

NO: **R231**

COUNCIL DATE: **October 22, 2012**

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## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **October 18, 2012**

FROM: **City Manager**

FILE:

SUBJECT: **Letter of Understanding for the Child Advocacy Centre – Sophie’s Place**

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## RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager’s Office recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Authorize the Mayor to sign on behalf of the City of Surrey the Letter of Understanding, that is attached to this report as Appendix “A” related to Sophie’s Place.

## INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the Child Advocacy Centre, known as Sophie’s Place, that is being established in Surrey and to formalize the City’s on-going involvement with Sophie’s Place by way of a Letter of Understanding with related partners.

## BACKGROUND

A business case for a child advocacy centre was prepared by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which concluded that a “child-centred model” for the investigation of cases of child abuse is vastly superior to the current model. The primary focus of this new model is to ensure a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive investigation is conducted into cases of alleged child abuse in the least traumatic and most protective environment for children.

With the business case in hand, in the fall of 2011 the RCMP approached the Mayor’s Office with a view to implementing the proposed centre in Surrey. The project was viewed as being well-founded and there was general support for moving forward with the implementation of such a centre. The Mayor’s Office agreed to approach potential partners about supporting the project and established a Steering Committee with representation from the City, the Centre for Child Development, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the provincial Community Safety and Crime Prevention Branch of the Ministry of Justice and Crown Counsel along with representatives from private sector partners.

Sophie Tweed Simmons, daughter of Gene Simmons who is the founder and a member of the rock group KISS, was approached and agreed to lend her name to and fund-raising support for the proposed Centre; hence the Centre was named “Sophie’s Place”.

The Board of the Centre for Child Development (CCD) has committed to house Sophie's Place in the CCD building and to provide coordination and fiscal management for Sophie's Place. The CCD is located at 9460 – 140 Street in Surrey. Contributions from several partners during late 2011 and early 2012, both in-kind and cash contributions, allowed tenant improvements to be constructed for Sophie's Place in dedicated floor space on the second floor of the CCD. The delivery of some services was launched at Sophie's Place in February 2012.

In April 2012, Sophie's Place received a one-time start-up grant of \$150,000 from the British Columbia Ministry of Justice's Civil Forfeiture Office (CFO). The purpose of the CFO grant was to assist Sophie's Place in becoming fully operational. The CFO funds are being used to achieve a number of objectives. Firstly, the funding has been used to purchase monitoring equipment so that RCMP and MCFD staff can interview child victims at Sophie's Place while making the necessary recordings to assist in follow up investigations. Secondly, the funding has been used to develop a fulsome operational plan for Sophie's Place. A project facilitator, Dr. Brian Katz, from The Centre for Child Development has been working in collaboration with the RCMP and MCFD in developing operational protocols including, among other things, how information will be shared between the partners. Thirdly, the CFO funding is being used to support appropriate staff training in relation to the operation of Sophie's Place, such training being taken from the National Children's Alliance. The goal of the training is to ensure that Sophie's Place is eligible for accreditation through the National Children's Alliance, which requires that the policies and procedures followed in the operation of the Centre be consistent with the NCA requirements. Sophie's Place staff has also conducted a site visit to the Zebra Child Protection Centre in Edmonton (following extensive consultation via phone and email) and to a similar Centre in Calgary to learn about their experiences with a view to ensuring that Sophie's Place is designed and operated effectively.

Sophie's Place is now operational with the Surrey RCMP using the space and related equipment in conducting interviews related to investigations into circumstances involving children. The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development is currently in the process of developing a plan for their Surrey-based Intake team to use the space to support increased integration of service delivery with the RCMP. The Victim Services and Crime Prevention Branch of the BC Ministry of Justice is studying the potential to place a Victim Court Support Case Worker at Sophie's Place as well.

## **DISCUSSION**

There is a clear need for a child advocacy centre in Surrey. Surrey is the fastest growing city in British Columbia and has the second largest population of all cities in the province, approaching 500,000. The City's population includes over 130,000 children and youth under the age of 19, representing 27% of the City's population.

Sophie's Place is intended to provide a seamless, coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing the needs of child and youth victims of abuse and their families. Research indicates that Child Advocacy Centres promote interagency cooperation in removing child victims from unsafe circumstances and in ensuring that they receive timely medical and mental health care and support and that those involved in committing child abuse are brought to justice. Investigations into child abuse cases are 45% less expensive using a child advocacy centre model than the traditional approach where each agency conducts its own investigation.

