



# Lookout Emergency Aid Society

## Program Reports 2008-2009

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### Report to the Board

As in past years, I've tried to find one word that best describes Lookout activities in the prior year – and the word that matches most closely is growth; growth in shelter, growth in housing, and growth in community!

We started in April 2008 with opening the new 15-bed shelter at College Place in New Westminster, thanks to working in close partnership with BC Housing, the City and many community groups. We worked seamlessly with the Salvation Army to retain these beds, transferred from their closing Garfield. April also saw us assume the property management of Tamura House, again a partnership with BC Housing and this time working seamlessly with St. James Community Services to reduce any disruption to the tenants. In December, a new Vancouver City Council initiated an emergency response to homelessness by opening 4 no-barrier shelters in the City in December/January. Lookout participated by assisting First United Church who opened the first no-barrier refuge, augmenting their overnight staffing to bring our expertise and resource knowledge. These shelters, known as the HEAT shelters, had an immediate decisive impact on the level of turnaways, dropping the number of monthly turnaways by close to **200** people per month compared to the same period last year – e.g. Jan. 2009 - **337** vs. **508** in Jan. 2008; likewise March 09 - **185** vs. **621** in March 2008. This added capacity to the shelters is critical to getting people off the streets, and keeping them off. Lookout recommended to both the City and Province that the services are opened 24/7 to truly meet needs and bridge people into other needed services and housing. Fiscal restraints prevented this, but we hope that the shelters will remain open until new housing is available that is accessible to people living with challenges as well as being affordable to them. Possibly the augmentation to 24/7 services can occur over time. However my personal wish remains that we continue a policy of investment into the permanent housing, with appropriate supports as this is truly the solution to homelessness!

The Single Room Accommodation (SRA/SRO) hotels and roominghouses purchased by BC Housing are all planned to undergo or undergoing repairs. College is being significantly renovated to create appropriate shelter space as well as to improve the housing for the 40 local residents. The permanent housing will be converted to supportive housing when it opens in September. Tamura House is looking forward to the same level of renovation, improving the SRO like the others the Province, through BC Housing, has redone in the Downtown Eastside.

The province should again be commended for saving these SRO hotels for critically needed affordable housing. However Lookout is concerned that the purpose of the hotels has changed and the flexibility we know to be essential to success in serving challenging and vulnerable people is diminished. Cookie cutter approaches to housing the homeless don't work, and we must take into consideration prevention in all the planning. Lookout is also concerned about having policy and government standards set without full participation by the agencies that have the expertise – it seems that the growth of BC Housing and the growth of the housing providers have strained the relationship between funder/Society, leading to misunderstandings and role redefinition and Contracts to the detriment of services and sound planning. Lookout is proud to be an autonomous nonprofit as this has ensured in the past that we remained true to our mandate of 'safety-net' rather than change services to meet the policy of the government of the day. This autonomy and responsibility are being redefined, and in ways that could undermine the goal of eliminating homelessness. BC Housing now selects the tenants for all the SRO's and all new housing that will be developed in the province regardless of whether it is considered a 'fit' by the housing provider. This is occurring in an atmosphere of distrust, and with the elimination of privacy for those needing supported housing, as government demands intimate details on health (medical, psychiatric, emotional, addictions), lifestyle choices, abilities, etc. in order to determine appropriateness of housing. Would this be any other sector of the population, this information would be kept privileged and confidential. Lookout has informed all funders that we cannot breach the trust of our residents and clients. Amongst these changing relationships with BC Housing, there is increased demand for outcome demonstrations. This has led Lookout to implement our new database while being required to significantly change all of our reporting, and our process of reporting. It has made it extremely difficult for all front line staff as well as the management team. It will be a Society wide celebration once this database is well understood and the reports that we need are available!

As noted above, this year has been one where we've been extremely involved in the design and renovation of the SRO's (Walton & College), but also we have been working on our two new developments, Garfield in New Westminster and First Place in Vancouver. Between these two buildings, 154 units of housing for people who are chronically homeless. The Province of BC has implemented a new model for developing housing funded by the federal infrastructure money, maintaining ownership over assets and moving towards the older public housing model. We are encouraging BC Housing to return to the community housing model that has been so successful over the last few decades and are working with BC Housing to develop a one-off model that retains as much of the community model as possible.



Our shelter and outreach programs have been augmented to provide more ability to address the needs of the absolute homeless, thanks again to BC Housing. They've also funded positions that will help with the increased statistical reporting requirements – a fact that we all celebrate! What our services are to do and the relationships is reflected in detail in the funding agreements with BC Housing, an ongoing negotiating process. Some of this work is being done in conjunction with other agencies.

This year has seen us concentrate also on organizational development, reviewing practices that need to change with the increased number of staff. Through strategic planning, the Board has approved two new positions within the Society, being brought on during the current fiscal year – the Director of Emergency Services as well as a Manager of Human Resources to assist our Director of Operations. With 300 employees, 26 programs and 13 sites, implementing change is difficult, and means all have to work towards new models of practice. I'm very proud to say that staff recognize this, and are working towards the common goal of improving how we work.

We are also enthused with the Board intent for Lookout to dedicate more resources to developing the capacity of our residents through asset building. At Yukon, the Tenant Support Worker Robert MacDougall has connected with the community in a very big way, implementing training & employment opportunities for tenants – including a recycling program and graffiti removal program. A bike program, overseen by an extensive community committee, is to open in the fall.

While we have celebrated the addition of new staff, we have also celebrated the retirement of a long time employee, Larry Way, our Building Services Manager. With Lookout since 1986, Larry took the plunge! He hasn't cut his ties totally: he continues on to help his replacement and take on special projects.

Our volunteers continue to provide amazing support to our clients and our Society, with unprecedented support as you will see in these program reports. Of particular note is the Burnaby Extreme Weather Shelter – where St. Francis de Salle Church provides the space, and volunteers provide the meal and clothing services, help with the clean up and generally provide any support to the staff that is needed. Burnaby would not have any shelter if it was not for this incredible group of people.

My report would not be complete without reference to national efforts and the Olympics. The latter will have a significant impact on Lookout's Vancouver resources, including closing the construction of First Place during the actual event. Transportation will be very difficult for our clientele, and Outreach will not be able to function with vehicles. These items are being discussed with the Olympic committee and the City of Vancouver.

Nationally, two years ago agencies like Lookout across Canada came together to form the national Multi Service Shelter Coalition, with a goal to give a national voice to shelter providers and particularly to share best practices and develop shelter standards for across Canada. There has been much communication, but there is no funding to support such efforts. I attended an Ottawa Conference "Shelters at a Crossroads" and the key message in my presentation was that shelters should be pathways out of homelessness, not warehouses.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K. O. Hennagery". The signature is fluid and cursive.