

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HELPING OUR CITY'S VULNERABLE OFF THE STREET BUILDS A SAFE AND HEALTHY CITY FOR ALL

DOWNTOWN WINNIPEG BIZ'S COMMUNITY HOMELESS ASSISTANCE TEAM (CHAT) OFFICIALLY LAUNCHES AS A PERMANENT DOWNTOWN PROGRAM WITH \$152K IN FUNDING

Downtown Winnipeg – Based on best practices of Business Improvement Zones/Associations throughout North America, new efforts to alleviate homelessness are taking place right here in the heart of our city with the Downtown BIZ's commitment of 3 dedicated outreach workers, passionate and eager to give those in our city who are homeless a fresh start.

Initiated on a small scale with one community outreach worker in 2012, the Community Homeless Assistance Team (CHAT) has now grown to a team of three with support from partners and community stakeholders. The workers undertake outreach to vulnerable populations – people who experience homelessness and/or mental health and addictions issues. CHAT outreach workers pursue a unique proactive approach that addresses the dynamic barriers and complexities faced by the homeless population in order to link those in need to individually and culturally relevant services. The aim of CHAT is to help facilitate individual transition from homelessness to enhanced stability – inclusive of housing, employment and educational support, as required.

The unfortunate reality of homelessness often presents a negative perception of downtown from a health and safety perspective. With CHAT, the conditions of those living on the streets are thoroughly addressed and can be overcome which can lead to a socially inclusive, economically prosperous city. When basic needs are met, people can become productive agents for change in their own lives and in the city, improving theirs and others' health and safety.

Today, CHAT received \$152,076 of financial and in-kind support from both the public and private sector to help enhance its services and outreach efforts:

- Vehicle donated by Sargent Blue Jeans to help CHAT outreach workers connect clients to services and supports quickly and efficiently (value of \$8,000);

- Clothing bank for CHAT clients donated by Sargent Blue Jeans;
- Winter parkas for CHAT outreach workers donated by Sargent Blue Jeans (value of \$1,500);
- Satellite drop in offices for the homeless located at Agape Table, Holy Trinity Church, and Red Road Lodge;
- Funding from the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD) of \$17,290 and the Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries of \$60,000 to employ one additional CHAT outreach worker plus program operation costs;
- Parking spot for CHAT vehicle donated by Impark (value of \$2,000);
- Office space for CHAT outreach workers at Portage Place (value of \$3,000); and
- Business community financial contribution through Downtown BIZ's membership (annual budget of \$60,286 dedicated to CHAT), in addition to in-kind BIZ staff support.

“We know that the cycle of despair often felt by our city’s homeless can only be addressed through sustained social intervention,” **says Stefano Grande, Executive Director of the Downtown BIZ.** “Our goal is to forge and help evolve stronger relationships, helping people who are homeless or at risk transition into healthier lives, through continued outreach. The BIZ strongly feels that by addressing the visible presence of homelessness, by helping people comprehensively off the street and into a better place, we will be able to break down barriers and create a more tolerant city.”

Funding from the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD) and the Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries will be used to fund an additional CHAT outreach worker plus program operation costs.

“Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries is very happy to be supporting the CHAT Program as our commitment to social responsibility,” said Ron Lemieux, Minister responsible for Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries. “The funding for an additional CHAT outreach worker will create that personal connection with those who are homeless to remove the barriers for a successful transition.”

“Many of our city’s homeless fall through the traditional social and health service cracks. Some live on riverbanks year-round, others move from place to place to keep warm and safe. Some are often banned from social service agencies, either by choice or no fault of their own,” **says Kristy Rebenchuk, Outreach Coordinator for CHAT.** “We use a strength-based approach. Instead of focusing on what people ‘need’,

we focus on what people are able to bring to the table. What do they want to do? What are their skills? We work closely with our clients to ensure a positive outcome that is reflective of their own aspirations, hopes, and dreams.”

