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Dear Friends,

Now that the cold, rainy Vancouver weather is upon us, the needs of the women we see changes. For women engaged in street-based sex work, it means very cold, very long nights of work that can be quite dangerous, isolating, and vulnerable.

In addition to the weather, Vancouver is seeing a resurgence in “abolitionist” language and activism that threatens to put sex workers in even more danger.

Vancouver’s “abolitionist” voice seeks to abolish prostitution in a misguided and paternalistic attempt to protect women from exploitation. Often conflated and confused with trafficking, and invoking historically specific and charged terms like “slavery” and “abolition”, this approach has very dangerous implications on the health and safety of women and men who are either resorting to sex work, or who have chosen sex work. It forces the trade further underground, pushes sex workers further outside of their comfort zones and further away from safety and resources. Ultimately, the “abolitionist” stance stigmatizes and judges women; further victimizing and endangering those same women they purport to protect.

The majority of the women we see at WISH are engaged in a form of sex work that is the most vulnerable, and that has the least amount of choice. They are also dealing with multiple barriers related to housing, mental health, addictions, trauma, impacts of colonization, criminalization, stigma, and discrimination. Calling for the abolishment of prostitution while these factors and conditions still exists – namely, those that lead some women to choose this form of work over other kinds – is counter-productive and irresponsible.

The vision of WISH is that every woman should have access to opportunities to make free, healthy and positive choices. Taking a harm reduction approach means that we work with women where they are at, and aim to reduce any further harm.

This past year has been a difficult one for women at WISH. Fentanyl, Vancouver’s highest homelessness numbers in years, increased “abolitionist” and “Shame the Johns” campaigns, and insufficient supports and services for women in the DTES have all combined to make women even more targeted and vulnerable. The need for a place like WISH is all the more critical, as explained by J’s experience:

J began accessing the WISH Drop-In Centre and over the course of a year got to know our Aboriginal Health and Safety Coordinator during her “inreach” nights in the Drop-In. J eventually joined the Aboriginal Health and Safety program. Through her involvement in this program, she has taken the time to work on herself and her healing. She is now over six months sober, helps to facilitate group sessions with new AHSP students, and successfully secured a steady part-time, mainstream job. All of which has gained her visitation and a renewed relationship with her grandchildren, whom she now sees on a regular basis.

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The number of women who use the Drop-In has gone up. Between 2014 and 2015, WISH saw a whopping 28% increase in the number of women served.

In practical terms, we are serving more women at WISH. In the first quarter of 2015, we served 19,191 meals, compared to 21,124 meals served in the first quarter of this year. Operationally, we will need to increase the number of Drop-In and support staff in order to maintain the operations and safety of the Drop-In. The impact WISH staff have on women is exemplified by K's experience:

*K has struggled to find housing that suits her needs and lifestyle. She spends a great deal of time in the Drop-In Centre to give herself a break from shelters and the street. Spending so much time in a shared environment is especially challenging when going through a stressful time such as this. When she first began accessing the Drop-In, K, sometimes struggled with her interactions with others in the space. **Through the relationships she's built with staff and their ongoing personal support, she has worked on strategies to share space with others in a healthy way.** These skills will help her in securing and keeping permanent housing.*

We don't do this work alone. In fact, we can't do it without you. We have started the **#ImakeWISHhappen** Campaign to celebrate everyone who contributes, in their own way, to making WISH happen. Please take the time to read about this campaign on page 3 of the newsletter.

I also urge you to take the time to make a donation to WISH. Your generous and thoughtful donations continue to be critical to the operations of the Drop-In, and to funding the programs that support street-based sex working women's access to opportunities to make free, healthy and positive choices.

I want to leave you with one last example of the impact of WISH on women's Lives. Early in my role at WISH I had a visitor to our offices. **S** used to come to the Drop-In close to 20 years ago. At the time, she was suffering from what she described as severe addictions. She was homeless and sleeping under the Georgia Viaduct, and was actively working the strolls of the DTES and Mount Pleasant. WISH was operating out of the church at that time and was only open several hours, a few evenings a week. She described WISH as the only place she could go where she felt accepted, not judged, and safe. **S** plainly states that, were it not for WISH, she likely would not be alive today. Now many years clean and sober, a mother, and successful in her career, **S** returned to WISH to share her story and, in gratitude, make a generous donation.

We look forward to your ongoing support in continuing to make these kinds of positive impacts for women in Vancouver.

Peace

Mebrat Beyene
Executive Director

We are thrilled to announce that, again this year, an anonymous donor is matching gifts of \$250 or more between November 1, 2016 and January 31, 2017.