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**TO:** CITY MANAGER **DATE:** 2008 May 16  
**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING **FILE:** 16000 - 20  
*Reference: Groups Homes*  
**SUBJECT: FUNDING FOR L'ARCHE GREATER VANCOUVER**  
**PURPOSE:** To provide Council with information and recommendations on the funding situation facing the L'Arche Greater Vancouver's Burnaby operation.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **THAT** the Mayor, on behalf of Council, write to the Honourable Tom Christensen, Minister of Children and Family Development and Rick Mowles, Chief Executive Officer of Community Living BC to request that they commit to:
  - a) Assist L'Arche Greater Vancouver in developing a strategic plan aimed at helping the organization to address the needs of existing and future clients in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner, and
  - b) Provide L'Arche Greater Vancouver with sufficient base operational funding to keep the organization's existing residential and day programs operating on a financially viable basis while the strategic plan is being developed.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to Burnaby's Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and the Social Issues Committee.

**REPORT****1.0 BACKGROUND**

Under the New Business portion of its meeting of 2008 April 07, Council considered a Notice of Motion regarding the funding situation of L'Arche Greater Vancouver. The motion was prompted by media reports that L'Arche residential and day programs in Burnaby could be in jeopardy because of funding shortfalls. Arising from the discussion, Council adopted the following motion:

“THAT Council request Planning Department staff meet with L'Arche representatives to identify their needs, assess the situation and prepare a report to Council outlining a proactive plan to assist L'Arche Burnaby in retaining their Provincial funding.”

As requested, staff met with representatives of L'Arche. We also discussed the situation with Community Living BC (CLBC), the primary funding body for the L'Arche operations. This report presents our findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

## 2.0 OVERVIEW OF L'ARCHE OPERATION

L'Arche Greater Vancouver is a Burnaby-based non profit society that was founded in 1974. Its stated purpose is "to share life in community with people with developmental disabilities revealing the unique values of each person and being a sign of hope for society." The Burnaby operation is part of the international L'Arche federation, established in France in 1964 by Jean Vanier, son of former Canadian Governor General Georges Vanier.

L'Arche Greater Vancouver operates six residential programs. Three (Bethel House, Creation House, and Unity House) are located at the organization's main property at 7401 Sussex Avenue in Burnaby. The others (The Crossing, Emily House, and Nazirah House) are situated on nearby residential properties in the city's South Slope area. The L'Arche homes are licensed under the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act*. They function as an "intentional community," whereby people with developmental disabilities and paid staff live together in a communal, mutually respectful, family-like setting. Twenty-four adults with developmental disabilities currently reside in Burnaby's L'Arche homes.

In addition to its residential programs, L'Arche operates two day programs from its Sussex Avenue facility: Emmaus Centre and Neighbours Helping Neighbours. The Emmaus Centre offers a multi-activity day program involving recreational, social, and volunteer outreach activities for people with disabilities. Neighbours Helping Neighbours gives program participants an opportunity to serve the wider community, assisting seniors and others with physical limitations with yard work, simple maintenance and chores. Until recently, the society also ran another day program at its Sussex Avenue location: L'Arche Wood Products. Through the program, people with developmental disabilities made a variety of wood products (primarily pine shelving) for sale to retail outlets and the public. L'Arche closed the program in 2007 November both because of funding constraints and because of changing needs and abilities of program participants.

## 3.0 FUNDING SITUATION

The majority of L'Arche Greater Vancouver's funding (about 86%) is provided by Community Living BC, a community based Crown agency established by the Province in 2005.

Governed by the *Community Living Authority Act (2004)*, CLBC has been given the policy, budgetary, contractual and operational responsibility for delivery of community living services in BC – responsibilities that were previously under the auspices of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). CLBC is accountable to the

Provincial Legislature through MCFD, with the Minister being responsible for providing funding, setting Provincial standards, and monitoring performance.

L'Arche currently receives nearly \$1.8 million in annual operating funding from CLBC. The Society is requesting a further \$1.5 million per year to increase salaries of existing program staff, hire additional program assistants, enhance programming and address other health and safety requirements of its operation. While acknowledging that the requested increase is substantial, L'Arche officials state that it has been necessitated by three key factors:

- a) **Historical underfunding:** When it was established in 1974, L'Arche Greater Vancouver operated with no government funding, relying instead on contributions from a generous private benefactor. In the 1980s, after the private benefactor died, the Provincial Government began funding the society. According to L'Arche officials, government funding for the Society has traditionally been modest. They note, for example, that the average CLBC payment for an adult in care through a group home in BC is \$100,000 per year, compared with \$63,000 per year for L'Arche residents. They further note that the Society has only been able to survive financially through the years for two reasons:
  - i) the generosity of the L'Arche Foundation of Greater Vancouver (a separate and distinct body from L'Arche Greater Vancouver), which no longer has the financial capacity to subsidize the Society's operating costs
  - ii) the gratuitous time provided by L'Arche employees.
- b) **Low salaries for employees:** Related to the foregoing point, L'Arche officials note that wages for their employees are at the bottom of the scale for the non-union sector. Further, they note that the wages have not increased for the past eight years. Notwithstanding the question of equity, without at least cost of living salary increases, retention of employees could be an issue for L'Arche.
- c) **Rising costs and challenges of caring for an aging clientele** – The average age of L'Arche residents is 54 years, with some residents having lived in the homes since the Society's inception. As the residents have aged, their health has been deteriorating, which has increased the costs of care and placed additional demands on staff.

