

# Encouraging Youth Participation through Community Leadership

In May 1998, several Victoria law enforcement personnel and members of the Victoria Shamrocks Lacrosse Club founded the Rock Solid Foundation (RSF) as a nonprofit Society. The term “Rock Solid” is representative of the demeanour young Canadians need to demonstrate when they are faced with issues of a violent or criminal nature.

Corporal Tom Woods is the Executive Director of the Rock Solid Foundation. He has recently completed a master’s thesis that focuses on raising funds to sustain the Foundation’s base programs. An escalation in the amount of youth violence and crime precipitated the launch of an interactive presentation designed to take reality into school gymnasiums.

The “Closed Loop Crime Prevention” concept is a model for diversifying a nonprofit foundation by adding a social entrepreneurial arm that

will support the core competencies of the organization, while providing skills, training, and leadership for the young people that RSF was created to help.

Two programs have been developed using this concept:

1. the Public Utility Box venture (PUB), and
2. the Trackside Art Gallery (TAG).

While these programs are themselves aimed at crime reduction, they also give young people an opportunity to learn a variety of marketable skills, and will ultimately provide funding for education programs that in turn reduce crime. Tom describes this as “doing well, by doing good.”

### **PUB**

The Public Utility Box program addresses the vandalism of “street furniture”—mailboxes, hydrometer boxes, Telus S.A.C. boxes, cable boxes, and intersection control outlets—which are

often defaced with unsightly graffiti. Rock Solid’s innovative approach is drastically reducing this problem. Ten trial boxes—covered with attractive, colourful Teflon-coated decals—have been “adopted” by volunteers, mostly seniors, in the area; any graffiti can be easily wiped off.



Left to right: *Adam Letourneau, Tom Woods, Erin Dance, Mark Lawson, Jane Duncan*

## TAG

The second program, the Trackside Art Gallery, involves the transformation of a section along the E&N rail corridor—the site of a serious crime problem. Until two years ago, when the RSF initially began to work in the area, the corridor was totally neglected, and a magnet for violence and crime. There are many stakeholders in this area, which is comprised of a 20-metre-wide corridor approximately one-kilometre long.

Utilizing the rampant graffiti along the corridor—a problem that reactive enforcement has simply not been able to curtail—the Foundation plans to transform this area into the world's largest youth outdoor-art gallery, called the Trackside Art Gallery (TAG).

Victoria's first legitimate graffiti gallery will be on the lower 10 feet of the warehouses that line the tracks, while the upper 20 to 30 feet of the warehouses will be covered with enlarged, top-lit, art

panels featuring the work of aspiring young Canadian artists.

The combination of the two media—aerosol art and traditional art—will form the TAG, a unique urban gallery crime-prevention initiative. Revenue will be generated through sponsorships of the artwork and purchases of the original pieces, with proceeds divided between the RSF's educational programs, the young artist, and the cost of producing and erecting the art panel.

Rock Solid has had help from the corporate community, gaining sponsorships and endorsement for both programs. Some of the organizations involved include The Victoria Foundation, Shaw Cable, Zonta International, Telus, Canada Post, The Investors Group, Scotia Bank, Odlum Brown, Coast Capital Savings Credit Union, Lefevre and Company Property Agents, Van de Kerk Hove Family Foundation, Vic West Residents Association, and Thrifty Foods. ▲

A police officer/firefighter since 1987 with the Esquimalt Police Department, **Corporal Tom Woods** has an MBA from Royal Roads University, with a specialty in Human Resources.

Since 2000—when he was seconded as the Executive Director of the Rock Solid Foundation—he has spoken to over 350,000 young people in British Columbia about violence prevention.

Tom is currently on the Board of Directors of the Kids Help Phone, BC Youth Police Network, Rock Solid Foundation, Kidsport, and the James Bay Athletic Association.

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