



Press Release

JOB OF NEW PORT COQUITLAM INITIATIVE: END HOMELESSNESS

Port Coquitlam, BC – March 2, 2009... What do you get when you add over 20 diverse and dedicated individuals to one of the most significant social problems in Port Coquitlam? When Mayor Greg Moore does the math, the outcome is: fewer homeless people.

Mayor Moore launched his new Mayor's Action Team on Homelessness (MATH) today, a group with the sole mission of creating and implementing a strategy to end homelessness.

"It's simply unacceptable that there are families and individuals in our community who don't have a home," Moore said. "We need to stop looking the other way and start doing what we can to help. We need to find and implement a permanent solution, and I feel confident that MATH will do that."

MATH will not duplicate the work of existing agencies that provide social services to the homeless, Moore stressed. While that work is certainly necessary, he said, "MATH is not about building shelters. It's about getting people into a home, and keeping them there."

MATH's members represent a range of backgrounds, ages, perspectives and experiences. They include representatives from the Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Group, the business community, schools, community agencies and even the homeless population (see member list at end of this press release).

Moore, the group's chair, said he assembled a group he feels is capable of carrying out MATH's specific mission: to develop a multi-year strategy, similar to a business plan, that aims to end homelessness – and then implement it. MATH is designed around the Streets to Home programs and other strategies that have been successfully implemented in Portland, Toronto and Calgary.

The goal is to have the strategy completed by Homeless Action Week in the fall of 2009. Moore envisions the strategy will include a series of action steps intended to create the necessary environment to put people in homes and to prevent them from becoming homeless again. For example, that could include recommending changes to municipal bylaws about a minimum percentage of rental units in new housing projects, or identifying and creating services to support people once they are off the streets.

Once the strategy is finalized, the action team will shift away from the Mayor's office and form an independent non-profit society dedicated to implementing the strategy.

"This will be a multi-year plan, and we'll need the involvement of everyone in the community to execute it," Moore said. "Homelessness is a community-wide, multi-faceted problem, and it will only be fixed with a community-wide, multi-faceted approach."

According to information from Metro Vancouver (formerly Greater Vancouver Regional District), the number of homeless people in Port Coquitlam has grown significantly. Hope for Freedom Society's report on homelessness in the Tri-Cities (Oct. 2006-Mar. 2007) indicates that Port Coquitlam is a hot spot for homelessness in the region:

- 168 individuals were identified as homeless in the Tri-Cities. Of those, 62 per cent (102 individuals) were living in Port Coquitlam, 30 per cent in Coquitlam and eight per cent in Port Moody.
- The homeless live throughout our community, seeking shelter in a variety of locations, including homeless camps (24.1 per cent), drug houses (11.2 per cent), abandoned buildings (7.8 per cent) and vehicles (six per cent).
- 71.6 per cent were categorized as “roaming,” which includes seeking shelter at the locations above, plus “couch-surfing” (temporary accommodation with friends or family).
- Only 29 per cent indicated they were originally from the Tri-Cities. Of those, 40 per cent (19 individuals) said they were originally from Port Coquitlam.
- Port Coquitlam is considered an ideal location because of access to the river and downtown, and the availability of services.
- Ages of homeless people in the Tri-Cities range from 18 to 60, with an average of 40. Sixty-eight per cent are male.
- 88 per cent of the homeless people in the survey had a drug, alcohol or other substance dependency, about 37 per cent had a mental illness, about 36 per cent had dual diagnoses, and about 13 per cent came from abusive family situations.

Members of the Mayor’s Action Team on Homelessness:

- Greg Moore – City of Port Coquitlam, Mayor and MATH Chair
- Adele Garofano – Homeless resident of Port Coquitlam
- Alison Ferguson – Every Little Bit, Co-Founder and Soroptimist International, Member
- Aly Sunderji – SAMZ Pub, Owner
- Cheryl Rutledge – CUPE, Local 498, President
- Chris Seppelt – Archbishop Carney High School, Teacher of Social Justice Class
- Dale Wigton – Homeless resident of Port Coquitlam
- Dave Teixeira – Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Group, Deputy Chair
- Doug Fortune – Northside Foursquare Church – Grace Campus, Pastor
- Doug Stead – Tri-M Systems, Owner
- Erin Ireland – REACH (Realizing Empowerment and Community Help), Program Facilitator
- Erin Moore – Livable Region Consulting, Owner (Admin Support)
- Harris Kidd – Archbishop Carney High School, student
- Helen Popple – City of Port Coquitlam, Planner
- Ian Duke – Onni Development, VP, Corporate Development
- John Morrison – Homeless resident of Port Coquitlam
- Peggy Hunt – TransLink, Manager of Municipal Affairs
- Peter Kobayashi – G & F Financial Group, Branch Manager
- Ravi Panwar – Park Georgia Realty Ltd., Realtor
- Roloff Veld – Sutton Group-1st West Realty, Managing Broker
- Sandy Burpee – Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Group, Chair
- Vanessa Parsons – Port Coquitlam resident
- Wayne Jackson – Homeless resident of Port Coquitlam
- William Hue – Neodyn Systems Inc., President

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