

ICCS, VIU and SOS partner to Open Extreme Weather Shelter in Parksville

Island Crisis Care Society (ICCS) today announced an Extreme Weather Shelter (EWS) will open in a temporary location for 2016-2017 at 223 Mill Street in Parksville. Vancouver Island University (VIU) is donating space in the former Pass Woodwinds childcare building to serve as the EWS, which will operate from November 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017 to serve the homeless of the Oceanside region. The shelter will be open from 6 pm until 8 am on nights of inclement or extreme weather (please see backgrounder for more information).

The ICCS, which has operated emergency shelter services in Nanaimo since 1989, entered into a contract with the Society of Organized Services (SOS) to provide the EWS for the Oceanside region.

Extreme Weather Response (EWR) funding is provided by the Government of British Columbia for community-based service organizations to provide temporary emergency shelter during periods of extreme winter weather which threatens the health and safety of the homeless. It is because of a partnership with MLA Stilwell's office, Vancouver Island University and the Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness that an extreme weather shelter will open for this winter.

Violet Hayes, ICCS Executive Director said, "There was much relief when VIU offered the old Pass Woodwinds childcare building as a location for the extreme weather shelter. The Taskforce is thankful for the support of Michelle Stilwell, MLA for Parksville-Qualicum and Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation, who was instrumental in finding us this space."

Michelle Stillwell, MLA, said, "It takes a community of organizations and people to come together to make things like this happen and I am grateful that I was able to be part of the solution. This shelter would not be possible without the significant efforts of the Island Crisis Care Society, Forward House, Society of Organized Services and members of the Taskforce on Homelessness. I am also thankful to Ralph Nilson and VIU for stepping up when I made the call. This is a positive step for our community and I look forward to working with partners to help bring more solutions forward in the future."

Dr. Ralph Nilson, VIU's President and Vice-Chancellor said that providing space for an extreme weather shelter supports one of the University's fundamental values. "This shelter will provide a critical community asset for those in need and is another example of how VIU is engaged in the communities we serve. It also reflects one of our key values of supporting the most vulnerable members of our society. This is evident through the work VIU does through programs such as the Tuition Waiver for Youth in Care. We've also established numerous community partnerships to promote and support initiatives such as the Canada Learning Bond, aimed at creating opportunities to access education for those who are living in poverty. Working with ICCS and SOS to provide this shelter is another example of these community partnerships and our commitment to this important work.

The ICCS is asking the community to help with much needed items for the shelter including: a fridge, stove, dishwasher, stackable washer/dryer, table, chairs as well as many miscellaneous kitchen and household items (crockpots, plates, cutlery, etc.) To donate large items, please call 250 954 3268 for pickup. Smaller items may be dropped off at Hirst House, 151 East Hirst Avenue, Parksville.

The ICCS is also looking for volunteers to prepare meals as well as staff to work when the shelter is open. Job postings for volunteers and support workers are located on the ICCS website. “We are looking at a quick start-up for this program, so we are asking for everyone’s help to spread the word so we can train our volunteers and staff members as soon as possible,” stated Hayes. <http://iccare.ca/node/14346>

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For more information:

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BACKGROUNDER

EXTREME WEATHER SHELTER

The Extreme Weather Shelter (EWS) will be available from November 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017 and will be open from 6 pm to 8 am. Shelter is available to men and women aged 19 and older as well as family groups. The main focus of the EWS is to provide beds and keep folk safe that would otherwise be at risk to the elements. A dinner meal and breakfast is provided.

Children, under the age of 19, can receive service if accompanied by their parent/guardian or if they are referred to the provider by a social worker acting under the Child, Family and Community Service Act.

The first EWS opened in 2011 and since this time, has been regularly used. From November 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014, the EWS was active on 58 nights with 133 client visits. In 2015-2016, the shelter was open 37 nights with 64 male attendances and 24 female attendances.

Extreme weather conditions are defined by the Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness. Implementation of the Extreme Weather Response Plan is called by the Society of Organized Services as the regional coordinator when weather conditions are deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless persons. Criteria may include: temperatures near zero with rainfall that makes it difficult or impossible for homeless people to remain dry; sleet/freezing rain; snow accumulation; sustained high winds; temperatures at or below -2 Celsius, taking into account wind chill; feedback from clientele of the region's service providers may also be considered and other factors.

The Society of Organized Services on behalf of the Oceanside Taskforce on Homelessness will provide notice when the EWS will be open and post notices at locations where people who are homeless are known to frequent.

For more information: <http://iccare.ca/node/14346>

OCEANSIDE TASK FORCE ON HOMELESSNESS

The task force continues to make progress in talks with local and provincial government representatives on long-term plans for a year-round shelter. Numerous government and NPO agencies are working towards a solution in the region, including the City of Parksville, Town of Qualicum Beach, Regional District of Nanaimo, the local Member of the Legislative Assembly and Member of Parliament, BC Housing, District 69 Society of Organized Services, Forward House and Island Crisis Care Society; and others.

The Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness formed in 2010, is now co-chaired by Renate Sutherland, Society of Organized Services; Violet Hayes, Island Crisis Care Society; and Sharon Welch, Forward House. The task force is working to address homelessness and the issues related to homelessness in School District #69, Vancouver Island. The geographical region includes the area from Nanoose to Deep Bay and inland to Whiskey Creek. As a regional initiative, the City of Parksville, Town of Qualicum Beach and the Regional District of Nanaimo participate on the task force.

Services and support for the homeless in our region are provided by such organizations and service providers as Island Crisis Care Society, Island Health, Society of Organized Services, Canadian Mental Health Association, Forward House and our local churches. The Salvation Army operates the local food bank and Manna Homeless Society offers emergency supplies to homeless in the Oceanside region.