

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 5, 2014

B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week is Not a Time to Celebrate: Homelessness

Surrey, British Columbia Drive or take a bus through the streets of Vancouver and its mighty suburbs and it is a surety that the sight of desolate-eyed homeless people will blur past the window. British Columbians have become desensitized to this sight, but it doesn't have to be this way. Regaining our humanity starts with acknowledging the solidified connection between the foster care system and homelessness. One large section of society is ending up on the streets at deplorable – even shameful – rates. **In the midst of B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week, this is certainly not something to celebrate.**

In this province, **over 60 per cent of homeless people self-identify as former foster children**¹. That is the majority of people living on the streets, whether in East Vancouver, Richmond, Surrey, Delta, Langley, Mission, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, or Hope and beyond. Some reports have underestimated this number at 50 or even 40 per cent. But the truth is out there, sitting forlorn without parents or a home. British Columbians can continue complaining about poverty and the homeless on the streets, or they can put the wheels in motion to change it by tackling the crisis in the B.C. foster care system.

Any strategy must start at the beginning with prevention, and ensure that each child who is placed within the foster care system is being fully equipped with adequate provisions to support each stage of their individual growth and development. Society must guarantee that there will be structure, consistency, and love provided by at least one responsible and caring adult.

In order to bring this to fruition, more funds must be allocated to serve children and youth in need and there must be a responsible governing body to make sure that these funds are being used both appropriately and effectively. Social workers working within the Ministry of Child and Family Development and the Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society need to have reasonable caseloads and adequate resources to refer to so that they can properly serve the children and youth they work with.

It is absolutely the responsibility of society to be the voice of these children and to hold the ultimate expectation that for every child entering care, their stay is as 'normal' as any other typical child's life; with similar experiences and opportunities. Foster youth, who have no one else to turn to, should not be dropped out of the system when they turn 19, left to fend on their own.



“How do we expect to raise our children into loving, adaptable, self-reliant adults when we are not offering them the opportunity to learn this?” asks Douglas Dunn, Executive Director of SOS Children’s Village BC. **“We emulate that which we know, so is it any surprise really that over 60% of our province’s homeless have been former kids in care? Maybe if we act now and alter the system we will alter the outcomes?”**

About SOS Children’s Village BC

SOS Children’s Villages is the world’s largest non-governmental, non-denominational child development organization for orphaned and abandoned children. It has existed for over 60 years with presence in 133 countries and over 550 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.

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We hope you will be inspired to pick up our ‘dark side of foster care in BC’ series that lasts until Friday.

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

¹ Source: *Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions*, Raising the Roof, 2009.