

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 8, 2016

B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week: Grand Opening of Transition Suites for Youth Aging Out of Care

Surrey, British Columbia SOS Children's Village B.C. is thrilled to announce the grand opening of three transition suites in their Surrey village for youth transitioning out of foster care and into independent adulthood. **This momentous moment in the history of foster care in B.C. – with a June 9th ribbon cutting by Marvin Hunt MLA (Surrey Panorama) – is the culmination of two years of intensive capital campaign fundraising of \$250,000 to build five permanent suites.** Success has been achieved through the generosity of individuals, corporations, foundations, and governments who understand the incredible need for this project. Fundraising continues for the construction of the final two suites.

The ribbon cutting ceremony also coincides with the charity's 30th birthday. Letters of greeting from His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston Governor General of Canada, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the Honourable Christy Clark Premier of B.C., the Honourable Stephanie Cadieux B.C. Minister of Children and Family Development, and Melanie Mark MLA (Vancouver Mount Pleasant) will be read aloud to guests in attendance.

The Mayor of the City of Surrey, Linda Hepner, is a proud supporter of the transition suites.

In British Columbia, the first week of June is Child and Youth in Care Week, and SOS Children's Village B.C. is pleased to be a national trailblazer in advancing a more effective model of care for foster children and youth. With shocking news articles being published virtually every week about what critics are calling a 'broken' foster care system, SOS B.C. envisions a better way. British Columbians have said "Yes to the Village, No to the Streets!" through their passionate support of the charity's two year capital campaign for transition suites.

Every year in our province, more than 700 teenagers 'age out' of the foster care system. As soon as they turn 19, the only support system they've known is no longer available to them, and they're expected to begin taking care of themselves. But at just 19, with no confidence, no skills, and no support or resources, it's setting these kids up for failure. **And far too many of them do fail – ending up homeless, living on the streets, addicted, or in trouble with the law.** Indeed, over 40% of youth living on the streets have been in foster care.

That's why Canada's only SOS Children's Village is excited about the completion of construction on three independent living accommodations. Separate building entrances, bath and restrooms, living spaces, and kitchen areas will allow young adults or young mothers, to live an independent lifestyle.

“The transition suites we are building in our village are desperately needed and when all five are complete they could reduce the number of homeless youth in our area by up to 8%, now and into the future,” said Douglas Dunn, executive director of SOS Children’s Village B.C.

The at-risk youth in the new housing program will have greater social connections by developing relationships with the other children, youth, and caregivers in the SOS Village. The village is a family, and it will become a family to teens in the year-long ‘Intensive Transition’ housing program. “It takes a village to raise a child.”

Unique to SOS Children’s Village B.C.’s program, youth will be able to access any or all of the therapeutic and support programs offered to the village families including: learning clubs; music program; camps, recreation and cultural programs; cognitive, expressive arts, and Neurofeedback therapies. These wrap-around support services will contribute to a more normalized experience of transitioning to adulthood for teens who cannot live with their biological families. The organization also operates two thrift stores in Steveston and Kerrisdale, and can outfit a young person with clothes, school supplies, furniture, and more, all at no charge. A number of Transition to Adulthood participants in the established outreach program have already been provided with the business attire needed for successful job interviews.

A stable living locale will allow youth aging out of care to positively connect to their communities. With the location of the housing at an SOS Village, the teens will be healthier – with improved mental health – and more able to live independently **with access to the extensive green space and facilities of the village which include a sports court, dedicated and stocked art and music studios, and more.**

SOS B.C.’s transition suites capital campaign has garnered interest and praise from around North America. “I read with great enthusiasm about your effort to raise money to create homes for teens who must leave the foster care system at age 19,” said Richard Klarberg, President & CEO of the Council on Accreditation in New York. “Kids aging out of foster care is one of the most important initiatives in both Canada and the United States. Programs like yours offer a concrete and cost-effective approach to reducing homelessness and poverty among this growing segment of society. Congratulations on having the foresight and courage to tackle this problem.”

For the visual thinkers out there, picture a nest of newborn turtles running for the ocean, a good analogy for foster children in our province. Most don’t make it. SOS B.C. wants to turn that around. These kids are the future – don’t turn away and allow them to be consumed by lives of crime, unemployment, homelessness, and addiction – give them a choice and a voice.

Say No to the Streets! **Learn more about the campaign at www.sosbc.org/notothestreets.**

About SOS Children's Village BC

SOS Children's Villages is the world's largest non-governmental, non-denominational child development organization for fostered, orphaned, and abandoned children. It has existed for over 65 years with presence in 134 countries and 568 Villages. British Columbia is home to the only SOS Children's Village in Canada. SOS Children's Village BC provides stable homes, a supportive and healing Village environment, and community-based family care programs to help foster children and youth in need grow into caring, self-reliant adults.

-30-

This press release focuses on the suites and not on the actual structure and nature of the year-long Intensive Transition housing program. Please contact us for more details.

For more information please contact:

William Brennan, Manager of Communications
SOS Children's Village BC
T: (604) 574-2964 ext. 104
E: williambrennan@sosbc.org Web: www.sosbc.org

Please visit our Media Room: www.sosbc.org/news-events/media-room