



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Briefing Note

To: Council

File No.: 1845-20-SCS

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: June 12, 2024

Subject: **Strengthening Communities' Grant Update**

PURPOSE:

To update Council and local partner governments on the progress made and key outcomes resulting from the Strengthening Communities' Grant. This report covers the period from January 1 – March 31, 2024.

BACKGROUND:

In 2021 the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) was awarded a regional grant of \$1.093 million through the Strengthening Communities' Grant Program to better support people experiencing homelessness in the Comox Valley. The City is administering those funds on the region's behalf. The project funding was set to conclude on June 30, 2023.

At the May 31, 2023 Council meeting staff informed Council that a request had been made with local government partners for additional funding to support a one-year extension of the Strengthening Communities' Grant. The funding request was to cover activities previously approved under the SCG that could not continue without another source of identified funding. This included staff and security at Connect for daytime services, peer outreach, community engagement, training, and rural outreach.

At the September 13, 2023 Council meeting staff informed Council that the extension had been approved and that the City would receive \$898,603 to fund approved services through June 30, 2024. This brought the total funding approved to \$1,961.763.

At the March 13, 2024 Council meeting, staff informed Council that funding had been received and that staff had amended service agreements with principal partner agencies to reflect the new term and funding services through to June 30, 2024 to support the initiation and/or continued implementation of grant funding activities.

DISCUSSION:

The Strengthening Communities' Grant (SCG) supports the following activities and it is important to note that funding is only eligible for the following approved grant activities:

- **A Daytime Community Access Hub** that operates six days a week providing services focused on health, hygiene, personal safety, and administrative support to those in need. Funding supports security services and the creation/facilitation of a Community Advisory Committee.
- **Rural outreach** on Denman and Hornby Islands to facilitate connections to housing and support services.

- **A peer-based outreach team** to provide outreach and conduct cleaning and remediation activities around locations where support services are provided.
- **Community engagement and anti-stigma** outreach activities, including expanded community meal events hosted at Sunday Service for residents, local businesses and people experiencing homelessness.
- **Training and capacity building** activities across municipalities for local government and First Nation employees, politicians, outreach workers and volunteers focusing on trauma-informed

Update since last report

In this period the City continued to support and to administer SCG funds to three principal partners – Comox Valley Transition Society (CVTS), Sunday Station (SS) and Hornby and Denman Community Health Care Society (HDCHCS). These agencies continued to provide a number of essential services to people who were experiencing homelessness, mental health issues and/or addictions – from referrals to physicians and other health and social service providers, to food, showers, outdoor gear and shelter. Remarkably, 84,616 interactions with workers in these service agencies, and/or the peer workers supported by these agencies, have been recorded – demonstrating the incredible impact these services are having and the significant need that exists in our community for those who are experiencing homelessness or the negative impacts of substance use or mental illness.

Milestones

- CVTS was awarded additional funds to hire more people with lived experience to participate in street clean-up crews. This enabled street clean-ups morning, afternoon, and evenings, seven days per week.
 - This funding was made available due to a change in service provider capacity over the course of the grant period.
- The Community Advisory Committee for Connect continued to meet regularly with representation from the RCMP, City (Bylaw Services and Community Services), CVTS, and VIHA.
 - The focus has been on the timely sharing of information, and the coordination of services to improve the health and well-being of people who depend on the services offered at Connect, as well as the surrounding community.
- The City's Recreation, Culture and Community Services division coordinated a new spring/summer series of free workshop and training opportunities for front line workers who are supporting or interacting with people experiencing homelessness, addiction or mental health challenges.
 - The current line-up of courses includes: *Responding with Respect on the Frontline, Introduction to Trauma Informed Practice, Let's Get REAL about Mental Health: Exploring Empathy, Mental Health First Aid Standard, Gender Diversity in the Workplace, Not Just Naloxone, The Power of Coercive Control, and Prevention First: Introduction to Crisis.*

- Through the SCG grant, organizations are also able to register for an annual membership with the Homelessness Services Association of BC, where they can access additional free training and resources.

While not directly related to the SCG, it is relevant to note that since the last briefing note BC Housing announced that land has been purchased and plans are underway to build a new supportive housing development, as well as a purpose-built shelter in Courtenay. These new services will make a significant impact in meeting the needs of those experiencing homelessness in our community, which is critical as the SCG funding comes to an end June 20, 2024. The statistics and reporting from through the SCG program undoubtedly contributed to the successful advocacy efforts that resulted in this housing investment in Courtenay.

Metrics (January 1, 2024 to March 31, 2024)

Qualitative Feedback

Impact Statement – Connect

- *‘I’m motivated to continue to do this work because I like working with people and believe that we all have a responsibility to support the most vulnerable individuals in our society. I believe that Connect is an essential part of this community, and were it not for the tireless efforts of our team I have no doubt at all that many, many, people would have died from overdoses or other adverse health effects resulting from homelessness. Though options for people to exit homelessness into affordable housing are very limited we do the best that we can to support the people who depend on Connect’.* Connect Staff.

