

City's partnership with ASK Wellness Society succeeding

(Penticton, BC – June 1, 2022) – Since beginning nine months ago, more than 6,000 pounds of garbage and 150 needle sharps have been collected by those who were previously experiencing homelessness.

"The City of Penticton is proud to be able to support ASK Wellness Society and the Peer Ambassador program, which provide an opportunity for individuals to learn new skills, connect to the community and help create a cleaner and safer home for all of us," says Mayor John Vassilaki. "This is an innovative project that shows how by working together we can make a difference for those in need."

After learning of the program's success in its first three months of operation, the City of Penticton entered into a partnership with ASK Wellness Society in November, providing \$5,000 to help support the Peer Ambassador program that supports individuals who were previously experiencing homelessness develop skills and connections by providing clean up services around Penticton.

The team recently supported Bylaw Services in cleaning up a large, abandoned encampment along the east side of Okanagan Lake. Over 40 individuals who participate in the ASK Wellness Society's program have invested over 1,000 hours in cleaning up Penticton.

Keith Girard leads the Ambassador program in Penticton for ASK Wellness Society and has been with the project since it started.

"I've heard from participants about the effects the program has had on their mental health. They've been able to budget their money better, they feel good about themselves when out in community, and it also strengthens their trust in others," says Girard. I've directly witnessed participants becoming more open and comfortable sharing their struggles and background as they participate in the program."

ASK Wellness Society supports individuals at risk of or who have experienced homelessness through services such as Burdock House and Fairhaven. Participants from ASK Wellness Society's programs are provided with stipends for their work with the Ambassador team so they can purchase food, clothing and other necessities. The City is providing funding for the program's phone, support with the program's garbage disposal fees, and with identifying priority areas for clean-up. BC Housing is providing the primary temporary funding for the program's first year of operation, which will end in August 2022.

To find out more about the ASK Wellness Society's program, visit <https://askwellness.ca/employment-penticton/>

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