

# CONNECT WARMING CENTRE

The Connect Warming Centre (Connect) is a Coalition initiative, operated by the Comox Valley Transition Society that provides a safe, welcoming space for vulnerable individuals experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. People can escape inclement weather, temporarily store, or dry out belongings, access washrooms, refreshments, and other immediate supports.

Connect also aims to improve self-sufficiency by providing assisted access to housing opportunities, social connection, literacy and education or volunteer opportunities, referrals to community social service agencies, as well as food and living supports.



In December 2019, we hired coordinators, outlined operational and behavioural protocols, and signed the license to occupy agreement with the City of Courtenay who provides our space in-kind. We acquired furniture, supplies and everything we needed to open our doors and set the space up. We started 2020 exceptionally strong with the opening of the Connect Warming Centre on January 16th. If permanent housing is not available, then at minimum, being able to provide a space for people to go during the day can make a huge impact on people's well-being. The space quickly proved to be a safe, welcoming place for folks experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness and welcomed approximately 50-60 people daily.

## [The pandemic's impact on Connect](#)

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the closure and reduction of many services in the downtown Courtenay core, the Connect Warming Centre pivoted to respond to the needs of and to protect our most vulnerable populations. Hours of operation increased from Monday – Friday afternoons to 7 days a week. With strict health protocols and physical distancing measures in place Connect offers COVID-19 symptom screening and education, a washroom, hand hygiene, cell phone charging, access to wi-fi, coffee and hygiene supplies such as soap, hand sanitizer and masks. Staff remain available to help fill out income assistance forms, administer Vulnerability Assessments for supportive housing, and offer referrals to other agencies & access to living supports such as bus tickets, laundry tokens, grocery gift cards etc. Through our partnership with the Comox Valley Division of Family Practice, we now have a physician attending Connect regularly and assisting people on-site. Since opening, Connect has had nearly 7000 visits.

Our current partners include, AVI, Wachiay Friendship Centre, Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness, Ministry of

*"I come here to get out of my isolation. It gives me hope."*

*"I like coming here because there's friendly staff and people. It's a real nice place to hang out."*

*"I have mental health issues and sometimes I have to go to Connect for support. Sometimes I don't trust myself. It's frightening. This place helps me feel like support is never far away."*

*"It's a great place to come and relax and connect with good people."*

*"Through Connect I can get in touch with so many different resources to get my needs met."*

*"This place has been a big help in connecting me in a financial support worker that is helping with reintegration and rent for housing. You have been more than kind with me, and I appreciate it."*

*"A safe place to be that includes mutual respect, mutual dignity, caring and friendship."*

*"If I'm not able to calm myself down, you can help and if you can't, you connect me with someone who can and you're there to introduce, which helps me feel comfortable."*

Poverty and Social Development, Nursing Centre, Island Health Mental Health & Substance Use, Indigenous Women's Sharing Society, Division of Family Practice, and continues to grow.

## SHOWER PROGRAM

Since April 6th, 2020 Connect has also been operating a shower program based out of Lewis Centre 3 mornings a week. The City of Courtenay provides the space in-kind. We know in the face of this pandemic how important hygiene is and without this service, many unhoused people would not have access to a shower. At the Lewis

*"I would be dirty without these showers. Keeps me healthy. I'm happy this is happening – where I live there is no water- it's hard to wash with no water. Thank you!"*

*"Thank you, God, that this is happening for us. We can get clean; we have no worries. You guys are amazing. I appreciate the clean clothes. It doesn't exist anywhere else; we are very lucky."*

*"When I wash my ear, I feel so good cause I can finally hear."*

*"When my toes are twinkling from the nice soap you supply, I feel like dancing and saying thank you! When I brush my teeth (what's left of them now) I know I'll crunch food again."*

*"Personally, I don't think I would've survived without you guys."*

Centre, there are 2 staff (one for men's and one for women's showers). Staff not only monitor safety and proper

usage of the showers, but act as an additional health screening checkpoint and provide education and information about COVID-19 and other resources.