The objectives for Sophie's Place are to:

- Bring together a multi-disciplinary team of law enforcement and social service agency professionals in a child-focused environment to serve children and youth who have been impacted by abuse;
- Minimize institutionally-induced trauma to children who have been the victims of abuse;
- Assist in ensuring that those involved in committing child abuse are brought to justice;
- Minimize the number of interviews to which children and youth are subjected in the process of investigating abuse against such children and youth;
- Inform and educate the community on the prevention, recognition and reporting of child abuse;
- Increase the community's awareness and knowledge of Sophie's Place and how to obtain help if a child or youth has been impacted by abuse;
- Assist in ensuring client satisfaction with services delivered from Sophie's Place; and
- Inform and educate law enforcement and social service professionals on the Child Advocacy Centre model as a best practice.

Sophie's Place will be serving the most vulnerable children in Surrey and the Region. The issue of child abuse is a significant one. There are currently no CAC facilities available in Surrey or in the Metro Vancouver region. In 2011, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) received 3,843 intake calls to their Surrey office related to child protection and 1,265 of those calls resulted in an investigation.

In 2010 there were 771 police-reported incidents of abuse against children and youth in Surrey with the most common being physical assaults and neglect followed by sexual offences.

Under the current service delivery system children who have been abused are typically subjected to a number of interviews by a variety of professionals involved in the investigation (i.e., RCMP, child protection, and medical personnel) as well as by support workers working with the child and non-offending parents. These interviews are typically conducted in institutional settings such as a police detachment building or in a government office that is not typically particularly child-friendly and can act to increase the trauma that a child experiences.

Sophie's Place aims to shift the manner in which victims of child abuse interact with professionals involved in investigating allegations of abuse and to providing better support to the child and non-offending family members. Sophie's Place will provide an integrated, "one-stop-shop" for children who have been abused where they will receive the necessary services from a multi-disciplinary team composed of RCMP members, child protection workers, family services workers, medical professionals, and volunteers. All of the services provided through Sophie's Place will be designed to be child-friendly, including the physical design of the space.

The operation will minimize the number of times a child will be interviewed regarding abuse. Under the current model the child may have to tell their story numerous times, for example to an RCMP member, a physician, a child protection worker, crown counsel and a social worker since each of these professionals now works independently from the others.

Child advocacy centres have been associated with an improved conviction rate for offenders. When the Zebra Child Protection Centre in Edmonton opened in 2002 the conviction rate for alleged offenders in Edmonton was 25%. Six years later with the Zebra Centre being fully operational the conviction rate in Edmonton had risen to 89%.

Sophie's Place as it matures will also offer education and outreach to the community on matters related to child abuse. Staff members will serve as valuable resources in the community; particularly to provide training to those who work with children.

### **Letter of Understanding**

A Letter of Understanding has been prepared with a view to confirming the objectives for and commitment of each of the partners to the implementation of Sophie's Place and to define the responsibilities of the partners in relation to the implementation and on-going operation of the Centre. A copy of the LOU is attached as Appendix "A" to this report.

The partners that are signatory to the LOU include:

- The RCMP Surrey Detachment;
- The City of Surrey;
- The Centre for Child Development;
- The Child Development Foundation of BC;
- Victim Services and Crime Prevention; and
- Ministry of Children and Family Development.

The City's role in relation to Sophie's place will be primarily through the Surrey RCMP detachment, which will use Sophie's Place in the conduct of its duties and investigations related to police files associated with child abuse in Surrey.

The LOU makes reference to a Steering Committee that will be put in place to oversee the operation of Sophie's Place. The Steering Committee will include a senior representative from each of the parties that is signatory to the LOU.

### **SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

Sophie's Place will assist in achieving the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter; more particularly the following scope action items:

- SC 5: Improve the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents;
- SC6: Raise Awareness of Accessible and Appropriately Located Services within the City; and
- SC11: Improve Public Safety and Security.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above discussion and to demonstrate its support for the implementation and operation of Sophie's Place, it is recommended that Council authorize the Mayor to sign on behalf of the City of Surrey the Letter of Understanding that is attached to this report as Appendix "A".

