



## PRESS RELEASE



*Canadian Mortgage News - National Archive 2006*

### **Village Shelter to Benefit Prince George Youth**

**PRINCE GEORGE, British Columbia, May 27, 2006** — A newly renovated shelter for youth at risk was officially opened today by the Prince George Native Friendship Centre Society, along with federal, provincial and community partners.

The Village youth shelter, funded under the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness, Mental Illness and Addictions, includes 20 beds for both emergency shelter and transition housing.

"The newly renovated shelter opened today will ensure that vulnerable youth in Prince George have access to the housing and services they need," said the Honourable Jay Hill, Member of Parliament for Prince George — Peace River, on behalf of the Honourable Diane Finley, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. "This project is an excellent example of the Government of Canada's commitment to offer its support whenever possible."

In addition to providing 10 emergency shelter beds and 10 second-stage transitional housing units for youth, the facility will provide support with daily living, meals, community resources, social development and employment assistance.

"The first step to breaking the cycle of addictions and homelessness for at-risk youth is to provide access to reliable shelter and safe housing," said Shirley Bond, Minister of Education and MLA for Prince Georg — Mount Robson. "With commitments from the federal government, the province and the community, we're able to provide these young people an opportunity to get off the streets and begin to develop life-long skills."

"The Village youth shelter is helping to address the needs of our young people, who sometimes need an opportunity to get ahead," said Stan Hagen, Minister of Children and Family Development. "This shelter provides a safe, stable place where these youth can get back on track to a bright and healthy future."

"The Village model represents a safe alternative for the young people of our community, and will provide shelter and resources for our youth to improve their lives and futures," said Barb Ward-Burkitt, executive director of the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, adding that the Village model is based on the premises of harm reduction; culturally responsive; individualized programming; access to 24-hour support and crisis intervention; safe, stable and supportive environment for at-risk and high-risk youth; and promotion of self-responsibility in daily living and community interaction.

"Ensuring our community is a safe and secure place is one of the goals of Council's Vision and making sure our youth have a healthy place to live is of utmost importance," says Prince George Mayor Colin Kinsley. "I congratulate the Province on its commitment to serve the youth at risk, with this wonderful Village concept. This is truly an investment in our future and our community."

The federal and provincial governments are each contributing capital funding of approximately \$322,500 as part of the Canada — British Columbia Affordable Housing Agreement. The Prince George Native Friendship Centre Society

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contributed \$435,000 in building and land equity. Annual operating funding of approximately \$1 million per year, including rent, counselling and support for youth, will be provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The City of Prince George provided a \$10,000 capital grant for the project and the Native Friendship Centre can receive an exemption from property taxes.

The Premier's Task Force has also announced new housing and support service developments for Victoria, Kelowna, New Westminster, Terrace, Fort St. John, Vancouver, Surrey and Nanaimo. To date, the Task Force has announced a total of 533 new housing units with support services and shelter beds.

The Government of Canada, through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, will contribute more than \$130 million by 2010 towards affordable housing in this province. The provincial government, through BC Housing, will provide a minimum of \$34 million annually to subsidize the cost of units built under the Canada — BC Affordable Housing Agreement, as part of a larger strategy to provide a range of housing options for British Columbians in greatest need.

### Contact:

Larisa Saunders  
BC Housing  
Corporate Communications  
604-439-4757  
Cell: 604-790-2344

Andre Robichaud  
Manager, BC Community Development Centre  
CMHC  
Cell: 778-772-5962

Barbara Ward-Burkitt, M.Ed.  
Executive Director  
Prince George Native Friendship Centre  
250-564-3568

### Backgrounder

The Prince George Native Friendship Centre Society was established in 1969 and became a non-profit society in 1970. Today, the Native Friendship Centre is a multifaceted organization employing over 150 people, offering a broad range of services to the community of Prince George. The Friendship Centre services approximately 20,000 clients annually and has been recognized as a leader in social services and Aboriginal programs. For over 35 years, the Prince George Native Friendship Centre has been working towards meeting its original mandate as well as successfully adapting to the changing needs of the community.

The capital cost of the project is \$1,080,000. Funding partners include:

- \$322,500 capital grant from the Government of Canada through CMHC,
- \$322,550 capital grant from the province through BC Housing,
- \$435,000 in building and land equity from the Prince George Native Friendship Centre Society, and
- \$10,000 capital grant provided by the City of Prince George.

Through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the province is also providing \$1,225.550 in annual operating funding to cover the cost of shelter, outreach and support services to youth accessing the Village.