“Today’s announcement is only the latest example of Winnipeggers working together for the good of their fellow citizens. Whether it involves representatives from our business community, various levels of government, educational institutions, or those who simply volunteer their time, again we are showing what can be accomplished when we work together on an important issue such as this,” **says Devon Clunis, Chief of Police for the City of Winnipeg.** “On behalf of the nearly 2,000 women and men of the Winnipeg Police Service, I would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the entire Community Homeless Assistance Team and their partners for continuing their noble pursuit to end homelessness. Together, with the strength of many, we will succeed.”

Mohamed El Tassi, President and CEO of Sargent Blue Jeans, was inspired by the work of the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ when he took part in the CEO Sleepout in 2013, along with his father, Albert El Tassi, President and CEO of Peerless Garments Inc. For both Mohamed and Albert, homelessness is an important issue and they would like to be part of the solution.

“Sargent Blue Jeans is pleased to support the work of CHAT,” **says Mohamed El Tassi.** “A vehicle will help CHAT outreach workers become more mobile – connecting those experiencing homelessness with the right services and supports quicker and easier. As a business owner downtown, I know it is our corporate responsibility to be part of the solution in creating opportunities for those least advantaged.”

“Having participated in the CEO Sleepout in 2013, I can say with confidence that the work of the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ is helping to change people’s lives,” **says Albert El Tassi.** “Through this one event, more and more CEOs and community champions desire to play larger roles in ending homelessness in our city.”

Since 2011, \$400,000 has been raised to employ over 40 of our city’s homeless through the CEO Sleepout event. The CHAT program is being adopted by many other Canadian cities – in addition to being a Winnipeg-first and innovative model that supports our city’s most vulnerable.

Grande adds: “Downtown’s business community is ready to end homelessness. Four years ago, the Downtown BIZ brought its voice to the table. After witnessing this issue firsthand, along with the strain on fire, police, and medical services assisting people day by day, corner by corner, we issued a challenge to the corporate community. We asked CEOs and community leaders to step up and take part in our CEO Sleepout, to help support the work of the non-profit sector, intensify the conversation around homelessness, and challenge government to press forward on long-term solutions to this issue.”

To learn more about CHAT and the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ’s homelessness alleviation efforts, visit:

www.downtownwinnipegbiz.com.

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MEDIA INQUIRIES

Jason Syvixay, Managing Director

Downtown Winnipeg BIZ

Email: jason@downtownwinnipegbiz.com

Phone: 204.958.4635

BACKGROUND

Downtown Winnipeg BIZ Outreach Program

Supported by the City of Winnipeg, Province of Manitoba, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA), and Main Street Project, the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ’s Outreach Program helped intoxicated people move into safer environments in a compassionate manner, and connected people on the street with resources, saving the city’s emergency services an estimated \$6 million since the program began 6 years ago. Over 3,000 emergency calls were directed to the Outreach each year, freeing up fire, police, and paramedic services to deal with higher priority cases. The Outreach Patrol’s average response time was 10 minutes or less.

Since the program started in 2006, more than 12,000 vulnerable people have been helped off the street. They have been connected with social service providers or brought home to family members and supplied with essential services like socks, mittens, blankets, water, and food.

Through our Outreach Program, we have learned how important it is to forge deep and meaningful relationships with individuals who experience homeless, in order to help them off the street and into healthier lives. Given the magnitude of people helped by the Outreach, we saw a direct need to continue evolving and supporting these established relationships, using a preventative, case-management approach.

“The Outreach has played a key role in creating a safer downtown for everyone, providing a core service to vulnerable individuals and freeing up emergency services so they can focus on more serious issues,” **says Downtown BIZ Executive Director Stefano Grande.** “We are pleased to see the Cadets taking up this role with additional resources, and look forward to seeing these important services continue for our members and the general public.”

