



## Media Kit

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## Organizational Overview

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### **Mission:**

To provide for basic needs and to work toward positive change for women and children in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

### **Purpose:**

- To provide a comfortable, safe drop-in centre;
- To provide recreation and self-help programs;
- To act as a source of information by assisting women with referrals concerning their needs;
- To provide a social space and facilitate the opportunity for women of diverse backgrounds to interact and build community; and
- To educate the public and all levels of government about issues concerning women in the area.

The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre exists to support and empower women and children living in extreme poverty in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, British Columbia. High levels of violence, homelessness, addictions, and poverty characterize this community. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, injustice, and injury. Through our drop-in centre and emergency night shelter, we provide practical support to over 500 women and children daily to survive the conditions of ill health and violence that surround them. We work to provide security, basic needs, and support to enable women to make long-term change by identifying and removing barriers to full participation in the larger community.

Founded in 1978, the Centre is unique in that it is one of the only safe spaces within the Downtown Eastside specifically and exclusively for women and their children. We provide practical support to over 500 women, children, and seniors every day. As well as providing crucial refuge and shelter from conditions of poverty and violence, DEWC provides basic necessities including hot meals, laundry, a secure mailing address, phone and computer access, secure toilets and showers, and free clothing.

Beyond the basics, we offer support, counseling, information, referrals, advocacy, and education on the many issues that have an impact on women's lives. We also have a peer-driven volunteer program that offers training, experience, and support to help women make the transition to employment opportunities.

Offering individual long-term support, education, advocacy, exposure to alternatives, and peer mentorship are just some of the empowerment strategies we use to promote positive change. Our community also works towards increased understanding of systemic injustice and inequalities that contribute to women's vulnerability. One of our goals is to bring awareness to the general public and our governments to address issues of poverty and violence.

## Services & Programs

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### **Drop-In Centre**

This service provides basic needs, including a daily hot meal to 350 women and children each day. The drop-in offers showers, coffee/tea, snacks, computer room, telephone, message board, mailing address, free clothing, feminine hygiene products, and toiletries.

### **Night Shelter**

This service provides a safe low-barrier space for women during the evening and night-time hours. As well as a place of safety, women are provided with hot meals, showers, skills development opportunities, advocacy, activities, and support programs.

### **Kitchen**

Our kitchen staff works tirelessly, preparing up to 15,000 nutrition-packed meals a month - breakfasts twice weekly, daily lunches, and special group dinners almost every night. The chefs, along with dedicated volunteers, also prepare special meals at Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chinese New Year, Mother's Day, National Aboriginal Day, and a summertime BBQ picnic.

### **Safety and Security**

This program is an innovative approach to apply diverse strategies to address issues of safety and security in our community. This includes culturally relevant ways, community building, sharing of knowledge, focus on spirituality and women's leadership.

### **Advocacy**

This program provides advocacy and support to women in the areas of income assistance, housing, disability applications, landlord and tenant disputes, and assistance with the Ministry for Children and Families.

### **Chinese Seniors Outreach**

The Outreach worker provides assistance to isolated Chinese seniors. This includes accompaniment to medical appointments, outreach to homes, translations, referrals, education, and information.

### **HIV Case Management**

Primary goal of the program is to support women who are affected by HIV and AIDS to access harm reduction, medical services and community resources. It is our role to establish connections and networks with other community groups and resources to ensure the best possible information and resources are available to women in the community, particularly for women who may not be connected to other services.

### **Warriors Organizing Women**

Warriors Organizing Women is a social justice project aimed to empower us to create social change in our lives and communities. Some of the issues we address are homelessness, violence, poverty, media, colonialism, policing, government structures, and the economy.

### **Skills Development Program (Volunteer Program)**

This program provides support, training, education, and experience opportunities for Centre members to make positive changes in their lives. The process is to get women involved in the activities of the Centre and to build individual and community capacity for change.

### **Victim Services Program**

This program provides support and assistance to women that have been victims of crime. This includes reporting of crime, emotional support, accompaniment to court, and referrals to other programs and services.

### **Housing Outreach**

The Housing Outreach and Support Workers connect with homeless and at-risk women to support them in finding and maintaining housing.

## Statistics

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- 500 women and children helped daily
- 173,238 meals served annually
- 40,000 feminine hygiene products distributed annually
- 8,262 hours of drop-in services annually, including overnight
- 1,248 hours of programming annually
- 21,900 beds each year for women
- Each night up to 50 women access beds at the shelter;
- The shelter also supports up to an additional 100 women a night for drop-in support and food;
- Every month over 350 women seek support from our advocates

## Our Members

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- 65% are residents of the Downtown Eastside;
- 22% live outside the community but need the Centre because there is no help for them in their own neighbourhoods;
- 61% have been using the Centre for over 5 years;
- 28% have been using the Centre for over 10 years;
- 72% use the Centre at least 4 days a week;
- 37% use the Centre every day;
- 43% use the Centre for the Drop In as a meeting/community space;
- Up to 70% identify as Aboriginal or Aboriginal mixed heritage;
- 67% are between the ages of 30 and 59;
- 29% are in their twenties;
- 56% are homeless or at risk of homelessness, the majority live with family or friends.

## Quotes from Members

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- *"I can walk in and get a smile and hug every day. Meals are always good and staff go out of their way to help you."*
- *"A place to come and have a cup of coffee and also meet new people and enlarge your horizon."*
- *"I love coming to the Centre. I am a volunteer and am looking for a job and this gives me good work skills and I don't have cooking facilities, so I have a good home cooked meal. It is a safe place to come to. I love all the staff; in their own little way they are very helpful."*

## Special Messaging Guidelines

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- Women are not victims or people in need of charity or hand-outs. They are survivors and strong women with a range of backgrounds and experiences.
- Members are referred to as "members" or "women", not "clients"
- The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre is a daytime drop-in centre. The Centre also operates an emergency night shelter at a different location.