

\$30m centre eyed for native youth

FUNDRAISING: Facility to house gym, theatre, library, meeting place

BY JOHN BERMINGHAM
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A fundraising campaign has been launched to raise \$30 million for North America's first Native Youth Centre.

The City of Vancouver will donate a site for the centre across the road from the Aboriginal Friendship Centre on East Hastings Street.

"It's a much-needed project within our city," said Mayor Larry Campbell.

"They need a place to talk. They need a place to have peers understand and listen to their problems. It reinforces their identity, that they belong, that this is their land."

Melanie Mark, 29, a Nisga'a and spokeswoman for the Urban Native Youth Association, said the centre will empower youth, instead of reacting to their problems.

"The native ambience is going to be present," said Mark. "Aboriginal staff, aboriginal role models. That's

what we need in the community."

The facility will have a gymnasium, theatre, native library, research centre, computer labs and a place to interact with elders.

Fundraisers have already got commitments for \$4.6 million.

About 60 per cent of aboriginals are under 24, the fastest-growing urban demographic in Canada.

There are about 5,500 native youth in Vancouver, about four per cent of the city's youth. They account for 40 per cent of street youth, 60 per cent of sex-trade workers and 55 per cent of youth at risk.

Said Constance Hunter, 16, a Tsim'shian and Cree: "I would want to learn more about my culture, singing and dancing, that type of stuff."

To donate, visit www.nativeyouthcentre.ca.

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