



FIRST UNITED

FIRST THINGS FIRST
SUMMER 2026



THE NEW FIRST UNITED IS HERE

Our new home at 320 East Hastings is here, starting a new and exciting chapter for us and the Downtown Eastside community.

“Our redevelopment has been nearly 10 years in the making,” said Amanda Burrows, Executive Director. “The commitment, dedication, and passion exhibited by all the folks involved—from the early planning stages through construction, from the donors, staff and board to the volunteers and contractors—is incredibly humbling. This building is for the Downtown Eastside and we are beyond thrilled to be re-opening our doors at our historic location at 320 East Hastings Street.”

This building supports our work to uphold dignity, belonging and justice in the DTES as the community’s needs continue to grow and change. With three times more space than our last building, we’re maximizing the square footage to increase our impact in the neighbourhood through expanded programs,

including meals, legal advocacy, tax support, mail and phone services, referrals, essential items, spiritual care and more.

At present, we’re prioritizing current programs in the building and will launch new and returning programs gradually. We look forward to offering these services that the community identified as needs: washroom and shower facilities, women’s day sleeping and women-only programming, a library with computers and more. We’re also bringing back our beloved foot care program that was first introduced in our old building and that we’re excited to re-introduce in our new home.

The building was created for reconciliation in action and one of the many ways it serves to do this is through 103 units of safe and affordable housing for low-income Indigenous people, managed by Lu’ma Native Housing Society. Residents of the building will also

have access to our wraparound services.

Opening in the summer means we’re able to put our building’s HVAC system, with enhanced air circulation and filtration, to good use right away. We’re able to serve as a cooling centre in the event of extreme heat for up to 200 people and provide refuge from wildfire smoke for up to 470 people.

Thank you for seeing us through the redevelopment and helping us return to the corner of Gore and Hastings, which has been our home since 1892. We’re not only back, we’re bigger, and doing new things to continue our legacy of providing dignity, belonging and justice to the neighbourhood. Thank you for being a part of this legacy.



Scan the QR code to see photos, videos and a virtual tour of our new building.

A HISTORIC MILESTONE

Dear Friends,

At the time of writing this, I've been in my new office for three weeks as departments gradually move into the new building in phases. But the completion of our new building is just the beginning.

We have great plans for our new home that are outlined in our newly launched strategic plan. This three-year plan was developed with input from our board, staff, and community members and is our roadmap for how we will uphold and grow dignity, belonging and justice.

Right now, we are breathing into the space and learning how we, and the community, will use it. We're adjusting and taking our

time to minimize the inevitable bumps in the road that come up. The community deserves the best quality of service and having a strong foundation will enable that.

After we've had time to learn and adjust to this new reality, I'm excited about opportunities to grow and share our space with other organizations in the DTES. I believe that we can make a greater impact in the neighbourhood when we work together, and our building's collaborative spaces provide more opportunities for this to happen.

By year three we'll be flourishing and focusing on sustainability, changing systems and maximizing

the ways that we help the neighbourhood and the people in it thrive. The next three years are a journey with so much opportunity. But from day one of opening, we'll be grounded by what we're trying to achieve in this new chapter: that "we know your name, and you are seen." We're excited to be on this journey with you.

Amanda Burrows,
Executive Director



YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN COOL

"Climate change isn't coming, it's here."



After years of advocating for tenants' right to cool their home, we celebrated a win when Vancouver City Council passed a motion in June that prohibits landlords from banning cooling devices like air conditioners.

The 2021 heat dome was a wakeup call after 619 people died of extreme heat in B.C., many in their own home. The effects of climate change mean our homes are heating up at unprecedented temperatures but not everyone has equal access to cooling. Up until recently, there were no policies in place to ensure that landlords couldn't prohibit tenants from using cooling devices in their units.

