

In the proper hands:

The SPARC BC pilot project on knowledge transfer on affordable housing and homelessness

In an effort to put more of the results of research in the hands of those who can put it to use, writes **Ren Thomas**, SPARC BC has undertaken to develop a knowledge transfer model that does so effectively.

SPARC BC GAINS VALUABLE KNOWLEDGE in the course of its research that could be very useful to community workers in direct service delivery. Currently, our research is not always distributed in a way that makes the knowledge accessible and useful—or even known about—at the community-level. With this in mind, we set out to develop a project by which to re-package and distribute the knowledge accumulated on affordable housing and homelessness in the course of our research. This project will test a model for translating the knowledge developed through our work in these areas.

The Knowledge Transfer Project on Affordable Housing and Homelessness involves the development of a format, coordination of content, and distribution of the results. The project will also evaluate the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer and consider the viability of establishing an ongoing process for distribution of our accumulated research knowledge.

We have focused on the content in income security-related core projects and housing-relat-

ed consulting projects, including:

- *Left Behind: A comparison of living costs and employment assistance rates in British Columbia* (SPARC BC, December 2005)
- *Living with a Disability on Income Assistance* (SPARC BC, December 2005 draft)
- *Family Homelessness: Causes and Solutions* (CMHC/SPARC BC, February 2003)
- *Homelessness, Housing and Harm Reduction: Stable Housing for Homeless People with Substance Use Issues* (CMHC/SPARC BC, September 2005)
- *Issues and Strategies for Shared Accommodation* (CMHC/SPARC BC, June 2005)
- *Regional Homelessness Plan* (Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2001)
- *Regional Homelessness Plan Update* (SPARC BC, November 2003)
- *On our streets and in our shelters... Results of the 2005 Greater Vancouver Homeless Count* (SPARC BC, September 2005)
- *City of North Vancouver Affordable Housing Task Force Final Report* (October 1998)

SPARC BC's research clearly demonstrates that affordable housing remains a major challenge in the region, particularly for low-income renters. Very few rental or affordable housing projects have been built in the past decade, the existing stock of affordable housing is being lost through conversion and gentrification, and there are long waiting lists for affordable housing. The growing income gap and rapidly rising cost of housing are also significant challenges.

Changes to the BC Employment Assistance Act in 2002 have shifted the focus towards getting people off welfare and into paid employment. Many income assistance recipients receive inadequate benefits that do not acknowledge the high rents and high cost of living in the region. A significant prevalence of health conditions and addictions exists in the homeless population, resulting in increased pressure on municipalities in the GVRD to provide shelter and support services. The supply of shelters and transitional housing in the region is inadequate, particularly for youth. The number of homeless in the GVRD has increased dramatically and includes a significant number of families with children. Housing, in every form, is very significant in the lives of low-income people, the homeless, and those at risk of homelessness. SPARC BC continues to support the '3 Ways to Home': enabling people to have an adequate income, providing a range of support services, and creating a continuum of housing.

In preparing the format of the knowledge transfer for this project, we contacted our networks to determine the information and delivery method that would help them most. We sent out a questionnaire to key informants in order to

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find out what type of information was useful to them, what format they preferred, and how they would like to see our publication distributed. The majority of respondents preferred a mixture of text, tables, and statistics in a fact sheet format (4–6 pages), delivered in a printable PDF. Based on these results, we will be producing a series of five Housing Affordability and Homelessness Fact Sheets in the near future.

The fact sheets will be distributed to existing networks and contacts and made available to everyone on our web site. A distribution plan relevant to the subject area of affordable housing will be developed and will include service providers, government, advocates, and funders.

We hope that the methods and results of this pilot knowledge transfer project will prove the approach as an effective one for supporting and re-enforcing community efforts to tackle social issues. If so, we look forward to using the model in the future. ■