

Briefing Note

AIDS Vancouver Island's upcoming move to 1601 Blanshard Street

Potential Media Issue

Background:

AIDS Vancouver Island is moving to 1601 Blanshard Street at the end of February 2001. One of the services provided by AIDS Vancouver Island's Street Outreach Services department is a needle exchange that would be moving in at the end of March. The neighbouring building is the temporary home of a daycare facility for children up to 18 months of age. The daycare will be moving back to the Ministry of Health in August or September. This facility is the **Victoria Children's Centre**. There is the potential for bad press regarding the proximity of the AIDS Vancouver Island (specifically the needle exchange) to the Victoria Children's Centre.

Victoria Children's Centre:

- The Victoria Children's Centre has a maximum of 12 children at any one time and does not care for children over 18 months of age. There is a ratio of only three children to every staff person.
 - The daycare hours of operation are Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm. Children are not dropped off at the daycare before 7:45am. (At which point the area would have been searched for discarded needles.) Street Outreach Services does not open until 3:30pm. There is only a one-and-a-half hour window of time in which the daycare and Street Outreach Services are both open for business.
 - Because they are infants, the children are under constant supervision and are in a stroller or an adult's arms when they leave the facility. Due to their age and physical limitations, the infants do not roam the area as older children might.
 - The children play in the outside area between 10am and 11am each day under supervision. Street Outreach Services is not open for business during this time. Additionally, the temporary facility for the Victoria Children's Centre is private. The play area is not visible from the premises of AIDS Vancouver Island or vice versa. The centre will be moving back into the Ministry of Health building in August or September, 2001.
 - These factors neutralize the possibility of risk associated with AIDS Vancouver Island's proximity to the Victoria Children's Centre.
 - AIDS Vancouver Island gathers more needles than it disburses and has a used syringe recovery rate of 104%. In its attempt to establish a baseline, AIDS Vancouver Island has recently been having workers collect needles in the area surrounding the Ministry of Health. In the month of January 8-10 used needles were retrieved. (This is before AIDS Vancouver Island has even moved into the area.) To ensure maximum safety, however, AIDS Vancouver Island is doubling the surveillance for discarded needles.
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AIDS Vancouver Island

- The Capital Health Region, the Ministry of Health, the United Way and the Deputy Chief of Police support the work of AIDS Vancouver Island and, specifically, the needle exchange.
- These community partners have supported the agency's move to 1601 Blanshard Street.
- AIDS Vancouver Island understands that the daycare is only temporarily located in this site and will be moving back to the Ministry of Health building. *The daycare did not actually move into this location until January 1st, 2001; the building was vacant when AIDS Vancouver Island signed the lease for 1601 Blanshard Street.*
- AIDS Vancouver Island's clients, volunteers and staff are a part of the Victoria community and all have families. Parents, with their children, attend different programs that AIDS Vancouver Island offers. The health and safety of children, their parents and others has been incorporated into the planning of this move for AIDS Vancouver Island.
- AIDS Vancouver Island has met with a number of community partners and neighbours to discuss the move. These include meetings with
 - Ministry of Health HIV/AIDS Division, Health and Safety and Communications (January 29th, 2001).
 - Deputy Chief John Lane and Deputy Chief Geoff Varley from the City of Victoria Police (February 7th, 2001)
 - Lena Gregersen, Head Supervisor, Victoria Children's Centre (February 7th, 2001).
 - The Head Supervisor has stated both organizations are providing community-based services, albeit different, and that she is confident in the security of the little ones attending her daycare.
 - She also stated that she views people using the range of services that AIDS Vancouver Island provides, including the needle exchange, as responsible people who are doing something positive.
 - She commented on that fact that with the daycare having new neighbours the general security of the neighborhood would increase.
 - Lena Gregersen also expressed her appreciation of AIDS Vancouver Island staff developing a working partnership with the daycare.

AIDS Vancouver Island is not only committed to being good neighbours and community partners it is also committed to ensuring the health and safety of its clients and neighbours.

AIDS Vancouver Island's plan of action includes:

- Surveillance for discarded needles and other drug paraphernalia in the area, particularly around the daycare. Searches would be conducted at approximately 7:30 in the morning before parents drop their children off at the daycare and again during the late evening hours of Street Outreach Services (between 7pm and 11pm).

- Contacting Lena Gregersen to find out if the Board of Directors of the Victoria Children's Centre has any feedback on the issue for AIDS Vancouver Island and if there is any further information they would like the agency to provide. (The Board of Directors of the Victoria Children's Centre meets Tuesday, February 13th.)
 - Lena Gregersen presented the issue to the Board of Directors of the Victoria Children's Centre at its February 13th meeting. She indicated that she did not anticipate any problems with AVI's proximity to the daycare.
 - The Board is not concerned at this point and only asked that Lena post a sign in the daycare so that the parents would be advised. She has done this; the poster mentions that an Open House will be held (see below) and that a package of information is available for parents to review.
 - As of February 15th, one parent had expressed some concern and had made an appointment with Lena to go over the information package AVI provided to her. Lena did not anticipate problems and said she would refer the parent to AVI if they required further information.
- Holding an Open House at the new site on March 6, 2001. The Open House will be open to all community members, including the parents, staff and Board of Directors of the daycare and Ministry of Health employees.

Summary:

AIDS Vancouver Island believes the proximity of the needle exchange for four to five months poses little risk to the children attending the daycare facility. AIDS Vancouver Island is making every effort to ensure a good relationship with our community partners and new neighbours.

We realize, however, that the potential for negative press exists. We would like to advise the Minister and his staff of this possibility.

We would be happy to meet with the Minister or his staff to discuss the issue further.

Respectfully submitted,

Miki Hansen
Executive Director

Paulette McCarthy
Acting Chair