

WISH Drop-In Centre Society

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WISH LEARNING CENTRE EARNS NATIONAL LITERACY AWARD

This Fall, ABC Life Literacy awarded WISH's Learning Centre honourable mention in the national Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life Literacy Innovation Award! WISH Executive Director, Mebrat Beyene and WISH Learning Centre Coordinator and Capilano University Instructor, Betsy Alkenbrack traveled to Toronto to receive the award on behalf of WISH.

For 17 years, the Learning Centre, in partnership with Capilano University, has done innovative peer-driven work with women in the DTES. This award recognizes this innovative work, including one-on-one supports, widely-shared research projects produced over the years. Visit the WISH website at wish-vancouver.net to read some of those reports.



WISH's learning centre currently serves
24 core learners, 22 regular participants
and 60 drop-in participants

WISH Newsletter • Winter 2017



SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GRADUATE HIRED

EAST VANITY PARLOUR has hired the very first graduate of our Supportive Employment Program! And WISH couldn't be more excited!!

Finding local businesses to fill entry-level positions with social hires hasn't been easy. This struggle exemplifies the barriers that face sex trade workers looking for employment options.

WISH program coordinator Eva Ureta approached 20 businesses before finding one partner — East Vanity, a 10-year-old business that moved from Mount Pleasant to east Vancouver in March.

This isn't the first time that Vancouver beauticians have supported vulnerable communities. The Beauty Night Society was founded 17 years ago to provide services including makeovers to women living in poverty.

We are happy to report that East Vanity is already benefitting from the partnership.

"A product line that we carry has asked what they can do to help, guests hear about the partnership and are moved and want to bring more business here — it opens up your world to more kindness and community, it gives back in so many ways," says salon owner Kristi Johanson.

If you have any leads on businesses who would be interested in social hiring with WISH, please let us know. info@wishdropincentre.ca

CITY AND PROVINCE RE-COMMIT TO HEALTH & SAFETY OF SEX WORKERS

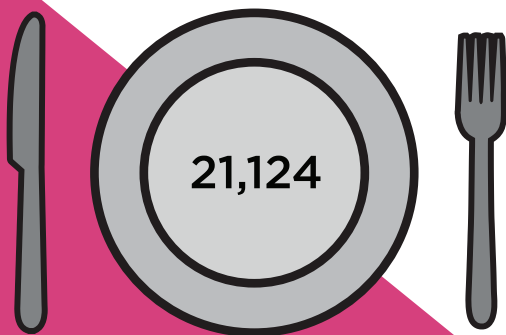
Readers of our Spring newsletter will remember that WISH was facing a dire situation. Due to stagnant core funding levels, WISH was experiencing the effects of ongoing funding shortfalls that brought us to a “go/no-go” deadline of July 1st. With no significant influx of core funding levels, WISH was forced to make the heartbreaking decision to cut back hours of the Drop-In, the MAP Van, the Supportive Employment program and the Aboriginal Health & Safety Program in order to ensure the overall financial sustainability of the organization.

Given the vulnerability of the women we serve, closing the Drop-In's hours one night a week and taking the MAP Van off the road one night a week was devastating. These core, front-line programs exist because women in street-based sex work face extreme stigma, targeted violence and trauma, and are dealing with chronic issues of poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, and substance use issues. **A 365-night-a-year safe and judgement-free safe haven dedicated to sex working women facing this complex intersection of issues MUST be non-negotiable.**

Due to our persistence, the support of our funding partners, our donors, and a new Provincial government with the political will to prioritize women's health and safety, we have successfully reversed those cuts!



From 3am to 6am, the WISH Mobile Access Project van is the only outreach van operating in Vancouver



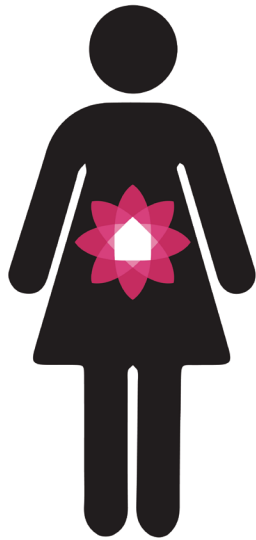
In 2016, the Wish Drop-In Centre served 21,124 meals to women in Vancouver's street-based sex trade

- City of Vancouver provides Emergency Opioid Response: Funds made available to keep the MAP Van on the road 7 nights a week until December 31st.

