



SURREY OPENS REGION'S FIRST CHILD PROTECTION CENTRE – 'SOPHIE'S PLACE' TO HELP THE MOST VULNERABLE

Surrey, BC: Sophie's Place, unveiled today by Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts and facility patron Sophie Tweed-Simmons is the first centre of its kind in the region and one of only a handful of similar facilities in the country. Located within The Centre for Child Development building in Surrey, a facility which currently provides programs and services for over 2000 children with severe developmental disabilities annually, Sophie's Place will bring together a multi-disciplinary team including the RCMP, Ministry of Child and Family Services, medical and trauma screening professionals and volunteer advocates.

"The children who will be helped through this facility are incredibly courageous, and we must give them all the support they deserve. This is a facility that the region desperately needs, and we need it now," says Mayor Dianne Watts. *"Sophie's Place will be a safe, friendly and welcoming place for a large percentage of the over 1000 children from across Greater Vancouver who report sexual or physical abuse each year,"* says Mayor Watts. *"I'm proud to have the centre in Surrey, but this is for the children of the entire region."*

Sophie's Place will provide physically, mentally and sexually abused children up to the age of 12 years with professional, compassionate and nurturing service from doctors, police and counsellors, all under one roof. The centre will provide highly specialized care in a child-friendly atmosphere.

Sophie Tweed-Simmons, daughter of legendary music artist Gene Simmons, a locally active child advocate and volunteer, became involved in the project to develop a facility of this kind following a meeting with Mayor Dianne Watts. An active participant in the process, Tweed-Simmons aided with the construction of the centre and will act the patron to the facility that bears her name.

"I am so excited to be part of what The Centre for Child Development is doing," says Tweed-Simmons. "I am especially honoured that Sophie's Place will be an umbrella for children where they can go to find help, feel safe and just hang out in an environment where they can be heard, understood and respected; as all children should be. I have been blessed growing up in a house where I am treated as an equal and with love, the least I can do is help show children that that can be a possibility for everyone."

Sophie's Place will operate as a separate arm under the umbrella of The Child Development Centre (CDC) and will be located within the facilities second floor building.

"I am extremely happy to welcome Sophie's Place into our facility," says The Child Development Centre CEO Gerard Bremault. "We're delighted to see that children who have experienced horrible abuse are going to receive a coordinated, multi-disciplinary service that provides greater support to them - and higher rates of conviction of the perpetrators. The CDC is especially happy to see this facility come to reality so quickly, as children with special needs are four times as likely to be abused as all children."

After a rigorous four-week construction schedule which saw over 60 volunteers including Surrey firefighters, Surrey RCMP, city staff, business leaders, companies and residents working throughout the Christmas holiday, Sophie's Place will open its doors in February, 2012.

"This project could not have come together so quickly without the leadership and dedication to the project from the Surrey RCMP, and the incredible outpouring of support and hard work from so many volunteers in the community," says Mayor Watts.

Organizations and members of the public wishing to support this important cause can make a charitable donation to: Sophie's Place Endowment Fund care of the Child Development Foundation of British Columbia at: www.cdfbc.ca or via mail at #170B – 7881 128 Street Surrey, BC V3W 4E7. (Charitable Tax # 133210229 RR0001)

For more information about the City of Surrey visit www.surrey.ca. For more information about The Centre for Child Development visit: www.cdfbc.ca.

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