

**Salvation Army Conference
April 28, 2009
Speaking Notes – Mayor**

// CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY //

Thank you for having me here this afternoon – it is a real honour

I would begin by recognizing the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations in whose traditional territories we live and work..... Hay sxw qa

The Salvation Army is an integral part of our community -

you are a partner in providing programs and services that people depend on

The list of services you provide is long and wide reaching –

you serve the old and young, the disadvantaged.

You also create opportunities for people to lend a hand – to focus their talent and passion in the aid of others.

I commend your efforts and thank you all you do for the people of this City and the region

(pause)

Victoria is a wonderful City –

there is so much to be thankful for ...

and so much to be proud of

But we also face some very real challenges

Challenges that affect all of us....

And we all have a responsibility to work towards solutions

My vision for Victoria is a vibrant and safe city.

A Victoria that is full of opportunities.

A city where young people can start a family, and start a career

Where all people, always have a roof over their head

A City that gains strength from our diverse communities and cultures

Where we are social and environmental leaders –

pushing sustainability...

both in terms of the economy and the environment.

From strollers to scooters – a city for everyone

At the end of the day –

I want a city that is known, NOT for its challenges,

but for the compassionate and creative ideas used to tackle those challenges

(pause)

Over the next three years, we will work to make that vision a reality.

We will face some tough decisions.

And we will also create and enjoy incredible success.

I continually remind myself of why I ran for Mayor.

I love this city. I always have.

I want to leave a community for my daughter's generation that is better tomorrow than it is today.

As the 51st Mayor of Victoria –

I have a lot of things I want to see happen and in a relatively short amount of time.

We have a huge job ahead of us

the challenges are many ...

Now, there is no question what the number one issue is in our city and the number one issue on my agenda.

We must find homes for those without.

We need to look in our own "backyards" and open our minds and hearts to have supported housing, in all of our neighbourhoods, in every part of the region.

(pause)

I have a seven year old daughter who knows what the term "homeless" means.

A seven year old shouldn't have to wrap their head around why some people have homes, and why some do not.

I want to be able to tell her that we're doing everything we possibly can to find homes for those in need.

There is a quote I particularly like to recount

In 1965 Prime Minister Lester Pearson said:

...it is “the necessity for everybody to have a decent dwelling; not to make all homes mansions, but to ensure that none of them will be hovels. It is only a very rare soul that can expand in a hovel. This objective of decent housing simply has to be achieved in our democratic society.”

This is still true today – everyone deserves a home

- unfortunately this is increasingly not the case

(pause)

It has been estimated that Victoria has between 1000 and 1500 people who do not have a permanent home

And without concerted action, this number could grow by almost 500 each year

Further, aboriginal people are over-represented in every category related to homelessness – and face the most challenges in finding and keeping housing.

What we also know about the homeless population is that about half of these residents are either mentally ill or have a drug and/or alcohol addiction

– many have both

Very few of these people will find their way off the streets without significant intervention.

That intervention takes many forms –

some of which comes from vital programs and services that organizations like the Salvation Army champion,

- some of which fall to me and other levels of government

Where the City fits into the picture – my job – is to move forward a housing agenda that puts people in homes –

gives them a roof over their head and a space that is safe

(pause)

In 2007 the City embarked on the Mayor's Task Force on Breaking the Cycle of Mental Illness, Homelessness, and Addiction.

