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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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Homelessness: measuring progress one person at a time

The sheer magnitude of homelessness in our communities can generate an aura of despair and doubt that hovers over the goal of ensuring that all Canadians have a safe and stable roof over their heads.

Just as it helps to maintain perspective on the issue by focusing on the humanity behind homeless statistics, perhaps we can also avoid becoming overwhelmed and discouraged by measuring progress through one person's story at a time.

For the past while, staff in my constituency office have been working with 63-year-old Dallas. He has been without secure housing for nine years - living rough in North Vancouver for the last couple of those years.

As his health started to suffer, Dallas became desperate to get a roof over his head - so desperate that on several occasions he mentioned he had even briefly considered committing a petty crime to get arrested and at least be inside. Dallas has spent a quarter century behind bars, largely due to alcoholism and what he readily admits was poor judgement.

Help from a navigator

Not everyone fits the tidy box that governments require of people to access supports - and Dallas is one of them. Often, my constituency staff find some people need an advocate or navigator to help get them on their feet. So, with an agent at BC Social Development, we managed to complete applications, tax returns, and a variety of other forms to get things moving.

Dallas eventually got a health number; confirmation of his Social Insurance Number; was put on a regular payment plan for social assistance; opened a bank account at Pigeon Park Savings (after major financial institutions refused him); applied for the B.C. Recovery Benefit; and went to the Health Connections Clinic to begin dealing with his health issues. The big hurdle remained - finding a place Dallas could call home.

Enter the exceptional team at the Hollyburn Family Services Society's Seniors Program and the federal government's Reaching Home Program. Reaching Home provides

local communities with funds to support vulnerable Canadians who need access to secure and stable housing - part of Canada's \$2.2 billion Homelessness Strategy.

Over the years, the compassionate caseworkers at Hollyburn have found creative ways to navigate limited housing options on the North Shore. They were able to find Dallas short-term rental accommodation and are on track to find him something more permanent.

It appears Dallas' story of homelessness may be coming to a fortunate conclusion. He came by the other day to sweep out the constituency office parking lot as a way of saying thank-you. One person's story signifying progress.

However, we have many more constituents in North Vancouver who are homeless or on the verge of being homeless. Unfortunately, when the COVID eviction and rent freezes are lifted, the social workers at Hollyburn and other agencies are anticipating a surge of people suddenly without a place to live. There continues to be progress on homelessness, but we need to do much more.

Federal commitment

As testimony to the federal government's commitment, we are continuing to expand the National Housing Strategy, our 10-year, \$70-billion plan, including more than \$13 billion added last year alone.

Before the National Housing Strategy, most federal funding for affordable housing flowed through the provinces and territories. The federal government did not provide funding directly to proponents. We changed that and re-established the federal government's leadership with a long-term vision for housing, working in collaboration with provinces and municipalities.

Accompanied by clear goals and ambitious targets, significant new investments and a focus on partnerships and cooperation, we are ensuring that even more Canadians like Dallas have a safe place to call home.

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