



## Homelessness and Business in the Tri-Cities

### Why should the business community invest in solutions to homelessness?

The number of homeless persons in the Tri Cities has been reduced considerably over the past couple of years, but is still significant. Based on day-to-day contact with homeless persons, outreach workers from the Hope For Freedom Society (HFFS) estimated the number of homeless in the Tri-Cities in fall 2011 to be just under 50 persons – typically the “hard to house” who have been on the street for an extended period of time.

Reports<sup>1</sup> on homelessness estimate the annual cost to the public system for a homeless person with severe addictions and mental illness can be in excess of \$55,000. The cost of housing and supports for the same person is estimated to be only \$37,000.

The savings, province-wide, could be \$211 million annually.

Loitering, obstructing pedestrian traffic, discouraging potential customers, and the loss of a sense of community can have real costs to businesses. Neither customers nor employees will frequent areas with questionable public safety.<sup>2</sup>

You have a vested interest in the Tri Cities and what happens here matters!

### Are there any emergency shelters in the Tri-Cities for homeless persons?

There are currently no permanent emergency shelter spaces in the Tri-Cities. However, the City of Coquitlam has dedicated and zoned land for a 24 hour/day, year-round, full service shelter and transitional housing facility at 3030 Gordon Ave., and in an October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011 BC Housing media release, the province committed to funding the facility. Raincity Housing & Support Society has been selected to develop and operate the facility, and the opening is scheduled for late spring, 2014.

### What is being done to meet the needs of homeless persons in the Tri-Cities?

The Tri-Cities [Cold Wet Weather Mat Program](#) which has provided overnight shelter in one of 5 host churches from November 1<sup>st</sup> – March 31<sup>st</sup> is currently in its 5<sup>th</sup> season of operation. Over the first 4 seasons, the mat program provided shelter and food to 596 different persons for a total of 8,139 mat-nights and helped 132 persons transition from the street into detox and recovery services and housing since inception. The CWW Mat Program is scheduled to discontinue operation following the 2011/2012 season – planning is underway for an interim “Bridge Shelter” to fill the gap until opening of the permanent shelter at 3030 Gordon Ave.

During periods of cold and snowy weather, an [Extreme Weather Response](#) shelter operates at Trinity United Church to augment the capacity of the Cold Wet Weather Mat Program.

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions, Feb. 2008

<sup>2</sup> Wilder Research at [www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)

The Hope For Freedom Society operates a program of outreach to persons homeless or at risk of homelessness in the Tri-Cities. Three outreach workers seek out homeless persons and connect them with available services.

There are food banks, a soup kitchen and clothing programs available across the Tri Cities. A listing of these services is available at [www.tricityshomelessness.ca](http://www.tricityshomelessness.ca).

## **As a business leader, YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

**Educate yourself and your employees.** Visit [www.tricityshomelessness.ca](http://www.tricityshomelessness.ca) for the most current information or to access a speaker on the issue of homelessness in the Tri Cities.

**Be part of the larger coalition.** Attend the Tri Cities Homelessness Task Group meetings. Get involved in implementing solutions to homelessness. Work with the Task Group to identify a specific project to address.

**Consider hiring someone** who is homeless or at risk of homelessness. Be aware that homelessness might be an issue that your employees or their families are facing.

**Support outreach to homeless persons** and non profits who serve the homeless population.

**Encourage your employees to volunteer** at the Cold Wet Weather Mat program or other services for homeless persons.

**Contribute your ideas, energy and leadership** to those working to address the issue.

**Use your influence and champion** the need to address homelessness in the Tri Cities. Encourage those in your business network to work on implementing solutions to homelessness.

**Recognize that changes** in an employees' personal hygiene, work habits, attitudes towards others, or increased tardiness and sick days may be indicators of an addiction. Awareness of these indicators and sensitivity to the impact on their families may open a door for help.

**Speak up** – let our municipal, provincial and federal politicians know that homelessness is unacceptable.

If you are interested in volunteering visit [www.tricityshomelessness.ca/howtohelp](http://www.tricityshomelessness.ca/howtohelp)