

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week: Grand Opening of Transition Suites for Youth Aging Out of Care

Surrey, British Columbia SOS Children's Village B.C. is thrilled to announce the grand opening of their final two suites for youth struggling to transition out of foster care and into independent adulthood. **This momentous moment in the history of foster care in British Columbia – with a June 17th ribbon cutting by Mayor Linda Hepner and MLA Marvin Hunt – is the culmination of three years of intensive capital campaign fundraising of \$450,000 to build five permanent suites.** Success has been achieved through the generosity of individuals and organizations who understand the incredible need for this project.

Every year in British Columbia, more than 700 teenagers age out of the foster care system. As soon as they turn 19, the only support system they knew is no longer available to them, and they are expected to begin taking care of themselves. But at just 19, with no confidence, no skills, and little support or resources, it is setting these teens up for failure. And far too many of them do fail, ending up homeless, living on the streets, addicted, or in trouble with the law. **Indeed, over 40% of youth living on the streets of B.C. have been in foster care.**

That's why SOS Children's Village B.C. is excited about the completion of construction on the final two (of five) independent living accommodations. Separate building entrances, bathrooms, living spaces, and kitchen areas will allow young adults or young mothers to live an independent lifestyle, with support from a youth worker. A survey by the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks found **64% of youth transitioning out of care said housing support is what would help – or what would have helped – them the most.**

"Like any parent, we don't believe that a relationship ends with a child on their 19th birthday," said Douglas Dunn, executive director of SOS Children's Village B.C. "Our program helps young adults move from the dependency enforced by being in care, to independence."

Most transition programs require a referral through the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The SOS B.C. program accepts referrals from other professionals, schools, social workers, parents, and most importantly, from youth themselves.

The high-risk youth in the Youth Housing Year Intensive Program will have greater social connections – **the number one desire of youth who have aged out of care** – by developing relationships with the other children, youth, caregivers, and staff in the SOS Village.

Unique to SOS B.C.'s program, youth will be able to access the other therapeutic services offered to the Village families including: learning clubs; music lessons; camp, recreation and

cultural programs; and cognitive, expressive arts, and Neurofeedback therapies. These wrap-around support programs will contribute to a more normalized experience of transitioning to adulthood for teens who cannot live with their biological parents.

Moreover, the SOS Children's Village Thrift Store Foundation can outfit a young person with clothes, school supplies, furniture, and more, all at no charge. Participants will be provided with the business attire needed for successful job interviews.

“There are financial incentives to pursue education, and rewards including everything required for their own apartment: furniture, appliances, kitchenware, computer, TV, etc. – an **‘Apartment In A Box’** that they can take with them after graduating from our yearlong program,” said Douglas Dunn.

“No one is really building suites like these and most grants only run for three years. **What makes our project different? It is truly ongoing, as we have established an Endowment Fund to ensure operation of these suites for the next 30-50 years.**”

A stable living locale will allow youth aging out of care to positively connect to their communities. With the location of the housing at an SOS Village, the teens will be healthier both physically and mentally, with access to the extensive green space and facilities of the Village which include a sports court, dedicated and stocked art/music studios, and more.

SOS B.C.'s capital campaign has garnered interest and praise from around North America. “I read with great enthusiasm about your effort to raise money to create homes for teens who must leave the foster care system at age 19,” said Richard Klarberg, President & CEO of the Council on Accreditation in New York. “Kids aging out of foster care is one of the most important initiatives in both Canada and the United States. **Programs like yours offer a concrete and cost-effective approach to reducing homelessness and poverty among this growing segment of society.** Congratulations on having the foresight and courage to tackle this problem.”

Once youth graduate from the Youth Housing Year Intensive Program, SOS B.C. promises lifelong engagement through their **Aftercare Program**. Once a child, youth, or caregiver has been part of SOS, they are part of the SOS family forever.

About SOS Children's Village BC

SOS Children's Villages is the world's largest non-governmental, non-denominational child development organization and cares for fostered, orphaned, or abandoned children. It has existed for over 65 years with presence in 134 countries and 572 Villages. British Columbia is home to the only SOS Children's Village in Canada. SOS Children's Village BC provides homes, a supportive community, and programs to help foster children and youth in need grow into caring, self-reliant adults.

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