrips what RainCity Housing can currently

provide. If more funding was focused on programs that provide solutions to ending homelessness, rather than paying to manage the symptoms – emergency services, health services, jails, temporary shelters – the benefits to everyone in the community would be enormous.

There is no quick fix to ending homelessness. Reaching this goal requires political will, public support and expansion of services like those offered by RainCity Housing. We believe it is possible to end homelessness, and RainCity Housing will continue to be at the forefront in the fight to achieve our vision of *a home for every person*.

in this issue

1 the true cost of homelessness

2 mark's blog, breaking news, client comments

3 housing first, charity's story

4 barb's story, luncheon update, going the extra mile

“I like the people who work at RainCity Housing. They are like my family and help me with my medication and talk to me when I'm having a hard time. – RainCity Housing Client”



mark's blog

by mark smith,
executive director

Barack Obama wrote a book entitled *The Audacity of Hope*. When I think about ending homelessness, I sometimes feel like it is an audacious hope.

Then, I imagine every person living in their own home - a stable, secure environment where they receive support and attention from a community who cares about their well-being.

At RainCity Housing, we have the responsibility of creating these environments for people living with mental illness, addiction and other challenges.

Creating a home is about much more than just securing space and filling it with furniture. A home is where we live, not just pass time. A home

is about love, security and comfort. A home can express our inner most sense of who we are. So, when we talk about creating housing for people we are really talking about homes.

As our organization grows and expands, we need to be smart about how we're bringing new facilities and programs online. We need to continue to design and deliver innovative, leading-edge programs that help our clients regain their independence and experience an improved quality of life.

Two of our upcoming projects, The Lux and The Shaldon Hotel, are great examples of how we're growing to meet our vision of 'a home for every person'.

The Lux, scheduled to open later this year, will provide housing and support services for 92 people in our community. 24 of those units will be designated as "low barrier" – intended for those who require a lot of support to meet the challenges they face every day.

The Shaldon Hotel is a 54 unit building that will provide medium-barrier housing, with an emphasis on Community Building.

By adding these extra units to RainCity Housing's inventory, we'll be 146 warm, safe, supported people closer to ending homelessness in the Lower Mainland.

did you know?

An estimated 50 – 70 % of homeless people suffer from both mental illness and addiction issues. One in four beds at St. Paul's hospital is being used to treat the homeless, drug addicted and mentally ill.

breaking news

The recently released study commissioned by the Vancouver Police Department, *Lost in Transition: How a Lack of Capacity in the Mental Health System is Failing Vancouver's Mentally Ill and Draining Police Services*, reveals that an estimated 33% of all police service calls deal with the mentally ill. In the Downtown Eastside, this number increases to almost one in every two calls. Police officers, along with the citizens with whom they come in contact, are bearing the burden of a mental health system that lacks resources and efficient information-sharing practices, often with tragic consequences.

did you know?

Windchimes, Princess Rooms, The Vivian and Fraser Street all welcome pets, which is rare among housing providers.

“I felt supported, and I started taking risks. I finally realized that I did not plan to have a mental illness; I learned to accept that many of my choices were not healthy. I learned that I, too, could be an asset to society. Today I am a mother, a sister, a daughter and a friend. From my view in my home at Fraser Street I see lives blossoming.

– Fraser Street Resident”

housing first - so much more than just getting people off the streets

Over the last decade the Lower Mainland has seen an alarming increase in the number of homeless people who live with mental illness, addictions and other challenges. They are the hardest to house because they have adapted behaviours based purely on survival.

The term "Housing First" refers to housing and support programs designed specifically to help these men and women find stability in their lives.

In Vancouver, all mental health housing outside the Downtown Eastside require the person to be stable, have a clear and relevant mental health diagnosis, be receiving mental health treatment, and exhibit few challenging behaviours.

The problem is that people who have been chronically

homeless typically cannot meet the criteria and end up unable to access the housing and supports they so desperately need.

RainCity Housing's "Housing First" programs accept that the chronically homeless will have active addictions, undetermined or untreated mental illness, and survival behaviours that challenge mainstream attempts to build community and achieve stability.

Our programs remove barriers to access housing, accept and work with survival behaviours, and respect people's choices in regards to mental health treatment and substance use. Most importantly, while the focus is on providing "housing first," the goal is not simply to get people off the streets but to provide a comprehensive array of supports that assist

these men and women to achieve stability and move forward with their lives.

The Princess Rooms and the Vivian were explicitly designed as Housing First programs. They provide "low-barrier" housing and intensive support for some of the most chronically homeless and challenging people in our community. To date, the outcomes of these two programs have exceeded our expectations.

RainCity Housing has seen that with the right supports and opportunities, people will choose health and stability and move towards a better life for themselves. In achieving this, our programs are making an effective and necessary contribution to the health and well being of everyone in the community.

Find out more about our programs at www.raincityhousing.org.



