



ASK WELLNESS CENTRE executive director Bob Hughes outside the former Whistler Inn at Fifth and St. Paul. KEITH ANDERSON/THE DAILY NEWS

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The bleak landscape of a **global recession** looks **all too familiar** to local social groups, but Kamloops is ready to **step up to fill the void**.

By **BOB HUGHES**
Special to The Daily News

The culmination of an unprecedented economic and social services boom in B.C. and Kamloops has left us all tiptoeing on eggshells. No longer able to treat our homes like bank machines has squeezed our blind confidence in the prospects of a rosy future to nothing more than a memory. Reality has struck us all and now the landscape looks surprisingly familiar.

I remember coming to Kamloops to live in 1999. The downtown neighbourhoods looked run down, the sex trade was open on our streets, and businesses were struggling.

It seemed like a gritty and rough town but I loved it. Kamloops and Kamloopians have always been modest and grounded in who we are and what makes us proud to call this our home.

It is these values along with respect for diversity, compassion for the vulnerable, and a strong sense of community that will allow us to weather the present economic storm.

During the coming year, ASK Wellness Centre will continue to reflect the values of Kamloops in what we do. Our clients are not just those marginalized and vulnerable, but the community as a whole.

Partnerships will continue to be a primary focus in our activities. Because we are an outreach driven organization, our services are the nexus of contact with the RCMP, bylaws, community groups, other non-



RAYMOND KARAKUNTE, originally from Fort St. John, finds a place to relax on a bench Tuesday outside the New Life Mission. Homelessness continues to be a challenge for the community.

profits and health services.

Many of our services are adapting to a changing social climate in our community.

With a decline in the visibility of the street-level sex trade and the success SHOP has had in helping women exit the trade, the program is increasing its outreach role to include prevention both in the schools and with the Ministry for Children and Families and the RCMP.

We will continue to work with the City of Kamloops to address homelessness and nuisance issues for businesses and the community.

Through education and mutual respect, our agency as proponents of harm reduction has forged progressive and effective partnerships with the pillars of enforcement, treatment, and prevention in our community.

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Whistler Inn key to service plans

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Tackling homelessness through the opening of the Whistler Inn in the early summer and through our housing outreach program as it expands to Merritt will keep us busy.

The Whistler Inn is a crucial transitional housing facility that will help those needing supports to integrate back into community by offering 24-hour support services and access to medical and addiction services.

Our partnership with Kamloops Native Housing in the delivery of housing outreach reflects the sad reality that the aboriginal population is over represented in homelessness and poverty.

This last year saw a decline in the number of homeless in our community through our homeless count. It is evidence like this that suggests we have a winning formula in working with government, the community and other service providers to fight the good fight in eliminating homelessness in Kamloops.

There is no doubt that this year will be a challenge for all of us. Compassion for the plight of others, a commitment to social justice, and continued collaboration between diverse groups and interests will triumph if we stick to the core values that make Kamloops what it is.

ASK Wellness Centre is ready, are you?

Bob Hughes is executive director of the Kamloops AIDS Society.