

Abbott: Sorella already full, commends Coleman

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Jon McComb: Women in Vancouver's downtown east side neighbourhood now have a new option in affordable housing. A brand-new 108-unit supportive housing development was officially opened yesterday. Janice Abbott, who is the CEO of Atira Women's Resource Society, joins us this morning.

Janice, nice to have you on our program. Tell me about what this new facility is like.

Janice Abbott: It's stunning. [Contact lost].

McComb: You were saying that this is quite a nice facility that's been unveiled on the downtown east side.

Abbott: Yeah, it's absolutely beautiful.

McComb: Tell me more about it. What will it do? What will it accomplish?

Abbott: Obviously, it provides 108 homes for women. Twelve of the units are 850-square-foot family units and will be supporting women who, with our support, will be able to keep their children, so they're involved with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. There's another 12 units where we are housing women who are pregnant and homeless, and hopefully, with our support, those women will also be able to keep their babies.

McComb: Now, what kinds of other services and supports are made available?

Abbott: Well, there'll be a couple of things that happen over the next few months. As we get to know the women, we'd like them to tell us a little bit about what they need and want from us, and from that we'll start to develop and put some supports in place. We'd also in this building and for the first time -- in Atira's history anyway -- like to involve the women themselves in service delivery. There's so many women there and such a diversity of women that we know that some of those women will bring skills and abilities to the program. We're also working with organizations like BC Women's Hospital, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Sheway, Battered Women's Support Services and our own staff to deliver everything from 16-step groups to yoga classes.

McComb: Tell me about where the funding all comes from.

Abbott: The core funding for the building, the two staff, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, comes from BC Housing. That's part of their sort of typical funding model for these kinds of buildings. The other programs and services are already in existence, so they're [already] funded programs, and it's through these partnerships that the services will be delivered.

McComb: What about a waiting list? I'm sure that these places either have filled up or will fill up fairly quickly.

Abbott: Yes, Sorella has been full for about five weeks. Our expectation is that we won't keep a waiting list. Our experience in our programs is we've had waiting lists up to 400 women, and it's really challenging to put a woman on a 400-woman waiting list, so what we'll likely do is take names and numbers, and as vacancies become available notify women rather than give them the sense that, you know, you're on a waiting list and you might get housing soon.

McComb: The announcement yesterday came complete with the hot and cold running politicians. They're, of course, always eager to claim credit. What's your sense of how the various levels of government have handled the housing issue?

Abbott: Like you say, it's hot and cold. We've had a very dedicated minister for the last number of years. The federal government hasn't been at the table. The money that they announced yesterday is certainly welcome, but we're not exactly sure what it'll be used for, so it'll be interesting to see how things unfold over the next year or so.

McComb: But you think on a provincial level that Rich Coleman has done a pretty good job.

Abbott: Yeah, he's done a great job over the last number of years in just his commitment to building more housing, and actually, that's resulted in housing, so it's been more than just words.

McComb: Janice, we appreciate it. Thank you for joining us this morning.