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Vancouver Agreement projects build social health and employability

Vancouver Agreement partners today announced funding of \$530,000 for a suite of programs in the Downtown Eastside to foster social and economic development and improve the employability of local residents and the appearance of the area.

The Vancouver Agreement is a five-year commitment by the federal government, the province of British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver to work together to support sustainable economic, social and community development in Vancouver. Although the Vancouver Agreement affects the entire city, the initial focus of work is in the Downtown Eastside.

The projects announced today are three-fold. The First Nations Creations Artists Cooperative, which will provide workshop and gallery space in the Gastown area, includes mentoring and training opportunities for First Nations youth.

The Interurban Gallery at 1-15 East Hastings will locate exhibition space, artists studios, commercial offices and shops in an important heritage building across the street from the former British Columbia Electric Interurban Station.

Building on the success of Humanities 101 and Women's Humanities Year, a new storefront learning resource centre will provide barrier-free access to advanced education for DTES residents through the BEACON project (Building Education and Culture in Our Neighbourhood).

Federal and provincial funds are provided through the Western Economic Partnership Agreement (WEPA). The City of Vancouver previously provided a capital grant for a share of the cost of renovations to the new Interurban building.

Western Economic Partnership Agreement is a joint federal-provincial agreement to encourage economic development and job creation in BC. Western Economic Diversification Canada and the B.C. Ministry of Employment and Investment are the lead agencies for WEPA. Federal funding for these projects was provided for in the Feb. 2000 budget and is therefore built into the existing financial framework.

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"The social skills that people require to function fully are enhanced by cultural, artistic and academic activities. These projects receiving federal and provincial funding will assist residents to build stronger lives for themselves and help return this historic area to the stature it once enjoyed," said Dr. Hedy Fry, Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women).

"Together with economic development, affordable housing, better access to primary health care, drug and alcohol treatment facilities, and increased enforcement, and cultural projects are proof positive that the Vancouver Agreement is truly addressing all of the elements required to build a healthy community in the Downtown Eastside," said Jenny Kwan, provincial minister responsible for the Vancouver Agreement.

"These grants will help build on the talents that exist within this community," noted Mayor Philip Owen. "Providing opportunities to invest in and showcase the skills of residents will build local pride and will also help make this neighbourhood a more inviting place for everyone to come and enjoy."

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