

HOMELESSNESS

Salt Spring joins 20,000 Homes

Campaign goal of permanent housing by July 2018

BY ELIZABETH NOLAN
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Salt Spring Community Services has signed onto a national initiative that strives to house 20,000 of Canada's most vulnerable homeless people by July 1, 2018.

The 20,000 Homes Campaign starts from the evidence-supported premise that permanent housing is a necessary first step to helping people work on the underlying problems that can cause homelessness, such as addictions, mental health issues and social/emotional troubles. The program aims to help the most vulnerable people first: those with a history of chronic homelessness and those at risk of death from homelessness.

The Canadian Coalition to End Homelessness was inspired to launch the campaign following the 100,000 Homes Campaign in the United States, which saw 103,000 vulnerable people successfully housed. So far, 21 communities from Sechart to Halifax have signed on to the Canadian version.

Here on Salt Spring, Community Services is hoping to collaborate with other organizations and individual property owners by identifying those in need, locating safe housing and obtaining funding for the social services supports that will ensure housing is sustained.

"We want to have a dialogue with

landlords about opening the parameters about who they would normally rent to," explained Carol Barteaux, a SSICS outreach worker and its Housing First coordinator.

"The idea is with supports and subsidies, those people don't necessarily need to be homeless, but it does require the additional supports," added SSICS communications director Rob Wiltzen.

Barteaux noted it is important that services be accessible in the community, as people have a right to choose where they live.

"A lot of people come here because it doesn't feel safe to live in the city, so they really don't want to go to Vancouver or Victoria," she said.

The first step of the project is to gather data on homelessness in the community. The 20,000 Homes campaign states that means "knowing every homeless person by name and understanding each person's needs and preferences."

Salt Spring may have a better chance at obtaining this information than larger communities. Many of the surveys can probably be administered on site during food bank days and other drop-in services. Barteaux said SSICS will also assemble a team of volunteers and hopefully partner with the island's housing council, which will be working to update the Salt Spring Housing Needs Assessment this year.

The next steps will be to connect with local landlords and find funding for the necessary social service supports. The 20,000 Homes platform calls for increased federal investment, not just in social hous-

ing but as subsidies that would make market housing more affordable.

"That what's been successful in other cities, such as Medicine Hat. They've been able to essentially wipe out homelessness," Barteaux said.

Supports to aid sustainable housing include having someone who could help ensure clients take their medication and make medical and counselling appointments, for example.

"Sometimes, just knowing there's someone who's on their side makes a huge difference. I've seen big shifts in some of the people I've worked with," Barteaux said.

Wiltzen said any level of government could be involved, whether funds come from BC Housing or community sources. He pointed out that Salt Spring has already been incorporated into a study sponsored by the Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness and the Capital Regional District, but federal money has centred on Victoria so far.

"What we have is a ready-made strategy — so much of that work has been done. So we're looking for local government support to implement that strategy," Wiltzen said. "We're looking for our political leaders to actually step up to the plate and implement some of the solutions other communities have seen."

More information about the 20,000 Homes campaign can be found at www.20khomes.ca. People who have rental units and want to know how they can help and those who want to make donations or volunteer should contact cbarteaux@ssics.ca or call 250-537-9971, ext. 249.



PHOTO COURTESY ISSSES

FREE TO GO: Peter and Bernadette McAllister release the last of hatchery-raised coho fry into the beaver pond on Fulford Creek. For its 30th annual season, the Island Stream and Salmon Enhancement Society raised 9,000 coho and 20,000 chum salmon. Coho were released in Fulford, Harris, Cusheon and Duck creeks, with Fulford Creek the sole spot receiving the chum.

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TREE HOUSE

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The Capital Regional District Board approved the plan in camera during its June 10 meeting, but failed to rise and report on the matter due to an oversight. CRD legislative services gave McIntyre permission to report the decision to SSITC at its subsequent meeting held Monday night. The CRD will release the full package of related material at its July 8 meeting.

Conversations about use of the contested area first surfaced in 2013, when HASSI discussed encroaching tables with LeCorre and his landlord Mouat's Trading Company. One of HASSI's aims was to open up vehicle access right to the head of the wharf so that people arriving for medical appointments could catch a cab and others could transfer heavy propane tanks, in just two examples provided.

"The issue of maintaining access has been on our radar for some time," HASSI chair Kathy Scarfo said. "There's this assumption that we don't need the access, just because we haven't been using it."

Scarfo said it was only after the other groups sought legal advice that the harbour authority did the same, and discovered their board members could be held personally liable for incidents related to alcohol consumption without a liquor licence on property HASSI leases from the DFO.

In July 2014, HASSI ordered LeCorre to cease serving alcohol at the tables outside the café's fenced interior and warned him the tables would not be permitted at all after that season ended. More than 1,300 people signed an online petition asking the authority to reverse its decision.

After LeCorre asked for the transportation commission's assistance in March, a CRD staff report determined part of the contested space is an unconstructed road right-of-way owned by MoTI. Provincial and fed-

eral bodies typically cede authority of small parcels of unused land if requested to do so by local government.

"What we're looking to do is get the property under local control. Then everything will be done on the island and in an open and public manner," Williams said, adding anyone in the community with an opinion on how the right-of-way should be administered could make a delegation to the SSITC.

If the CRD is granted the licence of occupation, SSITC will have the ability to lease the right-of-way to the café owners for continued use of table seating. Any liability associated with the area would be worked into the lease agreement, Williams said.

"As part of the process, the CRD will work with all parties to ensure needs are met for the overall good of the community," McIntyre said. "A great deal of consultation on many fronts has already taken place on the Ganges downtown core, the boardwalk/seawalk and a number of other community needs and desires. This will continue, hopefully with a resolution that will be satisfactory to all parties."

McIntyre and the DFO have agreed to let HASSI take the lead on facilitating a conversation about the infill area. But without having access to the CRD documents, Scarfo said it's difficult to make a comment.

"I'm assuming it's part of the ongoing process we've been going through for the past year due to lack of space in the downtown area, and that we'll try to find a solution that works for everyone," she said. "It's hard to engage further without the full report. At this point we remain enthusiastic that the public access can be maintained."

Scarfo said many good ideas have been put forward, including a landscaping plan produced by an Islands Trust consultant.

"We should be a creative enough community to find something, and this is just another step to further that process," she said.