

## treating drug addiction

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Photos by Rob Kruyt



David Love works for the Central City Foundation, owners of The Crossing's property near Keremeos. He is charged with a \$6 million capital campaign to establish the place as the province's first youth-oriented long-term drug and alcohol treatment centre.

## Crossing new frontiers

Staring up the towering mountains, feet from the raging Similkameen river, you can't help but be humbled by the setting for The Crossing.

And come 2009, 46 teens from across B.C. may also look for inspiration from this imposing landscape as they attempt to conquer their own mountain: Drug addiction.

"This is truly a place of healing," said the Central City Foundation's campaign director for The Crossing, a proposed treatment community for drug-addicted youth. "You just get this feeling when you're here. It feels good."

Situated near Keremeos in B.C.'s Interior, The Crossing will be the first long-term treatment community for youth in the province.

And it's about time, according to Susie Rutan, a Vancouver mother who looked far and wide in search of a program that could help her 16-year-old son kick a hard drug habit.

In the end, she shipped him to Eastern Canada because B.C. had little in the way of long-term treatment.

"It takes months to change the pathways of addiction," she said. "Some people just have an addictive personality, and it takes time to work through those issues. My son was one of those."

He came back a year later with a firm grip on his addiction, but Rutan said he was one of the lucky ones.

Most families in the same situation just aren't able to send their kids to the other side of the country.

"It's a real disgrace we

haven't had [a long-term treatment community] for all these years," she said. "There are hundreds of youth that could use a program like this. We were just the tip of the iceberg."

So Rutan kick-started a grassroots campaign with other parents to advocate for a treatment community in B.C. Seven years later, it's finally starting to look like a reality.

The Central City Foundation, provincial government and Portage — a company that operates several treatment communities in Eastern Canada — teamed up to convert The Crossing, currently used as a camp site, into a full-fledged treatment centre.

The chalet-style buildings at the site will be home to teens enrolled in the peer-based one-year program.

Traditional schooling, clinical counselling and recreation will give them plenty to do, but the focus will have teens with similar challenges help each other through recovery.

It's a model that gives youth a 70-per-cent better chance for recovery over the current treatment options in B.C., according to Love.

"It's away from the maddening crowd [of a big city] and it really does become a community," he said. "[The teens] care about each other and want each other to succeed."

Rutan told *24 hours* she's confident The Crossing will save lives.

"There is a desperate need for this type of facility," she said. "The children are our future, and the sooner you get to them, the more successful they'll be in recovery."

### reality check

One major stumbling block remains before B.C. gets its first long-term treatment community for youth.

Central City Foundation's David Love still needs to raise about \$6 million to refurbish the site and prepare it for residents.

Love and his team will tap foundations and private citizens to raise the money.

"That seems like quite a wonderful deal when you're talking about bringing 46 youth from B.C. to The Crossing," said Love. "These are young people, sometimes frighteningly so. Detox is a good start but six months to a year [of treatment]... what a difference that can make."

The province will cover the operating costs for the site.

