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For Immediate Release

Cowichan Collaborates to Address Homelessness and Affordable Housing

Like many communities across BC, the Cowichan Region is facing issues of homelessness, mental health and substance use, poverty and crime. Among the many challenges experienced by people in the Cowichan Valley are incomes that can't support the high cost of market housing, declining rental stocks, difficult and complex systems, funding to meet needs for immediate support and long term needs for affordable housing.

We know that many people are currently homeless, and many people live in housing that is inadequate or unaffordable. We have been working hard over the past several years to address these issues, and more recently, to build coordination and structure needed to make the difference we want to see.

Over the past six months, six key organizations have come together to build collaboration around these issues including Cowichan Housing Association, Social Planning Cowichan, Our Cowichan Communities Health Network, Mental Health and Substance Use Collective Impact Team, Cowichan Division of Family Practice and the United Way. In addition, our community is now embarking upon a Community Plan to Address Homelessness led by the United Way.

On March 6th community members came together at a community forum and identified the need to align our efforts to ensure we are moving forward together toward a common goal, ensure that we are communicating with each other and with the broader community, and to work together to build awareness, connect our efforts, and access funding and resources.

Community members attending a March 29th follow-up meeting committed to a common goal:

*"All Citizens in the Cowichan Region have a **safe and affordable home**"*

Moving forward, recommendations to build upon our efforts included:

- Coordinating our efforts through forming a broad-based, multi-sectoral Coalition that has all of the key agencies at the table and works through a team-based structure
- Developing and enhancing policies of local governments to encourage affordable housing development
- Building our resources to be prepared to take advantage of opportunities
- Educating and engaging the community so that we have a better understanding of both the issues and solutions.