Many things were learned from that process

and for the first time people really understood just how bad the problem was -

just how many people were homeless or on the verge of homelessness –

and that this growing community included all kinds of people –

no longer can people hide behind a stereotype of “the homeless”

We also started to recognize just how much is spent on “managing” homelessness

(pause)

It is estimated that \$62 million is spent annually on services such as policing, jails, hospital services, emergency shelters, clean-up, etc

Critical funds that could and should be spent on building and maintaining homes for people, providing the supports that people need

(pause)

We also know that there are about 2000 people in the Capital Region who are on a wait list for subsidized housing –

This group represents the homeless, but also those on the verge of homelessness –

families and children in need of help

This number tells us that the problem is bigger than what we are seeing on the streets –

it points to the reality that children and families are living in hotel rooms, others are one paycheck away from the street

in other words – when we talk about homelessness we need to also include those in unstable and unsuitable housing

(pause)

Out of that task force came a new agency – The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

This agency was formed in 2008 – and it hit the ground running – bringing together governments and agencies from across the entire region in common cause

I am sure you can all agree that this is no small feat –

and I extend my deep gratitude to the staff and volunteers that keep the Coalition moving forward, doing the great work they do

I am very proud to be the co-chair of this agency, along with the Honourable Ted Hughes.

(pause)

What is so different about the Coalition is that we've adopted a 'housing first' approach to homelessness

This suggests that the starting place for healing – whatever that may look like for each individual – must be in a home

People always talk about how 'complex' homelessness is

But in reality – homelessness is not complex at all

mental health is complex

addiction is complex

poverty is complex

But for any of these complex challenges to be overcome people need a safe space of their own –

a place to heal, to receive supports, to sleep and eat

A long-time U.S. housing researcher and activist Cushing Dolbeare wrote:

“The one thing all homeless people have in common is a lack of housing. Whatever other problems they face, adequate, stable, affordable housing is a prerequisite to solving them.

She goes on to say:

“Homelessness may not be *only* a housing problem, but it is *always* a housing problem; housing is necessary, although sometimes not sufficient, to solve the problem of homelessness.”

We recognize that people fall in and out of homelessness all the time

– for many different reasons

- Name three homeless population types – temporary, episodic and chronic

whether it is job security, abuse or drug addiction -

each story is unique, each challenge very personal

But the simple truth is that access to safe housing is a key requirement to addressing any other challenge a person may be facing

Only in stable housing can support services be effective, can addiction be overcome, can people find the security they need and deserve

So – this is what we mean by housing first – housing first with supports

And this is the approach that the City stands behind and the approach the Coalition to End Homelessness tirelessly advances

And if we can do our job, it will make it easier for you to do yours -

(pause)

Now, the City and the surrounding municipalities cannot provide housing alone – we need our partners at the table –

Especially the province and the federal government

Together we are starting to make progress

- Anecdotes here – taxi driver, street vendor, resident

That is not a signal to stop, but an encouragement that we have taken some first steps....

with the understanding that many more will follow

We have a number of projects under way.....

Protecting, building, committing to housing projects

Plus we are working with the development community in an effort to have more rental units –

- The Wing
- Dockside

We live a beautiful city – people need to be able to afford to live here

We need to increase the vacancy rate in the city to ensure there is room for movement and an array of housing options for people

We must increase the stock of rental homes in the City and keep rents affordable.

(pause)

What I really want to say to leave you with today is that you have an ally in the city

That we are standing next to you in an effort to make real change in peoples lives

I am reminded of two stories – you might have heard them before, but bare with me....

BABIES IN THE RIVER STORY

In social work we call this upstream work...

that is what the city can do –

find out who is putting the babies in the river and try to stop them

And while it is vital to try and stop the babies from being put in the water in the first place,

you still need to help those babies floating downstream

STARFISH STORY

The point being that every person we can help is a victory.....

And really, the more we work together the more people we can help....

We're here because we are dedicated to a cause that is just -

and that cause is about ensuring all members of our community get the help and services they need and deserve

We're here because we know we need to do more –

we always do – this is not the end, just the beginning

And we are all here because we care –

and we want to learn from one another

I like the quote from Sir Winston Churchill –

“Personally I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.”

Let me conclude by saying –

The work you do it vital –

The Salvation Army is dedicated to improving people's lives – to making sure every member of our community is cared for

Together we are a team –

And together we are ready to tackle the challenges ahead -

I am honoured to be provided the opportunity make Victoria even better.

Thank you – I look forward to all the work we will undertake together.