

# Peers help in transition from homelessness to housing

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Shannon Whissell, left, Hillary Marks, Don Elliott and Gwyneth Dustan of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society. Lisa Crossman is also a member of the team.

People who are transitioning from homelessness to housing will soon be able to receive help and support from their peers as the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society nears implementation of a new Peer Housing Support Project.

Designed to help individuals who experience chronic homelessness, the community-driven project differs from others by pairing clients with peer supporters.



greater victoria  
coalition to end  
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**hope has found a home**

“The peer approach complements the clinical route,” said Don Elliott, executive director of the society. “It fills a vital gap in existing service. ”

Thanks to funding from the Victoria Foundation, the society was able to hire and train three part-time peer co-ordinators (one with Indigenous ancestry), who were paid \$20.05 per hour. During four months of training, these co-ordinators — individuals with past experience of homelessness — were taught how to help clients, from finding available resources to assisting them in a successful transition to long-term housing.

The role of the co-ordinators will be to provide:

1. Assistance and daily maintenance.
2. Social and emotional support.
3. Links to professional support.
4. Ongoing, long-term support.

The peer co-ordinators will develop collaborative partnerships with agencies and create a framework and training manual.

Support for the program also comes from a strategic partnership with the Capital Regional District and the federal government’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The goal of the latter initiative is to assist people experiencing homelessness — and those at-risk of homelessness — to move toward greater self-sufficiency, with a focus on housing solutions and appropriate supports.

It also includes recognition that a stable living situation provides the foundation necessary for improving health, education and employment in a long-term and sustainable way.

With the training phase complete, the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society is looking for sufficient funding to launch a pilot project of the program, estimated to run for at least a year.

The program builds upon the success of the society’s Streets to Homes program. Launched as a pilot in 2011, the program moved homeless people to permanent market housing, as well as providing customized supports to help them stay there. T

he program was transferred to the Pacifica Housing Society in 2012.

“We are confident, as we approach funders and service providers for support, to secure funding for a pilot,” said Elliott, who has been the executive director of the organization for a year and a half.

For more information, go to [victoriahomelessness.ca](http://victoriahomelessness.ca).