- Province of BC Announces additional resources to combat violence against women: Funds made available to keep MAP Van on the road 7 nights a week beyond December 31st.

- BC Housing increases annual contribution to the Drop-In: Reflects the increased numbers of women accessing WISH, allowing the Drop-In to remain open 7 nights a week.

We are grateful to the City of Vancouver and the Province of BC for their commitment to helping us fight the effects of the opioid crisis, and in supporting WISH's ability to keep women in the DTES safe.



- Over **70%** of WISH participants are homeless or live in SRO hotels
- Over **50%** are of Aboriginal descent
- Women who use WISH are exposed to **high levels** of violence
- A woman who is involved in the street-based sex trade is **47 times** more likely to die a violent death than a woman who is not

FORSAKEN: 5 YEARS LATER

December 17th marks the fifth anniversary of the release of *Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry* (MWCI Report). The report reviewed the findings of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry and outlined two urgent measures and sixty-three recommendations for action.

One of the urgent recommendations was “To provide funding to existing centres that provide emergency services to women engaged in the sex trade to enable them to remain open 24 hours per day.” WISH was identified as one of those existing centres and BC Housing was identified as the funding body, allowing WISH to extend the Drop-In hours from 5 hours to 18 hours a night; providing critical front-line supports and a safe haven to sex working women in the DTES 365 nights a year. Funding for a 24 hour space, however, has still not been reached.

The further we move away from the release of *Forsaken*, we see that our collective memories and attention spans are disturbingly short and fleeting. Fewer people are speaking about the intersection of vulnerability that women engaged in street-based sex work face. The

further away from the report we move, fewer public and policy discussions link the fact that intersection issues of homelessness, poverty, race, mental health, disabilities, and trauma mean women face dramatically fewer opportunities to make safe, healthy, and positive choices, and result in women resorting to extremely unsafe street-based sex work.

With a new provincial government in place, we hope to see a shift. We call on them to make the health and safety of women resorting to street-based sex work a priority and to provide immediate, meaningful, and respectful updates on the *Forsaken* recommendations.

WHAT IS THE RED LIGHT ALERT?

“She woke up alone, and tied to a bed with shoelaces. She called for help and was freed by someone on her floor. Believes she was tied up for two days because she missed 2 days of methadone. She may have been drugged, raped, punched and threatened. Two males involved.”

(excerpt from Bad Date Report).

For 15 years, WISH has been producing the Red Light Alert.

This report has up-to-date information of violent dates and descriptions of dangerous johns. It is written in the sex worker’s own words, and is distributed every Thursday. Also receiving the report are the VPD, RCMP, PACE, Providence Health, Pivot, HIM, Vancouver Coastal Health, SWUAV, BC Centre for Excellence and HIV Aids, Surrey Women’s Centre, Hastings-Sunrise Community Policing, Lookout, ATIRA, DEWC, Neighborhood Houses, various shelters, BWSS, Raincity Housing, Positive Living BC, Renfrew Community Centre, In-Site, AESHA, WATARI, Vancouver Native Health, WAVAW, and approx. 50 other community groups.

The Red Light Alert serves a few very important functions: Primarily it functions as a warning/safety system for women by women in the street-based sex trade. As well, agencies who serve the women are made aware of what the women dealing with on a daily basis, which may or may not lead to arrests.

Last but not least, it is an important space for women to have a voice about the abuse, conflicts, kidnappings and other violence they endure as street-based sex workers. For their issues to be documented and shared; for their traumas to be acknowledged and recognized—WISH will continue to publish and send out this report to any and all vested partners. We hope the women continue to contribute their own well-being and the well-being of others through our Red Light Alert.