Staff in the kitchen area of the Princess Rooms

she comes by her name naturally



"Working at so many of our programs has given me a greater understanding of the housing continuum, and of the importance of supported housing"
- Charity Headley, RainCity Housing staff member

Charity first heard of RainCity Housing, then Triage, in 1986 when her next door neighbour befriended a man who lived in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The man became a regular visitor, playing with her cats and talking about his life and of a place called "Triage" that helped him out from time to time.

Charity shared her own inspiring story about her life journey at our annual fundraising luncheon in April. She understands that providing a home for every person is truly the best thing we can do as a society. As a RainCity Housing employee, she feels good about providing people in need the same type of opportunities and support that were available to her when she needed them.

Charity believes everyone has the inherent right to dignity, making her a natural fit with staff and clients. "I have always been drawn to working with people, and have worked in the related field of addictions treatment for many years. RainCity

Housing is an organization whose values and philosophy closely match my own. It's important to me to have a job where I am able to be true to my personal beliefs - where I know the clients are treated with respect and compassion, and offered a place to be themselves, as these are things I value as important for everyone," says Charity.

Charity has worked at the Triage Shelter, the Vivian, Princess Rooms and Fraser Street facilities. Working in a variety of programs has given her a greater understanding and appreciation of the continuum of housing and support options offered by RainCity Housing.

Charity has seen a lot of change as the organization has grown to support the needs of the community. But Charity says the biggest change she has seen is within herself. "Our services benefit not only our clients but the whole community, which I feel is truly being of service to myself."

fraser street opens new doors for Barb

Barb was a practicing lawyer until 1999. Then she began to suffer from severe depression and turned to alcohol as a means of self-medication.

Over the next eight years, Barb was debilitated by her illness and addiction. She was hospitalized eight times for extended periods, twice for as long as five months.

Between hospital stays Barb had to find a place to live. Because she could no longer work she could not afford to live on her own, so relied on shared accommodation. Things would be fine in the beginning, but her mental illness and addiction issues would inevitably disrupt the harmony in the household, resulting in Barb being asked to leave.

This would deepen her downward spiral and she would end up back in the hospital. Each episode of mental illness worsened her condition, to the point where she began experiencing episodes of psychosis.

The continued instability in housing and lack of programs to help her manage her mental illness and addiction further deteriorated Barb's situation. Fortunately Barb had many personal supports around her and she was always able to find a temporary place to stay

between homes. She even had two years in transitional housing but she was unable to attain stability for either her addiction or mental illness.

Barb's life turned around when she found out about the Fraser Street facility. Fraser Street specializes in housing for people who live with mental illness and addictions and want to live substance-free. Barb was one of the original residents and has been sober and managing her mental illness since June 2007. Barb feels that being at Fraser Street and among a community of support - including staff, residents, pets, her counsellor at the Centre for Concurrent Disorders, and the local community - has been instrumental in her road to recovery.

Today Barb is taking courses at BCIT in Human Resources Management. Barb now sees her future from a happy perspective. She looks forward to working in non-profit as her way of giving back to the community. **Way to go Barb, we are so proud of you!**



Resident's Room at Fraser Street

extra extra!

A record \$60,000 was raised at our annual Shining a Light on Homelessness event AND Mark Smith discloses his secret recipe for Singapore Singing Chicken! You can view it at www.raincityhousing.org.

Our warmest thanks go to BC Housing, a Presenting Sponsor, and to our other generous sponsors: The Vancouver Sun, Progressive Builders, RBC Dominion Securities, DYS Architects, Executive Strategies, GBL Architecture, G&F Financial, Manning Elliott, and Marsh Canada. Thank you!



Emcee Shelagh Rogers (CBC Radio), Susan Mader (RainCity Housing) and Marie Robinson (Board Member) at Shining a Light Homelessness event.

your support allows us to go the extra mile

your donation helps to provide:

- a trusted staff person to accompany clients to medical appointments
- administration of client's medications to ensure mental health treatments can be effective
- helping clients manage – and save – their money to buy useful things
- client honorariums for volunteer tasks such as helping in the kitchen or peer-leading an activity
- insurance and maintenance on the car and van so staff can take clients places
- organized activities that get tenants out of their rooms, away from hanging out on the streets, and out of the Downtown Eastside
- purchase and maintenance of computers for client's use
- furniture, blankets, books, craft supplies, food, coffee ...
- meals year-round and gifts for every tenant at Christmas

Your donation goes a very long way. *Every* donation helps.



RainCity Housing and Support Society

191 Alexander Street Phone: 604.662.7023
Vancouver BC Fax: 604.254.3703
Canada V6A 1B8 Email: info@raincityhousing.org
www.raincityhousing.org

please join our community of support today

Your donation will help provide safe housing, greater sense of purpose and improved quality of life for people living with mental illness, addictions and other challenges. Donate online at www.raincityhousing.org or contact Lucy Pearson at 604-215-3048, or lpearson@raincityhousing.org.

a home for every person