Murray Dinwoodie  
City Manager

Appendix "A": Letter of Understanding between the Sophie's Place Partners



## LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING (LOU)

### BETWEEN

**City of Surrey**

(hereafter referred to as “the City”)  
14245 – 56th Ave, Surrey, B.C. V3X 3A2

### AND

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Surrey Detachment**

(hereafter referred to as “RCMP”)  
14355 57TH Ave, Surrey, B.C. V3X 1A9

### AND

**BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, Fraser South Service Delivery Area, Coast Fraser Region.**

(hereafter referred to as “MCFD”)  
101-10221 153 St, Surrey BC V3R 0L7

### AND

**BC Ministry of Justice, Victim Services and Crime Prevention, Community Safety and Crime Prevention Branch**

(hereafter referred to as “MOJ”)  
302-815 Hornby St, Vancouver, BC V6Z 2E6

### AND

**The Centre for Child Development of The Lower Mainland**

(hereafter referred to as “The Centre”)  
9460 – 140th St, Surrey, B.C. V3V 5Z4

### AND

**The Child Development Foundation of British Columbia**

(hereafter referred to as “The Foundation”)  
#170B-7881 128 Street, Surrey,  
British Columbia V3W 4E7

Collectively known as the “Partners”

## **PREAMBLE:**

### **WHEREAS**

- A. The Partners currently provide a broad range of services to children and youth, some components of which relate to children who have been physically, mentally, and sexually abused;
- B. The Partners recognize that an integrated and coordinated approach is most effective in the delivery of services to children who have been physically, mentally, and sexually abused; and
- C. The Partners have a strong interest in increasing the safety and well-being of children and youth;

### **THEREFORE**

the Partners have come together to develop and support the operation of a Child Advocacy Centre in Surrey to provide the best possible services to children who have been victims of physical, mental and sexual abuse, including supports to promote healing, timely investigations and effective prosecution.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Letter of Understanding (LOU) is to set out mutual objectives and intended actions of the Partners to implement a Child Advocacy Centre in Surrey, BC, Canada to be known as "Sophie's Place".

## **GOALS**

The primary goal of Sophie's Place is to provide an integrated, "one-stop-shop" where children who have been abused in Surrey can receive the necessary services in a child-centred environment and operating from a child-centred perspective with a multi-disciplinary team composed of RCMP, child protection workers, victim services and other allied professionals. This allows for maximum efficacy for mandated investigators (RCMP and child protection) alongside support services designed to nurture the child following trauma. Sophie's Place will be a seamless, coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing the needs of children who are victims of abuse and their non-offending family members.

## **BACKGROUND**

Sophie's Place Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) was established in February 2012. The intent of Sophie's Place is to utilize a child-centred approach where a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive team responds to abuse in the least intrusive and most protective environment possible for the child.

The Partners of Sophie's Place adopt the following Mission Statement:

***"To provide fully integrated teams within the community whose focus is on the total wellness of children, with emphasis on protection, investigation, family support, preventive measures, and education."***

In Surrey, children who are abused may be subject to interactions with a number of professionals in different locations involved in the investigation (i.e., RCMP, child protection, and medical personnel) as well as by support workers working with the child and non-offending caregivers. It can be confusing and complex for children and their families to navigate through this type of service delivery system. Oftentimes, interviews are conducted in institutional settings such as a police detachments or government offices, which are not designed to be child-friendly. Sophie's Place aims to fundamentally shift the way victims of child abuse interact with those professionals involved in investigating allegations of abuse and to provide support to the child and non-offending family members.

Sophie's Place will serve as a valuable resource in the community to provide information and support to others who work with abused children. Sophie's Place will also raise awareness in the community regarding child abuse and promote the prevention of child abuse.

Sophie's Place represents the coming together of Partners who are committed to improving outcomes for abused children in our community. Sophie's Place will operate under the auspices of The Centre for Child Development, a registered not-for-profit society founded in 1954. The Child Development Foundation of BC, a separate not-for-profit society whose mission is to raise funds to support The Centre, has established a fund for the purpose of raising monies to support Sophie's Place. The City of Surrey, through the Office of the Mayor, has agreed to assist the Foundation in raising funds to support Sophie's Place.

## **ROLES**

Each of the Partners brings areas of expertise which, together, allow for Sophie's Place to provide a continuum of services to abused children and their non-offending family members. The roles of the Partners are as follows:

### **RCMP**

Subject to funding and competing pressures, provide appropriate RCMP staffing for the CAC who will remain under the legal authority of the RCMP but who will be responsive to the Multi-Disciplinary Management Team and Steering Committee of the CAC.