“...Thanks to the ladies who make my nights just a little easier to get through. Without you, who knows what would happen to us. Thank-you to all and keep up the great work. Love & respect.”

- Anon. (woman who uses the MAP Van)

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT TO MAKE WISH HAPPEN!



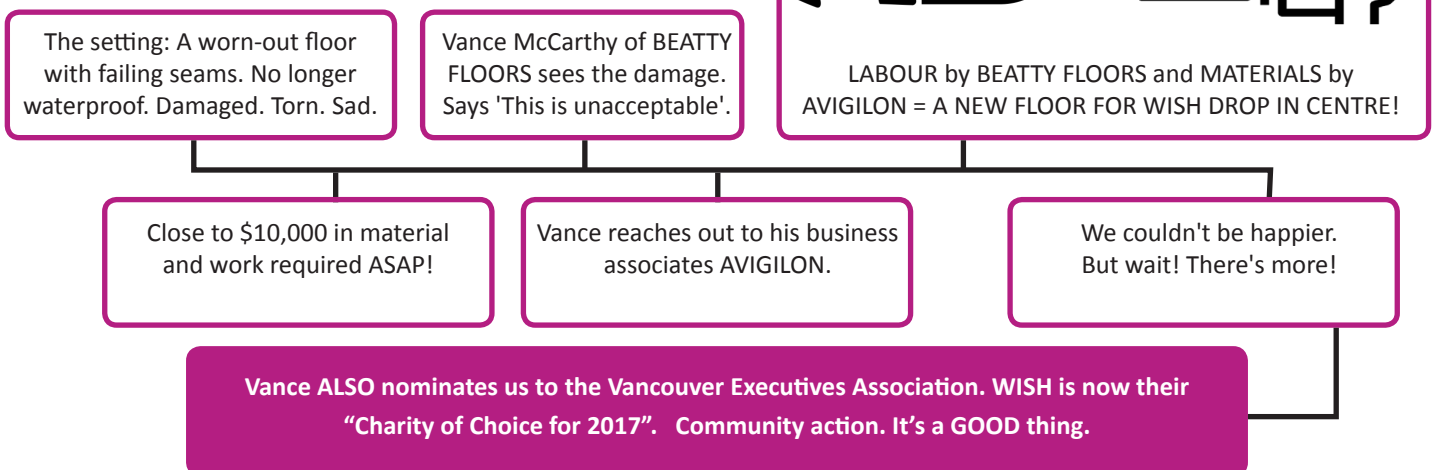
From **Dec 1 - Jan 31**, a generous donor will match all donations over \$250. Your donation helps WISH to improve the health, safety and well-being of women who are involved in Vancouver's street-based sex trade.

WITH MATCHING DONATIONS YOUR DOLLAR SUPPORTS:

\$1.32	One full, nutritiously balanced hot meal in the Drop-In Centre
\$50	One woman to complete a Supportive Employment shift, allowing her stable and safe revenue
\$250 \$125	Honoraria for 10 Indigenous women to attend one week of the Aboriginal Health & Safety Program
\$500 \$250	Keeps the Drop-In kitchen appliances serviced, maintained and cleaned for a year
\$1000 \$500	Allows the MAP Van to support 30-40 women with harm reduction supplies, overdose prevention, referrals, Bad Date reporting, donations and snacks, directly where they work, each night
\$1500 \$750	Provides one full month of customized and innovative literacy opportunities through the Learning Centre to approximately 50-70 women
\$1500 \$750	Provides anywhere from 3-10 women with 10 music therapy evenings in the Drop-In
\$5000 \$2500	Fuel for one full year for the MAP Van to be on the road, providing critical front-line supports 365 nights a year

HOW TWO LOCAL BUSINESSES MADE WISH HAPPEN!

SOME INCREDIBLE NEWS... and a wonderful example of how our local businesses came together in support of WISH!



DONATE TODAY AT WISH-VANCOUVER.NET