

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 6, 2014

SOS Children's Village B.C. Launches Capital Campaign to 'Say Yes to the Village, No to the Streets!'

Surrey, British Columbia The foster care system in British Columbia is broken. This past year has seen the publication of eye-opening articles on the issue – from The Vancouver Sun's hard-hitting *From Care to Where* series, to The Tyee's *Fostering Truth* report, to the advocacy of the Representative for Children and Youth – and growing awareness and outrage from the public. **Today, SOS Children's Village B.C. announced the first step in the healing of the foster system, with the launch of a six month capital campaign to raise \$250,000 to build permanent suites for youth transitioning out of care and into independent adulthood.** At the tail end of B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week, this is certainly something to celebrate.

Canada's only SOS Children's Village currently has five homes with unfinished basements. With the funds raised from the campaign, the charity will be able to renovate these spaces into semi-independent living accommodations. Separate building entrances, bath and restrooms, living spaces, and kitchen areas will allow – in each suite – two young adults or young mothers, to live an independent lifestyle.

The at-risk youth in the housing program will have a greater connection to others through developing relationship with the other children, youth and caregivers in the SOS Village. The Village is a family and will likely become a family to teens in the Transition to Adulthood program. "It takes a village to raise a child."

Unique to SOS Children's Village B.C.'s program, they 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. 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. In the past year already, a number of program participants have been provided with the business attire needed for successful job interviews.

"The transition suites that we want to build in our Village are desperately needed and **these five suites alone 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.

A stable living locale will allow the youth to positively connect to their communities. With the location of the housing at an SOS Village, the teens will be healthier – with increased 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.

The Village, the SOS flagship program, was created as a grassroots response to the unmet needs of children and youth in the provincial foster care system; namely the frequent placement breakdowns and moves for those in foster care. The Village's unique model is based on dynamics implemented by Hermann Gmeiner, the founder of SOS Children's Village International. Gmeiner believed that a loving consistent family, home, and community create a circle of healing, belonging, support, and positive growth that develops resilience in a child and renews hope, leading to future successes.

The Vancouver Foundation – Youth Homelessness Initiative has already funded the charity's Youth Transition Workers for the next three years with a \$142,000 grant. **SOS Children's Village B.C. now wants to provide the homes and better lives so desperately needed for youth from broken families, and asks for the public to 'Say Yes to the Village!' by contributing to the campaign.** Every donation will directly help a young person who has no one else to turn to, every gift will change a life.

For the visual thinkers, picture a nest of newborn turtles running for the ocean, a good analogy for foster children in this province. Most don't make it. Let's turn that around. These kids are our 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 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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