

## LIVINGROOM DROP-IN CENTRE

*The LivingRoom Drop-In offers people living with mental illness a variety of structured and unstructured programs that foster participation, build relationships, develop self confidence and improve self esteem. It provides a safe and secure environment in the Downtown Eastside, particularly for people with serious and persistent mental illness. Members may not be formally involved in the mental health system and may have few life skills, support connections, access to advocacy or socialization opportunities. It remains Lookout's only program with a restricted mandate to assist people.*

This has been the 15<sup>th</sup> year of operation of the LivingRoom. The program continues to evolve to accommodate the changing needs of its members and employs creative problem solving techniques to contend with budgetary constraints.

Open every day of the year (including Christmas) some of the primary goals of the LivingRoom are to improve the safety and well being of our members. In this, our nutritious food program is extremely important and very popular, **38,886** individual meals served this 12-month period. Food is prepared daily by staff during the week and by volunteers on the weekend. We are also able to include a multi-vitamin to boost people's health, thanks to the continuing support of Vancouver Coastal



Health H.I.V. funding. High protein drinks are made available for those who are in particular need of a nutritional boost. Medication administration is an important component and is offered on-site to members whose life skills or life style is not conducive to taking medication as prescribed. The medication program allows members to lead more independent and stable lives, thereby staying out of hospitals and institutions. The members who meet at the LivingRoom are able to socialize with peers in a welcoming environment and either on their own or more often with assistance from staff, develop plans and pursue their goals in an environment that is unfettered by the dangers of everyday life in the Downtown Eastside.

In tradition with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, certain basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter must be in place to reduce anxiety/stress and promote mental and physical health. Once this basic foundation is in place individuals discover they have the focus and energy to contemplate, pursue and access appropriate programs and services they would not have otherwise. The LivingRoom's nutritious meal program depends on food donations, which are thankfully received from Food Runners, U.B.C., the movie industry and volunteer groups like the "Greek Ladies" (as we affectionately call them). Every little bit helps. Other assistance comes from groups such as the "Art of Living", "Sri Baba", "Friends" and the "Jack Boyda Foundation" who prepare meals and provide entertainment at their own expense of time and money. This year we have had **237** individuals volunteer with the LivingRoom, contributing **9,495** hours of their time! This includes a minimum of **40** members volunteering! **215** individuals provide outside help, including the weekend food groups, preparing **108** meals for **10,800** people! With all this help staff are able to accomplish more for the members, and this is why the LivingRoom is always receptive to volunteers!

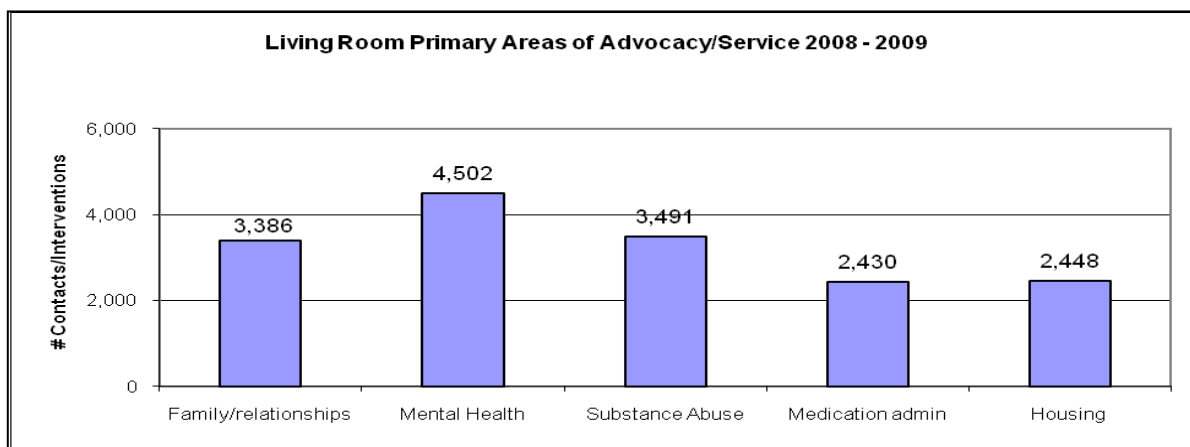
The LivingRoom's membership has increased to approximately **2,389** individuals who made approximately **45,500** visits. This is **500** visits more (**1%**) than the prior year. The total number of advocacy contacts was **22,180**, with the primary areas shown in the table on the next page. Violent episodes (includes verbal abuse) on and off-site have increased **41%**. Contacts are considered interactions over 15 minutes in duration. Contacts can include: crisis intervention, advocacy, medication administration and referrals to other resources. This type of support takes up a considerable amount of staff time especially in regards to mental health as the table shows.

Staff also spent time advocating to assist members with legal, financial, medical and housing issues. Affordable housing continues to be the number one issue for our members, especially with appropriate supports. Frustratingly, it is becoming even more difficult to find due to the increase in property values and the decline of affordable housing stock as it relates to the Downtown Eastside.

