

What You Can Do to Continue Teesha's Legacy

1. Write, call, email, visit to let the following ministers know about your concern for the children of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. On the back of this page, we have prepared some talking points you may wish to reference. We believe the ministers are ready to act. Our MLAs have been consistent advocates. Let them know they have your support to take action.
2. Contribute your time to raise awareness of the need for a youth safe house.
3. Contribute financially to a youth safe house fund: either to the Maple Ridge Community Foundation or to the Teesha Sharma Homeless Youth fund at the CEED Centre Society.

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Talking Points to Help Homeless and Exploited Youth in Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows

Along with your own concerns and expressions, you may wish to include some or all of the following points with regard to youth safe house system and other supports. There are viable solutions to this crisis, but so far the political will has not manifested. You can make a difference.

The Ask

- We need a youth safe house in Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows to allow homeless youth subject to exploitation to be safely removed from the streets. To qualify as a safe house that will accommodate highly traumatized homeless youth, the facility must allow youth to stay for extended periods of time (typically 3-6 months), to be inside the facility 24/7, to have a specialized, trauma informed staff, to be barrier free (no eligibility criteria), and gradual intake procedures. The house will require access to mental health and other specialists.
- The youth safe house can also serve youth with shorter histories of homelessness that require shorter stays.
- We suggest that the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions is the natural host of the BC youth safe house system to eliminate the single point of entry (MCFD) for youth services, which is currently failing disturbingly large numbers of youth in BC. The three ministries named on the reverse can collaborate to retain only those redundancies that are helpful.

The Reasons

- Youth in care may have sound reasons for refusing a particular housing or home situation based on their individual experience and trauma background. At present, MCFD is the only source of resources for youth under the age of 19. This presents a problem if the local office deems a youth to be refusing service. The average age range of a youth hitting the street is 13-14.
- Many of the services offered by MCFD have eligibility requirements that disqualify homeless youth (abstinence from substance use for those that have been forced into using). Many services require MCFD referrals.
- As a result, 22 youth were identified in the last homeless count. 18 of these were also identified as being subject to exploitation. The youth have been homeless for anywhere from 1 to 3 years.
- All of the documented, chronically homeless youth are wards of the state.
- At present, there are no 24-hour shelters for unaccompanied youth under 19 anywhere in BC.
- In the existing shelters, a youth can only stay for 12 hours (7 pm- 7 am). And only for 7 consecutive days. They are discharged into homeless again and they have to stay on the street during the day, where they are subject to exploitation.
- The closest shelter to MR/PM is 35 km away in Abbotsford, with poor transit links. Most of the other shelters are in the Downtown East Side or similar areas, at least 55 km.
- Predators watch the existing youth shelters for vulnerable youth.

- None of the youth shelters are in non-disclosed locations: you can find the addresses on the Internet. The location of a true youth safe house would have to be guarded and not disclosed. The youths would be picked up by house staff at the referral site.
- There are no organized food sources for youth under 19. They are not eligible for direct service at the local food bank and are not permitted, as unaccompanied minors, to enter the shelters serving adults.
- The homeless youth are not receiving regular health care, mental health services, or harm reduction supplies.
- The 18 homeless youth subject to exploitation have no shelter and take refuge in forested areas away from people when they are not being forced to work.
- The homeless youth are not being educated. Most leave school in grade 8 due to their circumstances.
- When exploited, many of the females are injected with substances and are subject to overdose and fentanyl poisoning. The young males may have to resort to male prostitution in Vancouver for survival and are also subject to the same forced drug use and overdose/poisoning risks.
- Overdose deaths for unaccompanied youths under 19 are not reported in newspapers.