



## THE DAILY COURIER

### Back to a life without drugs; New addiction-treatment centre in Okanagan kicks off final fundraising push

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Surrounded by dozens of unkempt residents of Vancouver's notoriously drug-ridden **Downtown Eastside**, Davin Boutang is happily munching on a free hotdog.

A glass of juice and a frosted cupcake sit by his side on a sun-drenched bench in Victory Square.

He's been a heroin addict for 10 of his 31 years.

The free meal is part of a picnic to kick off the final fundraising push for the Central City Foundation's work on B.C.'s first residential **addiction**-treatment centre for youth.

The \$6-million The Crossing at Keremeos project is planned for the site of a former Outward Bound camp 10 kilometres outside the Okanagan town.

The 42-bed centre will treat youth aged 14-24, said foundation CEO Jennifer Johnstone.

Boutang said if such a place had existed a decade ago, he might not be using methadone now to try and kick his habit while living in a transitional house.

Johnstone said safe and affordable housing or **addiction** treatment services are now accepted as a solution to what is considered one "of our most intractable community challenges."

"Right now, if you are under the age of 19, there is no long-term residential treatment in British Columbia. We know that long-term treatment works."

In fact, she said, statistics show that 71 per cent of people who go through such treatment stay in recovery from their **addiction**.

With youth beginning to begin experimenting with drugs at an average age of 11, those who become dependent on them need somewhere to go for help.

"It's a place for young people to truly turn their lives around and really become the people they want to be, not just learn how to not take drugs," she said.

Further, she said, the program is non-denominational. She said it's a spiritual program in the sense that the youth will create a "spirit of community."

"It's a community of shared past experience, but it's a community going forward out of that place that they share. It's a new kind of experience. When they get to this program, it's the first for many of them that they're ever really felt support from their peers to take a different path in life."

Currently, B.C. and Newfoundland are the only provinces without long-term residential treatment centres specifically for addicted youth.

While B.C. contributed \$2 million to the project last week, the Central City Foundation still needs to raise another \$1.7 million to renovate and retrofit buildings.

Further, the Vancouver Coastal and Fraser health authorities have pledged operational funding for the program "which will cover the cost of residents while they're on-site," Johnstone said.

The centre will include accommodation, a dining area, classrooms, workshops and recreational space.

Residents will not only interact with each other, but will also be assigned an individual counsellor for the length of their stay, and that appeals to Boutang.

"I don't want to be stuck with a bunch of losers all crying," he said of the counsellor. "That'd be pretty good."

But, in the meantime, he does what he can to change his life. In addition to the methadone program, he's working part time.

"I'm slowly changing my life. It's all slow baby steps. At least I'm off the streets and I'm not using nearly as much as I used to before. It took me a while to find programs."

The new program in Keremeos will take care of that transition back to a life without drugs.

With family and community co-operation, the program will work to reintegrate the youth to the community.

"It's all part of that continuum," Johnstone said. "Ongoing programs like (Alcoholics Anonymous) and (Narcotics Anonymous) are all part of that after-care program."

The 23-hectare site for The Crossing was purchased by the foundation several years ago.

Construction of the facility is scheduled to begin this summer and be completed by the summer of 2009.

The foundation hopes to have 20 treatment beds available for early occupancy by December 2008.

Foundation board member Susie Ruttan, who founded the parents' group From Grief to Action with husband Rob, said **addiction** can strike any family -- and she knows.

Her 26-year-old son is a recovering addict and plans to work at Portage.

He was 15 when he left B.C. to be treated for heroin **addiction**.

"**Addiction** can enter the most loving and happy of homes and, when it strikes, the whole family is thrown into turmoil," Ruttan said. "The Portage program at the Crossing will give hope to families in crisis and help young people reclaim their future."

"We believe this program will save lives."

Plans are to base treatment on the successful Portage program, which works on the "therapeutic communities" model of **addiction** treatment.

Since 1973, Portage has opened eight similar programs in Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada.

The Crossing's goal is to create a community in which young addicts are actively involved in their recovery, take responsibility for their actions and help each other live without the use of drugs, said the program website.

A typical stay would involve a commitment of six to nine months, with families encouraged to visit and support their children.

Those participating would have to undergo a detoxification program prior to arrival and would not be allowed alcohol or drugs during their stay.

Premier Gordon Campbell announced the \$2 million in funding late last week.

"Long-term, residential-treatment services improve the likelihood of a young person's success in overcoming addictions," Campbell said.