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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## SisterSquare, A Safe Outdoor Space for Women

Atira Women's Resource Society, with the support of the Central City Foundation, City of Vancouver and BC Housing, has set up a large, heated 20 by 70ft tent for women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. SisterSquare includes two washrooms, will have a shower trailer installed later this month and will offer women and women-identified individuals a safe respite from the streets.

In addition to offering women a safe place to gather, use safely with trained staff and peers on site, access harm reduction supplies, personal hygiene products and grab a snack, women will have access to services including support securing housing and or access to treatment, stopping the violence counselling, one-to-one emotional support, legal advocacy, and a direct line to connect to food hamper deliveries, among other services.

"As violence against women in the Downtown Eastside continues to escalate and safe gathering spaces close or reduce the number of women inside in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, women are left with fewer options for safety." says Janice Abbott, CEO of Atira Women's Resource Society. "This tent offers women a safe harbour in an increasingly violent storm."

Staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week with one staff and two peer staff on shift at all times, SisterSquare not only provides all women a safe place to rest and access services, but also provides the opportunity for between eight and 12 women from the community to earn an income.

"This community-led initiative will give women a place to go for respite, food, support and information, and hopefully it will serve as a model for how to open up more safe and desperately-needed spaces for people in the Downtown Eastside during this time of physical distancing," said Jennifer Johnstone, President and CEO of Central City Foundation. "We've been supporting people in the inner city since 1907, but like many in this pandemic, we are now doing things differently, so were able to move quickly with funding and support for this initiative, alongside other philanthropic partners and community organizations."

SisterSquare would not be possible without the support and collaboration of the Downtown Eastside community. Atira is partnered with Central City Foundation, Community Coordinated Response Network (with funding from City of Vancouver), BC Housing and A Better Life Foundation, and is supported by



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WISH Drop in Centre Society and Downtown Eastside Women's Centre. This collaboration will ensure a comprehensive wrap-around approach to providing women with the support they need during this unprecedented global pandemic.

For more information about Atira Women's Resource Society or the partner organizations, please see links below.

<https://atira.bc.ca/>

<https://www.centralcityfoundation.ca/>

<https://www.abetterlifefoundation.ca/>

If you would like to book an interview either at the SisterSquare tent or via phone or video, please be in touch at [media@atira.bc.ca](mailto:media@atira.bc.ca) or 604-818-4933.