

# Emergency women's shelter in Vancouver's Eastside salvaged

ERIC SZETO  
CUP Western Bureau Chief

VANCOUVER (CUP)—The moribund Downtown Eastside Women's Centre Emergency Shelter, a refuge that houses up to 100 homeless women on many nights, was granted a six-month lease on life last week.

On 22 March, BC Housing, the province's subsidized-housing agency, granted the emergency shelter \$160 000 to stay open for another half year, until a more permanent housing solution is hammered out. The centre first began operation in November 2006.

The shelter's existence was in limbo because the \$80 000 granted in November by BC Housing was to run out at the end of the month. Up until last week, BC Housing had given no indication as to whether it would extend funding.

The women's shelter has grown in popularity in recent months and has been providing food, shelter and clothing to people in increasing numbers. Patrons said it becomes so full on some nights that sleeping bodies scattered all across the floor block the way.

Harsha Walia, project coordinator for the centre, expressed concern

that, if the safe-haven was to shut down, women from all walks of life—seniors, mothers with children, drug users and prostitutes—would be left to fend for themselves on the street. In many cases, she said, women would have to resort to extreme measures like drugs and prostitution to stay safe.

But despite the funding, advocates like Walia are demanding a more permanent solution to the long-term social housing crisis.

"Shelters are not the solution to homelessness," she said. "We want long-term funding that's not a Band-Aid solution. Sleeping on floors is not a dignified solution to homelessness."

Sam Rainboth, public relations for BC Housing, said that they have been in discussions with the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre and is optimistic that a permanent solution can be finalized before the six-month funding runs out.

Standing outside in the rain and wearing a borrowed pair of shoes, Patricia Dove, a frequent visitor to the Women's Centre, said that without the shelter there would be nowhere to go.

"It's ridiculous, you see women sleeping on the street," she said. "Take

[Robert] Pickton's case. No wonder he had so much access to women. There's no housing."

Pickton has been charged with the murders of 26 women from the Downtown Eastside, where more than 50 women have gone missing since the '90s.

"The government needs to wake up," she added. "How many more women have to go missing and die before they listen?"

Beverly O'Reilly, who also uses the shelter regularly, said the expedited gentrification of the Downtown Eastside due to the upcoming 2010 Olympics is exacerbating the homelessness problem.

According to a Greater Vancouver Regional District report, there has been a 60 per cent increase in homeless women since 2002. Pivot Legal Society research shows that the gentrification leading to the Olympics will triple the almost 2000 homeless people in Vancouver by 2010.

"There are hotels here booting everybody out," she said referring to the Burns Block closure—a single-residence occupancy hotel in the Downtown Eastside that saw 18 residents evicted after getting only an hour's notice last year.

## Québec students will strike for free education

Postsecondary education could and should be free for all students, explain one-day strike promoters

MARK IHNATOWYCZ  
The McGill Daily

MONTREAL (CUP)—A province-wide student association, *l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante* (ASSÉ), will lead a Québec-wide strike demanding free postsecondary education today.

"Free education would cost \$550 million, according to an independent study—less than one per cent of the provincial budget," said Alex Bourdon-Charest, secretary-general of the ASSÉ Coordination Council, referring to an ASSÉ-commissioned study released last January.

According to first-year McGill University student Jessyka Boulanger, who last week collected the 500 signatures necessary to hold a general assembly yesterday on whether McGill students should formally join the strike, students' participation in the strike would bring their voices to the forefront of the movement for free education. The results of the general assembly weren't available as of press time, however, undergraduates mandated the McGill student society to fight for free education in February.

"The question is, how far are we willing to go to fight for education?" Boulanger asked.

In Montréal, the one-day strike will culminate in a demonstration at McGill in the early afternoon. According to Bourdon-Charest, the strike's main objective is to mobilize both students and concerned citizens to fight for free tuition.

He said demonstrators would also push the government to improve library and infrastructural resources, as well as establish a more accessible and flexible public childcare system at

postsecondary institutions.

But with the provincial election occurring just four days before the strike, Trevor Hanna, a vice-president for *la Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec* (FEUQ), Québec's larger, centrist student association, questioned why ASSÉ chose to wait until after the election instead of demonstrating before election day, as FEUQ did.

**"The question is, how far are we willing to go to fight for education?"**

JESSYKA BOULANGER,  
MCGILL STUDENT

"[ASSÉ] had it planned well in advance, with no consideration of the electoral process," Hanna said. "[FEUQ] planned [our demonstration] specifically before [the election] so that whatever party came into power knew they would have to deal with us."

Bourdon-Charest said that ASSÉ's decision to organize the strike after the election was strategic, arguing that it doesn't matter which party forms the government.

"The position of ASSÉ is to stay out of the electoral campaign," Bourdon-Charest said. "No matter who the government is, our education is in danger."

He added that ASSÉ's goals are considerably different from FEUQ's, as ASSÉ focuses on free education and FEUQ restricts itself to maintaining the tuition-fee freeze.

"Some people can't study even with the freeze. We want full student accessibility," Bourdon-Charest explained.

## NATIONAL NEWS BRIEF

### DNA ANALYSIS DETERMINES IDENTITY OF FIRST WWI SOLDIER

THUNDER BAY, ONT (CUP)—Thanks to the Paleo-DNA Lab research team at Lakehead University, Private Herbert Peterson is the first Unknown Soldier to be named using a DNA identification process.

A second First World War soldier found in France with Peterson hasn't yet been identified, but Dr Carney Matheson's Lakehead University research team hopes for identification soon.

There are likely many other unknown soldiers who died in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. And once their remains are found, Lakehead researchers from the departments of history, anthropology and biology will work together to find out who they were.

Much attention has been brought to the important biological aspects of the research, but Captain David Ratz, a history teacher at Lakehead, explained that the sometimes-overlooked historical analysis helps to uncover crucial information.

"By understanding the history of Vimy Ridge, it allows for accurate information," he said. "We can determine the scenario and circumstances to determine the death of the soldiers."

The historical analysis helps to prove or refute hypotheses with accurate facts. By examining the stains on the bones, researchers are able to determine what caused them. A blue-stained thighbone suggests that copper or brass caused it.

"A soldier would have had plenty of copper or brass on him, such as bullets, badges, belts and canteens," Ratz explained, but noted that the remains of the soldiers that are being identified don't actually come to Canada. Researchers only receive the DNA and photos of the bones.

"Up until Afghanistan, it was normal Canadian practice to keep bodies where they were killed, with the exception of Germany where they were buried in Belgium, France, [and] Holland," Ratz said.

Melissa Gaudette, Argus

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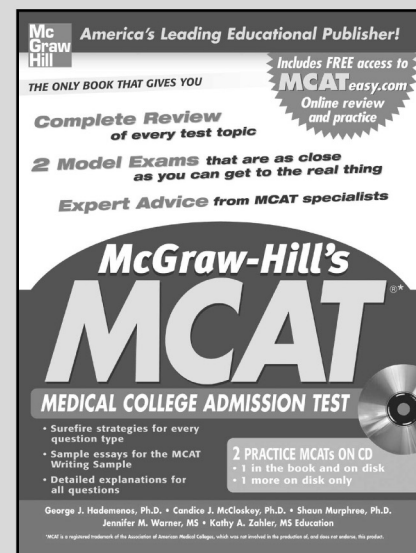
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