The LivingRoom strives to enrich social and life skills that enhance the ability of members to maintain a stable and independent living situation, thus improving their quality of life and helping to prevent homelessness. This is achieved through a variety of structured and unstructured activities. Fortunately with the help of outside volunteers such as Henke (helps with computers) and Tibor (music nights), the Carnegie Outreach Team, Lookout's Activity Worker and the tremendous efforts by the LivingRoom's staff and dedicated volunteers, we are able to provide a wide variety of activities for the members.



Our leisure, social and recreational activities have increased with over **23,000** participants, a **82%** increase over the last year, thanks to VCHA permitting last year's small budget surplus to carry-over to this year! These additional activities were implemented in the last quarter of the year, and included 25 extra outings, including special activities like paint ball and horseback riding. It was such a positive qualitative difference in our member's outlook, we are driven to try and continue these special outings.



Another outcome: we were able to offer a vocational program for a short trial: **9** out of **12** involved members gained employment or were involved in employment training – excellent given the few opportunities that exist. All told, we offered life skill events **1,129** times during the year, and **2,923** leisure activities, both described below.

Activities	# of Sessions	# of Attendances	Activities	# of Sessions	# of Attendances	Activities	# of Sessions	# of Attendances
<b>Basic Needs</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>39,044</b>	Women's Group	7	53	Special Event	18	1,394
Meals	353	38,886	Goal Mapping	3	9	Yoga	56	230
Laundry	106	109	N/A Panel Meetings	2	12	Tea Party	10	71
Showers	49	49				Happy Feet	51	203
<b>Life Skills</b>	<b>1,129</b>	<b>3,291</b>	<b>Leisure</b>	<b>2,923</b>	<b>23,869</b>	Car Wash	5	60
Kitchen Volunteer	260	416	Bingo	49	1,569	Computer Front	2,101	4,609
Janitorial Volunteer	225	847	Cards/Games	156	1,607	Scrapbooking	11	66
Non-member Volunteer	145	818	Movie	117	2,992	Smudging	5	40
Computer Studies	205	387	Art Group	76	363	Beading	7	44
PAC	10	56	Video Games	9	37	Gym	10	38
Men's Group	2	10	Show Offs	107	9,669	Quilting	5	26
Literacy Studies	24	107	Outings	97	664	Coloring	5	24
Exercise	2	9	Carnegie	9	63	Collages	3	16
Hygiene	174	445	Model	14	76	Talking Circles	2	8
Library	70	122	Gardening	0	0			

\* PAC = Participant Advisory Committee

Each year the members are surveyed to get a statistical overview of how the LivingRoom is meeting their expectations and what changes they would like to see. The LivingRoom is pleased to report an **7%** increase in overall satisfaction from the previous year. **93%** of our members were satisfied or very satisfied with the services at the LivingRoom, the principle wish being for more programs, particularly outings such as bowling, camping and visits to museums. For most people these are normal events, but given our members live in poverty, the cost and distance prevent most from participating in such activities. LivingRoom staff will continue to provide creative programming within its budgetary constraints by working with our advisory committee, nurturing relationships with our volunteers, benefactors, and other agencies as well as encouraging new relationships to blossom.

## Accommodation Supplement Program

*For the past 16 years (since 1993) the Accommodation Supplement Program has been improving the housing prospects for people on low incomes who live with serious mental health challenges in the Downtown Eastside. The Program allows individuals with a persistent mental health history to receive a maximum of \$75.00 per month towards their shelter costs and can also be applied to upgrading their amenities with telephone, cooking capability and cable, etc. Funded by Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, the program has an annual budget of \$18,000 for eligible individuals sponsored by various agencies such as MPA, Raincity (formerly Triage), Lookout, Strathcona Mental Health and ACT/Bridging. VISU and 1<sup>st</sup> United Church also sponsor clients on occasions when the former agencies are unable to fully utilize their allotted supplements.*

This subsidy program is administered by the LivingRoom Drop In/Activity Centre and continues to be of benefit to people who are struggling to cover basic living costs, especially considering the rise in housing expenses. The subsidy allows local Downtown Eastside residents to afford better living conditions that contribute positively to their overall mental health, adding stability in their lives.

At the 08/09 fiscal year end, **\$18,106.60** in subsidies was paid out. The total expenditure reflected a balanced budget for the accommodation Supplement Program. Surplus funds from the Program, if any, are carried over to the next year.

**37** individuals (**26** men and **11** women) received the monthly subsidy this year. Some people required assistance for only a few months, while others continue to need a financial supplement for much longer periods of time (sometimes years). **43%** of the recipients have been on the Program less than 2 years, **51.5%** from 2 to 5 years and **5.5%** from 5 to 10 years.

**24** people were carried over from the prior year, **15** were added (**9** of who remained on the program at year end). **13** people left from the program because they transitioned to subsidized housing or moved out of the geographical area. At year end, **24** people were receiving an Accommodation Supplement.

The Program will continue into 2010 to assist mentally ill people to live in healthier, safer living conditions and who consider the DTES their preferred community to live.