The right to cool is something we've been advocating for since 2023 when we brought this recommendation directly to the Minister of Housing, requesting changes to the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA). In 2024, we released a law reform platform that provided specific language for the RTA, including research on the health and safety impacts that a lack of access to cooling has on low-income and vulnerable tenants, like seniors and people with disabilities. Over the past eight months, many staff have spoken at City Council about the critical need for cooling rights and the deadly consequences of not taking action.

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY, EVERYONE!

On June 17th, we threw a party for 51 celebrants—our first ever Everybody's Birthday party at our shelter.

Shelter residents walked into a cheerful room decorated with colourful banners and balloons. There were snacks and refreshments, birthday cupcakes iced with sprinkles, silly party hats and fun activities like get-to-know-you bingo and karaoke! Each person also got a Tim Hortons gift card so they could get their preferred treat.

“Birthday parties help us reconnect with our playful selves which is such good medicine.”

Addressing the desire to provide more opportunities to celebrate shelter residents and foster a sense of belonging, Casey Stainsby, Spiritual Care Outreach, suggested the idea.

“Everybody’s Birthday is brilliant because it is low pressure and fun, and it doesn’t put the spotlight on anyone, but everyone still gets a chance to feel seen and celebrated,” explained Casey. “Events like this, that offer a chance to break out of the usual routine, really go a long way towards allowing people to connect with each other, staff, and themselves in new ways. Birthday parties help us reconnect with our playful selves which is such good medicine.”

That spirit of playfulness showed itself during the party. Whether it was people deciding how many years old they’re turning, or folks coming alive while belting their favourite karaoke tunes, it was so special to see residents get the chance to have fun and relax.

But the most touching part of the day, Casey observed, was seeing residents’ faces when they opened



their personalized birthday cards, uniquely decorated by volunteers and signed with well-wishes by staff. She noted how moved they were; a great reminder that small but meaningful gestures can have a big impact.

The first Everybody’s Birthday was a great success, thanks to Spiritual Care who organized the event with support from shelter staff and volunteers. We hope to make this an annual event!

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN COOL

“Access to safe temperatures in one’s home should not be a matter of landlord’s discretion, it should be a right,” Sarah Marsden, Director of Systems Change and Legal, stressed to City Councillors on June 3rd, ahead of the vote to ban landlords from restricting cooling devices. “Let me be clear, allowing access to cooling equipment is not a complete

response to extreme heat or climate change, it is one critical first step that the City can take now.”

“Climate change isn’t coming, it’s here,” Amanda Burrows, Executive Director, said to Council. “We’re proud that our new building will serve as a cooling centre during extreme heat and clean air refuge

during wildfire smoke events. We built it this way because we know these events are no longer rare.”

This win is just the first step in our fight for cooling rights. We will continue to advocate for maximum indoor temperature regulation to protect tenants from extreme heat.

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**FIRST
UNITED**

320 E Hastings St.
Vancouver BC Canada V6A 1P4

*Located on unceded Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm
(Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish),
& Səlíl̓wətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) lands.*

THANKS FOR BRINGING THIS BUILDING TO LIFE

Thanks to the collective support of over 1,800 donors, we've exceeded our \$39 million capital campaign fundraising goal, meaning we're debt-free and without a mortgage! We wouldn't be here without the support of everybody who donated and believed in our vision for this building. Thank you for providing a space for the Downtown Eastside community to access dignity, belonging and justice for generations to come.

FRONTLINE MONTHLY DONORS, THANK YOU!

Frontline Monthly Donors are committed individuals whose recurring gifts help uphold dignity, belonging and justice in the neighbourhood. So far this calendar year, 397 monthly donors have given an incredible \$128,130! These recurring gifts provide stability and the ability to plan for the future—something that will be helpful as we continue to expand our programs and start new ones in the new building. Thank you to all of our monthly donors!

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

Volunteers have been an integral part of our community and have made an immeasurable impact over the past 141 years. If you're looking for an opportunity to make a difference in the DTES, we have a variety of positions for various skillsets and interests. Visit firstunited.ca/volunteer to learn more and sign up.

firstunited.ca