In 2006, prior to requesting the \$1.5 million funding increase, L'Arche had asked CLBC for an additional \$2.78 million in funding. The request was based on a comprehensive needs assessment of every individual in L'Arche's homes and day programs and a determination of the actual care hours required to provide a safe environment. CLBC assessed the request, but rather than agreeing to annual budget increases, offered L'Arche a one time only funding increase of \$570,000 (disbursed in seven monthly installments from 2007 March to September).

L'Arche intended to use the supplementary money to hire additional assistants for its residential and day programs, cover an operating loss from the previous year, enhance staff training, and implement administration and documentation procedures required by its accreditation body (the Commission of the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities).

The Society had anticipated that the increase would be permanent and written into its contracts, which were up for renewal in 2007 September. This did not occur. L'Arche officials thus state that the Society will be operating at a deficit by the summer if additional funds are not forthcoming.

In addition to meeting with L'Arche officials, staff contacted CLBC to gain that organization's perspective regarding the Society's funding situation. We were advised as follows:

- a) As of 2007 March 31, CLBC served 19,343 children and adults in BC, including 5,150 adults using residential services. While appreciating the service provided by L'Arche, even if it had the funds, CLBC would have difficulty rationalizing a budget increase of over 80% for the operation – especially as the number of people to be served would be unchanged.
- b) CLBC has had several meetings with L'Arche regarding the financial challenges facing the organization. CLBC has also offered suggestions to help the Society in managing within its budget. One option put forward involved consideration of a homesharing model, whereby L'Arche clients would be placed in the homes of families in the community (similar to foster care for children). Representatives of L'Arche rejected the option for a variety of reasons, most notably that:
  - i) homesharing would be unstable (i.e., families may choose to move or simply cease offering the service, thereby causing the people in their care to seek alternative accommodation and care options)
  - ii) it would be disruptive to the lives of existing residents who have expressed a desire to continue living in L'Arche's intentional community setting.

While acknowledging that the homesharing option may not be appropriate for L'Arche, CLBC stressed its commitment to supporting a range of housing and care choices for adults with developmental disabilities (i.e., one size doesn't fit all). CLBC also indicated that it would be willing to continue to work collaboratively to find innovative solutions to the challenges facing the Society.

#### 4.0 DISCUSSION

Upon reviewing the situation facing L'Arche, two key conclusions emerge:

- a) L'Arche is facing significant challenges in continuing with its existing service delivery model – challenges exacerbated by such factors as an aging residential population, increased demands for accountability and documentation from its funders, and additional training and educational requirements for employees. Irrespective of the specific dollar amounts being requested, it is clear that L'Arche needs enhanced funding to continue to operate its programs on a financially viable basis – at least until longer term solutions can be developed.
- b) In addition to a funding increase, L'Arche needs to plan for the future. The Society has indicated a willingness and interest in looking at options for serving younger

adults in the community with developmental disabilities. It has also taken preliminary steps to improve its fundraising abilities, thereby reducing its ongoing reliance on the government for support. For its part, CLBC has indicated a willingness to help L'Arche in developing strategies for addressing the Society's current and future needs. It is believed that a collaborative planning effort amongst L'Arche and CLBC would be worth pursuing.

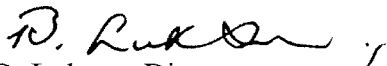
## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

L'Arche Greater Vancouver has been providing a valuable service in Burnaby for over 30 years. Through its unique "intentional community" model, the Society has benefited adults with developmental disabilities in its care. The Society has also been a "good neighbour," making a positive contribution to the broader Burnaby community. Because of funding constraints and increased costs and challenges in serving its aging residents, the continued viability of the Society's programs is in question. Also, given current funding uncertainties, it has been difficult for the Society to effectively plan to address emerging needs.

In light of the foregoing, it is recommended that the Mayor, on behalf of Council, write to the Honourable Tom Christensen, Minister of Children and Family Development and Rick Mowles, Chief Executive Officer of CLBC to request that they commit to:

- a) Assist L'Arche Greater Vancouver in developing a strategic plan aimed at helping the organization to address the needs of existing and future clients in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner, and
- b) Provide L'Arche Greater Vancouver with sufficient base operational funding to keep the organization's existing residential and day programs operating on a financially viable basis while the strategic plan is being developed.

It is further recommended that a copy of this report be sent to Burnaby's Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and the Social Issues Committee.

  
B. Luksun, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

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