

Dinner for Our Elders, Family & Friends on the Street



Date: April 11, 2016

Good evening, my name is Krisandra Rufus and I wish to thank Council for having myself, our Grassroots Kind Hearts Society and supporters here tonight.

We are pleased to know that the City of Campbell River is committed to creating positive change by undertaking such projects as the beautification and revitalization of our downtown core. We realize this will help to ensure that our community will continue to thrive, attract tourists and generate revenue. We are excited to be a part of such change and feel that the goals of our group fall directly in line with what the City has planned. Our society helps those vulnerable members within the community that are often "visible" in the very downtown core that you plan to beautify. In fact, the "Friends and Family" that we serve dinners to Monday to Friday can be found seeking shelter or rest in areas all over town. They are sometimes in need of medical help, assistance for substance abuse and/or may have mental illness. Although many services are required to fully support our friends and family on the street we feel that every person has a right to food and a warm and a safe place to sleep. We are dedicated to seeing a place for them to go 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Grassroots Kind Hearts Society began one year ago when I went to feed my nephew who lives on the streets downtown. I quickly realized the need that existed and was soon feeding everyone who was hungry. Since then I have lost several of my own family members who called our streets "home". I will fight for each person that has passed away and I will continue to fight for all that need me to be their voice, to help them fight for their future. Our volunteer group has grown through a huge effort by many committed people that believe we have helped create change in the lives of many. We have aided in helping twelve people that are now living "off the streets". Although there are many support services in town that are available we have such a unique and diverse group of individuals they may be reluctant to utilize them for a number of reasons. Many learn to trust us and know we will do our best to provide direction for them to get

to the services they need. We often go with them to appointments, we check on them and we believe in them when they no longer believe in themselves.

DID YOU KNOW?

The cost of homelessness to Canadians is estimated at \$7 billion dollars annually, according to the 2013 report "The State of Homelessness in Canada." This estimate is based on the cost of reacting to homelessness instead of addressing the root cause of it and taking a proactive approach. Reactionary solutions are expensive and typically involve a greater use of emergency services such as: law enforcement, courts and prisons, emergency healthcare, longer hospital stays, etc. Those that are chronically homeless have a considerably higher risk of suffering mental and physical health problems, addictions and disabilities.

My passion is to see a center in Campbell River that would allow for a place where we can serve hot meals, the coffee is on and there is always a warm and dry place to sleep. One that in the future may include sobering beds and see other minded like organizations working together in an effort to provide what is needed to assist our friends and family living on the street. We hope that City Council will see that a "proactive approach" rather than the reactionary one that we are currently using would be less of a burden on tax payers and more effective in its outcome.

We have created a petition that we would like to present to City Council this evening that shows an outstanding support from the citizens of Campbell River. We have received more than 850 signatures that back our efforts to help not only our friends and family on the street but those in our community that would like to see a more effective solution for those that are homeless in our city. We are asking for a commitment from you in regards to a mutually agreeable location that could be used as a center with your full support. We also require that City Council pressure BC Housing to commit to keeping the shelter beds running until such a center is open. Finally, we need a place that we can continue to feed meals that would be in close proximity to the shelter until a center can be operational.

We wish to thank you for your time this evening and look forward to working with you towards a solution.