Social planning council is part of city's history

Group set up during Great Depression marks 75 years

BY JEFF BELL, TIMES COLONIST NOVEMBER 9, 2011 6:17 AM

Staff of the Community Social Planning Council, from left, Alvaro Moreno, Mary Katherine Ross, Dibya Shrestha, Christine Coates and Brian Hill.

Photograph by: Darren Stone, timescolonist.com

Victoria and the Community Social Planning Council have been through a lot together.

It all started in 1936, when the group was created as the Council of Social Agencies. It continues today, 75 years later.

"Alleviating poverty and social disadvantage in the teeth of the Depression, that's how it came to be," said executive director Rupert Downing. "It worked after the war in helping returning service-people and armed forces personnel with housing needs."

The council has turned into a bigger operation over the decades, but affordable housing and poverty reduction remain key goals. Celebrations for the landmark anniversary are planned for next March.

"We'll combine the celebration of the past with the launch of our new generation of youth community-and economic-development programming," Downing said.

The council, which has grown to encompass a wide range of activities, may also become a little better known in the process.

at how we can better co-ordinate emergency food provision. That's an example of where we try to avoid duplication and make the system more efficient."

Several other Canadian cities are served by similar agencies, including Edmonton, Winnipeg and Toronto.

"It's a model that has become common across Canada, and also in the United States," Downing said.

Like many non-profit groups, the Community Social Planning Council faces funding challenges.

"We're a charity, so we raise charitable donations and we get [support] from some foundations, and we sell our planning and research services," Downing said. "We don't currently have any provincial or federal government funding, but we do get grants from four of the core municipalities: Esquimalt, Victoria, Oak Bay and Saanich, and we get ongoing grants from the United Way."

The council has its hand in the upcoming municipal election. It is organizing an event today at 4 p.m. called City Halls & Families.

"We try and bring forward ideas and evidence of how we can do a better job of working together across municipal governments," Downing said. "This is an opportunity for our citizens and candidates to talk a bit about the family-related issues."

Host Gregor Craigie from CBC will lead a panel at the Metro Studio Theatre (1411 Quadra St.) that includes Downing, Charley Beresford of the Columbia Institute, Jennifer Charlesworth, from the Federation of Community Social Services, and Michael Prince, the University of Victoria's Lansdowne professor of social policy.

Call 250-727-9736 or email info@afsavictoria.ca for tickets ($20 for members of the Association of Family Serving Agencies and $25 for non-members).

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