**MCFD**

MCFD supports the model of Sophie's Place. It is prepared to have staff utilize the CAC on a case-specific basis and envisions the facility as a focal point of intervention and collaboration with its community partners and the RCMP in particular. Subject to the availability of sufficient funding, it would be willing to consider the re-location of appropriate Ministry staff to the CAC at some point in the future.

**The Centre**

The Centre for Child Development is designated as the registered charitable society for the purposes of operating the CAC and providing general administrative, fiscal, and program oversight of the CAC on an ongoing basis. The Centre is responsible for the daily operations of Sophie's Place including serving as the Chair of the Sophie's Place Multidisciplinary Management Committee and Steering Committee; initiating, developing, implementing, and maintaining policies; developing and maintaining the strategic plan for the Sophie's Place; coordinating the research, planning, development, implementation and evaluation of programs and services including implementing best practices in CAC management; interfacing with other community providers and the general public and office administration.

**The Foundation**

The Foundation will establish a named charitable fund to be called the "Sophie's Place Fund" of the Child Development Foundation of British Columbia. The Foundation will develop and implement related terms for the "Sophie's Place Fund" agreeable to the founding donor and/or her delegates

The Foundation shall have exclusive authority for raising charitable funds for the CAC in association with the founding donor (Sophie Tweed-Simmons) and/or her delegates so as to provide funding for the operations of Sophie's Place including the general administrative and program oversight of the CAC to be performed by The Centre as described above.

**MOJ**

The Ministry of Justice, Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division fund victim service programs that provide support to victims including court information/orientation; information specific to the case involving the victim and referrals to victims/witnesses; and coordinating with health, social, and justice system resources and services for victims and linking them with appropriate resources in the community. The Ministry funds a range of services including the Crime Victim Assistance Program, police-based, community-based victim service and Ministry victim court support programs.

**City of Surrey**

The City of Surrey brings leadership and expertise in community development as well as perspective on the needs of the community as a whole.

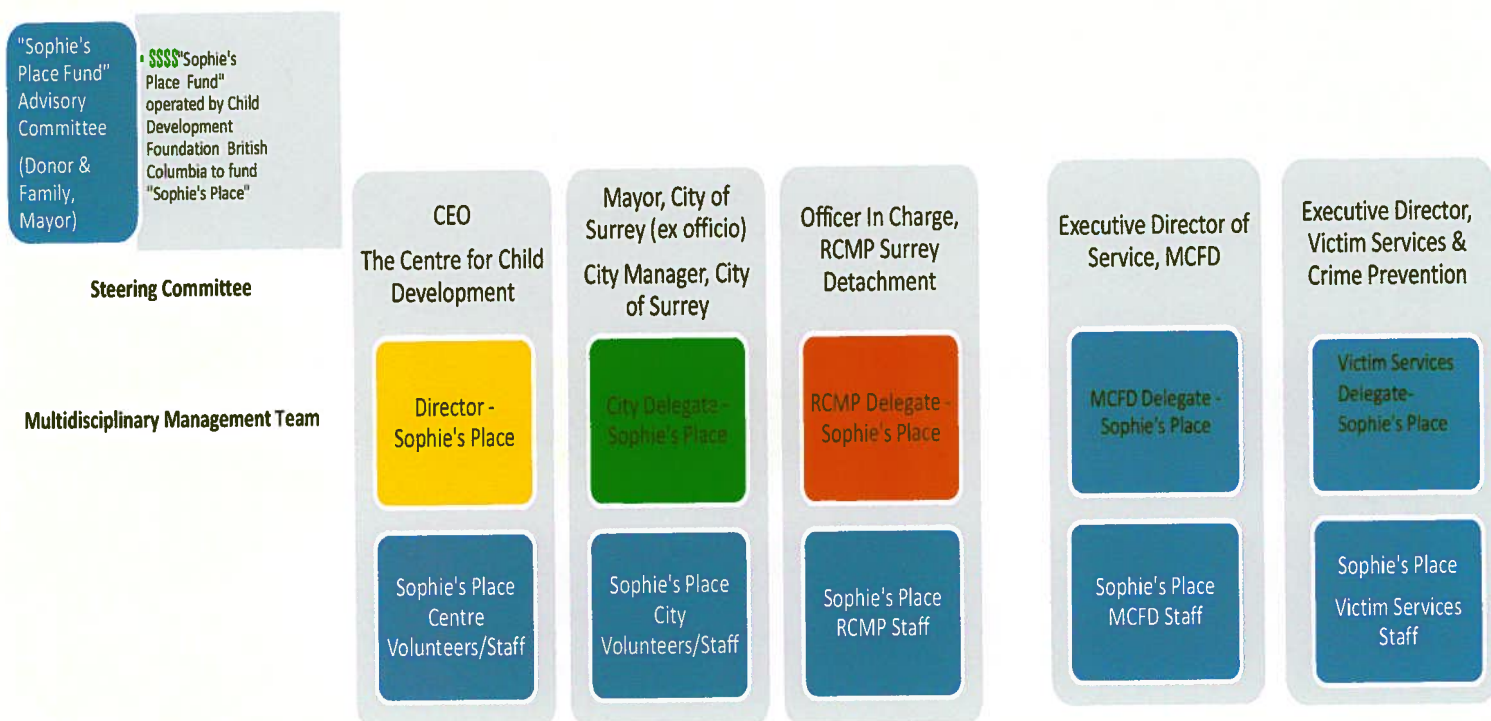
## MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Each of the Partners in Sophie's Place will fulfill their mandate while at the same time operating in a collaborative manner to ensure the best outcomes for the children that are being served.

