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Coast Mental Health Announces First 2010 Courage To Come Back Award Recipient STARR PEARDON named as recipient in ADDICTION category

VANCOUVER, B.C. March 29, 2010 – Coast Mental Health announced the first of six award recipients of a 2010 Courage To Come Back Award. **Starr Peardon of Coquitlam** has been named as the 2010 Courage To Come Back Award recipient in the Addiction category. The remaining recipients will be announced over the next five Mondays, leading up to the awards gala on Thursday, May 6th.

Today in the Greater Vancouver area there are three successful recovery homes for women who are in conflict with the law, dealing with addiction, leaving the street, on probation or parole, or who are serving conditional sentences. They are places where lost and dispossessed souls can find recovery, growth and new purpose and meaning to their lives. These women are often the hardest to help: they have been in and out of prison many times, in and out of detox, in and out of trouble of every kind. These safe havens would never have been if it were not for the vision and tenacity of one remarkable woman: Starr Peardon.

Starr's was an inauspicious beginning. Born in Nanaimo into a poor family of 12 children, her parents struggled for years with drug addiction and alcohol abuse. She was taken periodically out of school to care for her younger siblings as her parents spiraled further downward. Home was often a violent and dangerous place to be and soon Starr, now in her early teens, began to turn to drugs and alcohol herself for a quick fix, a relief from the unrelenting pain.

Like many others, Starr ended up living on the streets, her 2 children taken from her. She was using full-time, making frequent trips to Vancouver to buy drugs to sell back in Nanaimo - she was her own best customer. Addicted to heroin and cocaine, committing crimes to obtain the money to purchase the drugs was her full-time job. A cycle of violence, homelessness and addiction began that would last for 10 years of her life.

Eventually Starr added armed robbery to her list of crimes, and was caught, tried and sentenced to prison. This "enforced detox" period allowed Starr the first glimpse of clarity she had had in years. Praying with the prison chaplain one day, Starr felt a great peace descend on her, a feeling she'd never known before. Unfortunately, it was not enough to keep the young woman off drugs or out of trouble, and she as soon as she was released on parole, she was back in the downtown eastside getting high and committing more robberies. But that one glimpse of peace had given her a sliver of hope and, unknown to her, planted a seed that was to grow. Suddenly, her former lifestyle didn't feel right any more.

In 1994, Starr checked herself into detox and, when her treatment was over, voluntarily returned to prison to complete her sentence. Once out, she began volunteering with organizations working in the very neighborhoods that had been the scene of so much of her trouble. Undaunted, she resisted the temptation to return to drugs and the street life. Inside her a dream had begun of a recovery house for women just like she had been, a place that would welcome and serve those women deemed too difficult to handle. But who would give money to her? Uneducated, with a less-than-commendable track record, who would place their trust in her?

Through extremely hard work, persistence and constant faith, Starr's dream began to take shape. In 2000, she formed her nonprofit society and opened the first of three recovery houses, staffed by women who had been in the same situation as those they were trying to help. In the past decade, the Talitha Koum Society has helped hundreds of women recover their lives. Graduates of the program have a success rate of over 70% one year after graduation.

Accepting this Courage To Come Back Award, Starr says, "I am truly humbled to be nominated by all the people who have been part of my life in the past 16 years. Without their support, prayers and guidance, I would not have the honour of receiving this award. Most importantly, however, I would not have had the chance to see the beauty in each woman I have had the pleasure of serving."

Starr Peardon named as recipient in CTCB Addiction category

Starr will receive her Courage To Come Back Award at the 12th Annual Gala Dinner at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Vancouver on Thursday, May 6th. For tickets, call 604-675-2328 or purchase online at www.coastmentalhealth.com

About Courage To Come Back:

The Courage To Come Back Awards celebrate people who have inspired others as they have courageously battled back from illness, adversity or injury. Through Courage, British Columbians are acknowledged for their accomplishments, positive attitudes and willingness to give back to their communities. Awards are given in six categories including: addiction, medical, mental health, physical rehabilitation, social adversity and youth. Recipients are chosen by volunteer panels of community leaders and category experts.

Through presenting the stories of six amazing recipients each year at The Courage To Come Back Awards, Coast Mental Health strives to offer hope to all those suffering from illness, adversity or injury and demonstrates that all people have value and dignity regardless of the illness, adversity or injury they have faced.

About Coast Mental Health:

Since 1972, Coast Mental Health has been providing high-quality housing, employment programs, social opportunities and other community mental health services for people with serious and persistent mental illnesses. Coast, from our nearly 40 years of community service, that people with a mental illness can and do recover. Our services include:

- Mental Health Resource Centre – 500 Active Members, 220 meals served daily
- Homeless Outreach program serving approximately 60 people per month
- Coast Clubhouse - 400 Members, 80 Meals Served Daily, 80 Jobs Weekly
- Community Homes – 12 Houses, Over 120 Housed in Vancouver and Burnaby
- Supported Housing - ~650 Housed
- Coast Cottages - 50 Housed
- At Home/Chez Soi - 100 Housed by 2011
- Coast Transitional Housing - 44 Housed
- PACT Employment Services - 160+ Served Annually
- Coast Social Enterprises - 20 Employed
- Financial Trust Program - 350+ Served

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