

Coast Foundation

For over 30 years, the Coast Foundation Society has been providing housing, jobs, community, rehabilitative social and recreational opportunities, food, clothing and basic life skills training to persons with mental illness. In 2005, Coast provided housing to more than 600 people throughout Vancouver and Coquitlam. Without decent housing, all other rehabilitation and treatment efforts become frustrated.

With its newly incorporated Coast Social Enterprise Foundation (CSEF) and the support of BC Technology Social Venture Partners, David and Dorothy Lam Foundation, Vancouver Foundation, VanCity and Enterprising NonProfits Program, Coast has been able to enhance its employment programs through the development of affiliated social enterprises (Landscaping with Heart, Sewing with Heart, Coast Catering). The objective of the social enterprises is to create self-sustaining businesses that provide employment to persons with mental illness or other disabilities.



Both the landscaping and catering businesses run through CSEF generate enough revenue to cover employees' wages. The landscaping business generates surplus revenue that is used to support the development of the sewing and catering enterprises. While the mandate of this enterprise is to generate employment rather than profit, additional surpluses are donated back to the Coast Foundation Society to support other programs that promote recovery from serious mental illness. At this time, CSEF provides flexible employment for twenty people.

Alex's Story

Alex lived in Stanley Park for two years. Estranged for a dozen years from his middle class family, Alex was schizophrenic, homeless, penniless and out of work, with little hope or trust of others.

A Coast outreach worker met Alex in 1995, when Alex was living in a cardboard box, and they slowly developed a relationship. The worker invited Alex to the Mental Health Resource Centre for coffee and

eventually Alex accepted Coast's offer of food, a shower and new clothes.

Alex eventually started taking medications for his schizophrenia, and moved into supported independent housing through Coast. He began volunteering in maintenance and kitchen services, and helping with gardening at Coast Community Homes. His involvement with Coast Landscapes led him to pursue a Landscapes Technician Certification Program in January 2003.

Alex now works full time with Landscaping with Heart, one of Coast Foundation's social enterprises and he is often asked to supervise crews. Alex is continuing his education, intending to obtain a diploma in horticulture and a first aid certificate.

Alex's boss, Peter, says Alex is a consistent worker and completely self-supporting. Wishing to help others in the position he found himself in a few years ago, once a week Alex makes soup and takes it to the Union Gospel Mission. Quite simply, Alex says, "Coast saved my life."

[Click here](#) to read *A Social Economy Showcase – BC Stories* in its entirety.