



PRESS RELEASE



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New Transitional Housing for Women in Victoria

VICTORIA, British Columbia, November 29, 2005 — Older women fleeing abusive relationships will soon have more options for safe and affordable supportive housing as construction begins on twenty-three new transitional units in Victoria.

The \$4.5 million Harrison Place will provide transitional housing with tenancy for up to three years for women aged 45 – 65 who have left abusive relationships and are working towards the goal of living independently in the community. This is the first of its kinds in the Victoria area to address housing for older women fleeing abuse. The development has been guided by the experiences and knowledge of older women who have been abused. Services are available five days a week and include group and individual counselling and social activities.

"We know that a key factor in a women's ability to leave an abusive relationship is stable housing," said Ida Chong, BC's Minister for Community Services and Minister Responsible for Seniors' and Womens' Issues. "Harrison place will provide older women who have limited income and options, an opportunity to reintegrate into the community in a healthy and safe way."

Under the Capital Region's newly formed Housing Trust, the society has applied for a grant towards the creation of additional affordable housing and the District of Saanich provided an exemption on the property taxes as a result of the society's charitable status.

Since 1975, the Victoria Women's Transition House Society has provided safe, welcoming shelter, respectful counselling, support and advocacy. Harrison Place is their first housing development and will complement their existing services for older women.

"Most subsidized housing in Victoria for women who have left abusive situations is for women with children," said Victoria Women's Transition House Society executive director Carolyn Fast. "Harrison Place will provide older women the opportunity to reach their goals of living independently, free from abuse."

The 23-unit building will share the site with a privately owned 30-unit condominium development. Both projects will be built together, achieving significant cost savings. The developer, Searidge Management, will own the private condominium development and has provided land equity to the Victoria Women's Transition House Society.

The Government of Canada, through CMHC, will contribute \$130 million towards affordable housing in British Columbia by 2008. The provincial government will provide a minimum of \$34 million annually to subsidize the cost of units built under the Canada – British Columbia Affordable Housing Agreement, as part of a larger strategy to provide a range of housing options for British Columbians in greatest need. The federal assistance is part of the \$1 billion announcement under a 2001 federal-provincial framework, and the 2003 Federal Budget, to create affordable housing.

For more information, please contact:

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Backgrounder

Harrison Place

The residential apartment building will be four storeys with 23 one-bedroom apartments, including one wheelchair accessible unit, a community kitchen and common room.

Older women who belong to the Victoria Women's Transition House Society's programs provided feedback on the design and were able to make suggestions that would enhance the security and safety of future residents. The design, location, architecture and landscaping were geared towards maximizing the comfort of women leaving abusive relationships.

The programming component of the project will include staffing five days per week, providing individual and group support, social activities, creating a liaison with appropriate community services and links to housing supports following their residency at Harrison Place. Tenancy will be for up to three years, providing an opportunity for recovery. It will also allow time for residents to establish volunteer or work opportunities and search for stable housing.

Partners and Funding

The capital cost of this project is \$4.5 million.

- The Government of Canada, through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, contributed \$1.25 million (under Phase 1 of the Canada – BC Affordable Housing Agreement) towards the capital costs and \$10,000 in seed funding.
- The Province of British Columbia contributed \$1.25 million towards the capital costs of the development.
- The District of Saanich is providing tax exemptions during the construction phase of \$6,832.
- The society is providing cash equity of \$600,000 as a result of a bequest from the Harrison Estate and a generous donation from Sharon Stewart (nee Harmer). In addition, land equity of \$300,000 has been donated by Searidge Management.
- The Ministry of Community Services will provide operating funding of \$80,000 for various transition and life skills supports for the residents.

Victoria Women's Transition House Society

Incorporated in 1975, the Victoria Women's Transition House Society is a non-profit society in the Greater Victoria area that responds to abuse of women in relationships. The Society responds by providing:

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- shelter, support and counselling for women with or without their children; and
- community programs to increase awareness of family violence issues.

The Society's programs and services encourage and assist women and children to live free from abuse and promote community responsibility for the elimination of family violence.