Because each of the Partners in Sophie's Place is a separate legal entity with their own mandate (for example, child protection authority is delegated exclusively to the Ministry of Children and Family Development), Sophie's Place will have a steering committee and a multidisciplinary management team.

- The multidisciplinary management team will consist of staff representatives from each Partner who are responsible for the ongoing supervision of services provided through Sophie's Place.
- The steering committee will consist of decision makers from each Partner who will provide overall guidance and direction for Sophie's Place.

The relationship between the parties is illustrated in the following chart:



## STATEMENT OF MUTUAL AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

Through their services, the Partners will seek to:

- Provide services using a child-centred approach;
- Minimize institutionally-induced trauma to children who have been the victims of abuse;
- Minimize unnecessary duplication of interviews for children and youth who are victims of abuse;

- Work together in a collaborative manner to enable timely investigations and effective criminal justice system responses;
- Work together to ensure that victims of abuse and their non-offending family members receive appropriate support
- Inform and educate the community on the prevention, recognition and reporting of child abuse;
- Increase the community's awareness and knowledge of Sophie's Place and how to obtain help if a child or youth has been impacted by abuse.

The Partners intend to work collaboratively to implement Sophie's Place Child Advocacy Centre (CAC). Each partner to this LOU commits to:

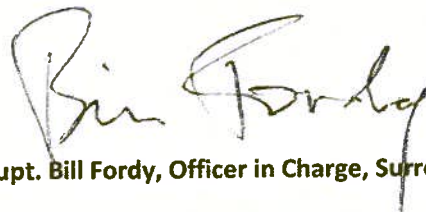
- Appoint a representative to a Steering Committee for the purpose of providing strategic and long-term planning for the CAC;
- Appoint a representative to a Multi-Disciplinary Management Team for the CAC for the purposes of designing, implementing and operating the CAC;
- Develop a detailed operational framework to implement and manage Sophie's Place including information sharing policies, procedures, protocols, staffing and funding plans; and
- Undertake their mutual and respective activities subject to the availability of resources and/or funding.

We, the undersigned, on this 30 day of AUGUST 2012 hereby agree to the above letter of understanding, setting out the parties' mutual aims and activities in working together to implement a Child Advocacy Centre in Surrey, BC, Canada to be known as "Sophie's Place":

On Behalf of the City of Surrey:

**Dianne Watts, Mayor**

On Behalf of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police:



**Supt. Bill Fordy, Officer in Charge, Surrey Detachment**

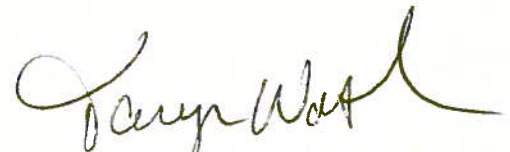
On Behalf of the Ministry of Children and Family Development:



**Amarjit Sahota, Director of Practice**

**South Fraser Service Delivery Area, Coast Fraser Region**

On Behalf of Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, Ministry of Justice



**Taryn Walsh, Executive Director**

On Behalf of The Centre for Child Development of the Lower Mainland and Child Development  
Foundation of British Columbia:



**Gerard Bremadt, Chief Executive Officer**