Impact Statement – Recreation, Culture and Community Services, City of Courtenay

- *“Trauma informed training programs are really popular. The {Introduction to Trauma informed Practice} workshop is about trying to get people to gain an understanding about how trauma that people have faced in the past shapes how they behave as an adult. Trauma training can help reduce stigma. It can help people to understand it from a different lens, to take away stigma, whether it is fear or judgement or anything like that.”* - RCCS Staff.

Impact Statements – Hornby and Denman Community Health Care Society

- *“Having a weekly, consistent presence at outreach spaces has created a friendly, familiar, approachable face for our service in the community. Being present and supporting people in these meaningful spaces opens the door to be approached by community members afterwards to initiate more in-depth and private supportive conversations about mental health and substance use.”* - HDCHCS Staff.
- *“Prior to our providing outreach support at the Hornby Kitchen and Denman Island Foodbank, this work was being done informally by the staff and volunteers at these spaces, who were simultaneously trying to provide their own services. These workers have seen the*

need for professional outreach services and are grateful for our presence to provide practical and mental health support to service users.” – HDCHCS Staff.

- *“My position is that of a constant liaison between people and services. As a community-based service, I can cast a wide net to reach community members who may not access help through more conventional means. These participants can then begin to access the necessary services, resources, and care providers. I also act as an integral link in connecting one resource provider to another, allowing more wrap-around care for marginalized participants.” - HDCHCS Staff.*
- *“I just need to talk to someone who isn’t in my immediate circle of drama.” - Hornby Island Participant.*
- *“I’m starting to feel joy again for the first time in a long time!”- Denman Island Participant.*

Impact Statements -Sunday Station

- Photos of fresh food donation and hot meals prepared by volunteers.
- *“The effort and grace that Sunday Station volunteers put into each Sunday really shows. Our community relies heavily on this team to provide a nutritious meal to those in need.” - Community Volunteer.*
- *“Thank you for everything you do. Without this program, some of us wouldn’t eat.”- Participant.*
- *“Each Sunday a lot of us look forward to joining together at the train station. It provides a social activity for most of us.” – Participant.*
- *“I watched a short documentary about Sunday Station and it was so well presented to inform the community about Sunday Station. And an awareness about the people who are less fortunate and need community support.” Community Volunteer.*



Quantitative Measures

Sustainability Planning

With funding through the Strengthening Communities Grant set to expire June 30, 2024, staff have been in discussion with partners regarding the impacts of the termination of funding as well as plans for sustaining services following the end of the SCG program.

All principal partners state that they intend to continue to provide the services beyond the June 30, 2024 when SCG funding ends. Each has indicated that they have throughout the project, been able to utilize SCG statistics and funds to leverage additional funds which will allow for some level of service sustainability. That said, each service organization has also stated that the service levels will likely drop off to some extent after the June 30, 2024 date.

The services provided at Connect are likely to be the most significantly impacted by the cessation of funding through SCG. While the SCG funding was a key driver in CVTS securing BC Housing temporary shelter funding, BC Housing funding is limited to the operating costs related to a 24-

hour, 33 bed shelter, and does not contribute to the extensive day services provided to the broader community. Staff and CVTS are in discussions about the potential impacts and strategies for mitigation, however it is expected that the following will be significantly reduced or potentially eliminated completely:

- Peer-led street clean up: CVTS has indicated they may have the capacity to maintain a morning peer led clean-up crew, however they will not have funding to continue with the provision of afternoon and evening street clean up. The City is working with CVTS to explore the extent to which community partners, such as the DCBIA might resource this activity. CVTS is also exploring grant opportunities.
- Food Provision: CVTS currently provides meals to approximately 55 people per day. They will be increasingly dependant upon donations to top up food service for guests above and beyond the 33 shelter guests whose breakfast and dinner meals are covered by BC Housing funding.
- Security: CVTS currently has two security persons for 24 hours everyday of the week. CVTS are in discussion with BC Housing to explore the extent to which this level of service can be maintained. Without additional funding, this service will likely be reduced.

As staff and partners prepare for the end of the Strengthening Communities Grant program, they are planning to come together to discuss project impact, lessons learned, communicating the results, and sustaining momentum where possible.

NEXT STEPS

This SCG update for the period of January 1, 2024 to March 31, 2024 will be sent to the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD), Town of Comox and the Village of Cumberland as partner municipalities. RCCS staff will continue to support the administration of the SCG on the region's behalf.

The Strengthening Communities' Grant will sunset on June 30, 2024, after which an update to Council and local government partners, including the final report, will be shared. For monthly progress updates, information on our social service partners, contact information and the SCG training and capacity building initiatives please visit: [Strengthening Communities Grant | City of Courtenay](#)

RECOMMENDATION: THAT Council receive the Strengthening Communities' Grant Update briefing note.

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