

Seniors add to homeless numbers

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THIS fall, a 75-year-old woman spent her nights sleeping outside at Ambleside Park.

The news came from Paul Butler, who spoke to District of North Vancouver council last week on behalf of the North Shore Homelessness Task Force.

Homelessness Action Week takes place from Oct. 7 to 13 on the North Shore, and for Butler, it's a crucial time to call attention to the seniors pushed from their homes by ballooning bills and the young people unable to gain a foothold in the job market.

"We're seeing an increase in young people and more

Homelessness Action Week aims to link needy with helpful services

importantly right now, an increase in seniors who aren't able to stay in their own homes because they're one cheque away from losing their home or not being able to pay for their hydro bills," Butler said.

The dearth of inexpensive housing is the cause of most homelessness on the North Shore according to Butler and North Shore Housing Centre manager Linda Fox.

"People that come from the North Shore, they don't want to be housed in other places, they want to stay in their home where

their roots are. There is a genuine lack of affordable housing on this side of the water," Fox said.

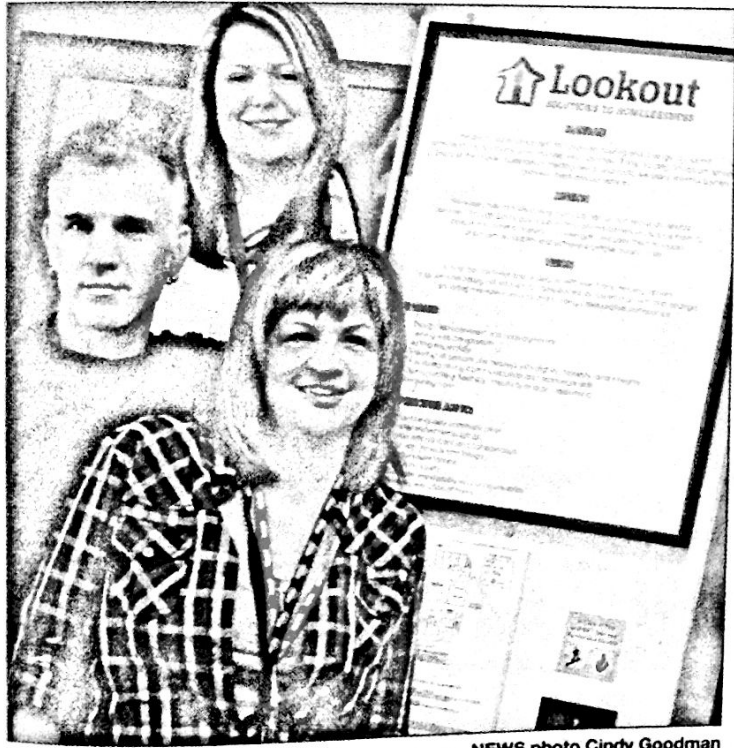
Speaking to Butler at the Oct. 3 council meeting, Coun. Alan Nixon asked if homeowners could be convinced to open the doors of the approximately 20,000 to 30,000 unoccupied bedrooms in the District of North Vancouver.

"There's still a stigma of what a homeless person is," Butler replied.

Many curious citizens who examine local homeless shelters are surprised at its inhabitants, according to Fox.

"It's not all the stereotypical homeless person that's drug-addicted. In fact that's probably the smallest percentage of the

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NEWS photo Cindy Goodman

MANAGER Linda Fox (front), Paul Harmon and Sarah Benson are the workers who transform the North Shore Lookout Shelter's mission statement into action.

Housing worker makes a difference

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homelessness issues on the North Shore," she said. "We're even finding the working-class individuals are starting to become displaced."

Recently, many improvements have been made in finding transitional housing for people who would otherwise be homeless, according to Butler.

This is largely due to a second full-time tenant support worker on the North Shore, who was hired with funds raised from Dundarave's Festival of Lights.

A lot of help is necessary in the transition phase, according to Fox, when previously homeless people are trying to furnish an apartment and pay utilities while working a job that barely covers rent.

For Butler, the problem comes down to the price of housing.

"There are many roads to homelessness, but there are few roads out that don't travel through adequate affordable housing and appropriate support services. Solutions to the problems of homelessness in our community will require continued political will on the part of community and council," he said.

"The importance of (Homelessness Action Week) is to bring awareness to the community, bring awareness to those affected individuals that there are some services out there that they may not be aware of. They aren't alone. The community is out there

actively trying to assist," said Fox.

Connect Day, which is slated for Oct. 10 between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. at the Salvation Army on West 12th Street, includes a health clinic, immunizations, clothing vouchers, haircuts, and connections to employment programs and income assistance.

A youth dinner is scheduled for 5 p.m. Wednesday evening at the Youth Safe House on West First Street in North Vancouver. The dinner is scheduled to include outreach and hygiene kits.

A mother and kids lunch is slated for 11 a.m. on Thursday at the John Braithwaite Community Centre. The meal includes counselling programs, fitness access cards, employment programs and free child minding.

On Friday night the Ambleside Youth Centre in West Vancouver hosts a movie and discussion night beginning at 7 p.m.

The week is scheduled to finish off with a street soccer game at Norseman Field at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

In 2013, the North Shore Culinary Education Society is scheduled to start a program in the City of North Vancouver to give at-risk people training to help them land jobs in the food industry, according to Butler.

The North Shore Housing Centre is largely assisted by large and small donations from concerned residents, according to Fox, who says even pair of socks or a towel is helpful.

"Everything that anyone gives us helps us to restart somebody's life," she said.