

Wine tasting festival

AYSS helps youth

One of the causes being helped by this year's festival is Access Youth.

by Heather Colpitts

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So far this year up until mid-October the Access Youth Services Society (AYSS) has had about 1,600 contacts with youth in Langley.

Last year the total reached more than 2,000 contacts.

The charity, formerly known as PoCoMo Youth Services, added Langley to its list of communities receiving help a few years ago and will this year receive help from the Fraser Valley Wine Tasting Festival.

"The staff really enjoy being out here," executive director Jerome Bouvier recently told Langley City council.

AYSS provides what help it can, whether it's providing an ear for young people couch surfing, a warm drink, information on health issues, or referrals to services.

The AYSS bus starts out at the City firehall then tours. Services are provided Friday and Saturday evenings, 7 p.m. to midnight. It has three buses (operating in different communities) and another soon to be donated by TransLink.

Bouvier said a key facet of the work is dealing with mental health issues and there are not supports out there for them.

"The average time to get mental health services to young people is nine months," he said.

AYSS has made some

changes to try and help. It used to be for youth ages 12 to 18 but now services are provided for youth up to 23.

"We see a lot of young people that are aged out and unfortunately have a hard time getting those services," he said.

As well as the AYSS bus that tours areas where youth congregate, the society has added some bikes for its small crew so they can better connect with youth. AYSS also uses social media.

"Homelessness is an issue because there isn't a huge number of places for young people to be referred to," he said.

Young people aren't visible on the streets like the adult homeless, and society has less compassion for young people on the streets, he said. He pointed to the fact that there are more animal shelters than shelters for people.

A good chunk of his time is spent proposal writing to obtain grants so the wine festival funding will be important to the charity.

"It's getting tougher for all non-profits," he said.

Funds are dwindling and many of the issues faced – health, educational opportunities, mental health, addiction – are provincial responsibilities but communities and groups like AYSS are on the front line and not willing to wait for the province to step up, he explained.

"I struggle with what the future looks like for our young people," he commented.

To learn more about the three causes go to www.autismbc.ca, accessyouth.org, and focusbc.org.



Rotarians John Meagher and Guy Tousignant are some of those organizing the Fraser Valley Wine Tasting Festival on Nov. 1.

Heather Colpitts/Langley Advance

Fraser Valley Wine Tasting Festival

Event marks 25th anniversary

The annual Rotary gala event is this Saturday and is a milestone for the community.

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Not many charity events can boast 25 years of philanthropy and providing more than \$800,000 for various causes.

"This being our 25th anniversary, it's the biggest and best yet," said Rotarian John Meagher.

So the Fraser Valley Wine Tasting Festival organizers have decided to dream big for their event Nov. 1.

"We want people to help us get to \$1 million," he said.

And bringing in more funds means there's more funds to provide to charity and community groups.

The 25th anniversary wine fest proceeds will go to the Autism Society of B.C., the Access Youth Outreach Services Society (formerly PoCoMo Youth Services Society), and Focus BC which helps troubled youth with education and therapy.

The Autism Society of BC has

been around since 1974 and is a parent-based and parent-directed society providing support to individuals with autism and their families.

"Essentially we're concentrating on kids that need help, kids at risk," said Tousignant. "Every year we have more requests [for funding help]."

The goal is to provide as much funding as possible.

"We hope to reach to more community services than in the past," he added.

The members of the Rotary Club of Langley Central spend a great deal of time discussing where to devote the funds raised at this largest fundraiser of the year.

"Our main area, which we haven't done anything yet is kids with autism," Tousignant said.

Despite the success of the past 24 years, the organizers always feel some trepidation.

"Every year when the Rotarians start planning for this, they wonder if people of Langley are going to decide, no not this year, it's too

'deja vu' after more than two decades or find another reason not to support wine fest, he said.

"Every year the people have supported us and really gotten behind us," Tousignant said. "We don't take anything for granted."

This year ticket sales are strong. Despite the success, Rotarians don't tinker with the format.

There will be wine (about 200 varieties from 37 vendors) and gourmet goodies. Initially two restaurants provided food. Now 11 Langley eateries will be on site

feeding patrons.

There will be three different music sites spread around the venue and fundraisers such as a 50/50 draw.

Organizers keep the event to 1,200

people so it doesn't become too unwieldy and so they can use the unique venue – Willowbrook Shopping Centre after closing.

Wine fest runs 7-9:30 p.m. on Nov. 1. Tickets are \$50 per person. For tickets go to www.fvwf.ca or the Willowbrook customer service counter. People can call 604-202-0364.

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Guy Tousignant