



NEWS RELEASE

Pilot outreach program supports at-risk unhoused community members while reducing strain on City law enforcement

ABBOTSFORD – July 13, 2023 – CEDAR Outreach, a local outreach society, is providing front-line intervention and supports for people living unsheltered in Abbotsford through funds from the City via a grant provided by the Union of BC Municipalities Strengthening Communities: Safe Restart Program. Augmenting ongoing efforts to keep the community safe by working directly with local law enforcement and responding to their needs in real time, CEDAR’s outreach initiative supplements and diverts from formal enforcement measures to ensure all residents are provided the unique supports they may need to transition out of homelessness.

CEDAR Outreach Society, in partnership with the City of Abbotsford and the Abbotsford Police Department, operates the Community Integration Team seven days a week, including after-hours and on call. Team members work closely alongside the Abbotsford Police Department and the City’s Bylaw Services to ensure law-enforcement officials have a smooth transition for people who could benefit from wrap-around social service supports. The team provides front-line intervention and assessment of needs, case management, and coordination of the social services required to support highly vulnerable individuals in meeting their basic needs and moving toward well-being; including in the areas of housing, personal identification replacement, harm reduction, detox, counselling, and access to food.

Ten months into its pilot, this initiative also helps bridge the gap between law enforcement and social service providers. By building connections and trust with people who are living unsheltered and in complex scenarios, and through assisting law-enforcement officers on site with an intervention-based response, the Community Integration Team provides additional supports and assistance beyond what the Abbotsford Police Department and City Bylaw Officers are able to provide. It also ensures those who were previously falling through the gaps of the existing social service network are supported and provided access to resources, and is a step towards creating a more equitable, safe and supportive community for all.

From January to May 2023, the Community Integration Team has received 138 referrals and provided 559 rides to essential services and appointments, while also providing on-the-spot advocacy and service navigation support. Through their on-site response, they've also provided 2,439 food items, distributed 280 articles of clothing and have worked to stabilize eight clients in shelters while supporting them towards long-term sustainable housing options.

The Community Integration Team was developed in consultation with the Abbotsford Police Department, CEDAR Outreach Society, City of Abbotsford Bylaw Services, and a range of community stakeholders and social-service providers and the City is hopeful the success of this pilot will help in securing long-term, ongoing funding from the Province.

Quotes:

Ross Siemens, City of Abbotsford Mayor

“As a City, we are committed to facilitating action to mitigate social issues that impact our community and keeping our community members safe, while also supporting the needs of our most vulnerable residents. By providing essential on-the-ground support, the Community Integration Team of CEDAR Outreach Society is achieving both, while also helping to reduce increasing pressures on our City’s Police and Bylaw Officers. This initiative is a great example of the positive outcomes that can be reached through collaborative partnerships and a dedication to social justice.”

Inspector Kevin Murray, Abbotsford Police Department

“CEDAR Outreach provides support for clients at every step of their engagement with enforcement authorities, ranging from initial contact with police due to a business or neighbourhood complaint, to supporting them as they are released from AbbyPD cells, to working with them around issues of warrants, to supporting those who are exiting the prison system. This has not only alleviated strain on the system, but has also translated into increased trust between those CEDAR supports and criminal justice actors. This increased trust has been a two-way street. This is particularly important, as we know that people living unsheltered are often victimized and we are wanting to increase the likelihood that they will report. Ultimately, this program has begun to increase access to justice for those who are needing it the most.”

Josh Burton, CEDAR Program Manager

“This project fills an important gap in our community. It allows us to work within the complex and challenging space where enforcement efforts intersect with people in situations of vulnerability. Through our outreach work, and referrals from enforcement authorities, we build important relationships with those not connected with existing services. Working alongside our community non-profit and other partners, these relationships translate into increased access to services and enhanced well-being for those we support. As our clients are connected to services, this further translates into increased public safety and the decreased set up and entrenchment of new camps for those living unsheltered.”

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For more information contact:

Aletta Vanderheyden
Communications and Public Relations Manager
City of Abbotsford
E: media@abbotsford.ca