"Over six years, the Downtown BIZ Outreach program saved millions of dollars in fire paramedic and police resources," **said Mayor Sam Katz.** "More importantly, Outreach volunteers connected thousands of people with social service resources within the City of Winnipeg, and perhaps even saved some lives, by bringing people out of the cold during the winter months. I am pleased this valuable program continues with support from the Winnipeg Police Service cadets."

Community Homeless Assistance Team (CHAT) Clients Successfully Housed

	Client	Age (M/F)	Referrals/ Service Connections	Years on street
1	B.T	55, M	Eagle Urban Transition Centre, Medical Services, Family reunification	Intermittent months
2	T.R	41, M	Medical Services	Intermittent months
3	S.F	45, F	WRHA Mental Health Worker, Homeless Outreach Mentor, Salvation Army, EIA	1
4	O.R	38, M	HSC- Chemical Withdrawal, Forward House Ministries	5+
5	C.B	42, M	EIA, Reconnected with prior employment position, family reunification, AA, Family Centre- Selkirk, Recovery Acres- Edmonton, Alta. MAP 24/7- Edmonton, Alta.	7+
6	D.B	51, M	Assertive Community Treatment Team (ACT), Mount Caramel Clinic, Main Street Project Detoxification unit, Dilico Treatment Centre- Thunder Bay, Ont.	3+
7	F.D	48, M	Family Doctor, Main Street Project Detoxification unit, Peguis Al- Care Treatment Centre, EIA	3+
8	J.K	23, F	Pritchard House Treatment, Native Women’s Transition Centre, EIA, FASD Life’s Journey Inc.	3
9	M.M	24, M	EIA, Eagle Urban Transition Centre, Parenting Programming- Snowbird Lodge	6+
10	J.O	37, M	EIA, Revenue Canada, Eagle Urban Transition Centre	5+
11	B.H	33, M	EIA, John Howard Society- Counseling and Anger Management, Aurora Family Therapy Centre- counseling	Intermittent months
12	D.A	47, M	Assertive Community Treatment Team (ACT), EIA	6
13	Q.M	39, M	Ma MaWi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc., Men’s Resource Centre	4

14	M.S	44, M	EIA- Disability, Eagle Urban Transition Centre, Winnipeg Harvest, Legal Aid- Tenancy Advocacy	6+
15	A.K	60, F	EIA, Family doctor, WRHA Social Worker, Manitoba Housing, Ophthalmologist, Revenue Canada, Vital Statistics, MPI, Salvation Army	3
16	R.C	30, F	EIA, Pritchard House, SonRise- Salvation Army, Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, Oxford House Band Office, Pritchard House	1+
17	A.F	34, M	EIA, AFM	2
18	S.A	34, F	EIA, The Compassionate Friends of Canada- Parental Support group, Crisis Stabilization Unit, Aurora Family Therapy	2
19	R.M	47, M	Family Doctor, EIA-Disability, Community Gathering sites, Eagle Urban Transition Centre	1+
20	F.B	44, M	AFM	1+
21	A.P	19, M	HSC- Psychiatry	1
22	M.F	47, M	Employment Programming- Opportunities for Employment	Intermittent months
23	R.M	48, M	Main Street Project- detoxification Unit, Pritchard House Treatment Centre	2
24	M.M	56, M	Main Street Detoxification Unit	2
25	J.R.	36, M	EIA, Stepping Forward- Addictions and ongoing counseling, Red Road Lodge	2
26	M.M	51, F	Pritchard House Treatment Centre	3+
27	K.A	39, M	Red Road Lodge, Michnawbe- gomik Friendship Centre- Ontario	2+
28	L.E	25, F	EIA, Eagle Urban Transition Centre	4+
29	M.B	52, M	HSC, Berens River Band Office, Main Street Project Detoxification Unit, Medical Services	2+
30	L.D	24, F	Salvation Army SonRise Program, Northern Connections Clinic- prenatal care	1+
31	R.G	33, F	Ni-Apin Housing Program	1+
32	L.E	28, F	CFS, Pritchard House Treatment Centre, Snowbird Lodge- Parenting programming, Anger Management	5+