Anonymous donor gives $1M to charities

By Sean Myers, Calgary Herald, December 22, 2010

Staring at a bill for more than $100,000 in renovations, the executive director of Potential Place Society worried his charity might have to go into debt to pay for the work.

Potential Place, an agency that helps Calgarians with mental illnesses live independently, is moving in the Beltline due to an increase in its rent. While Alberta Health Services covers about 60 per cent of the nearly $1 million operating budget, the agency had been strapped for donations.

"I just got an invoice for our renovations so they could start doing the work," said Gord Young. "Well, I didn't know where the money was going to come from. I was prepared to call the bank and say, 'Look, can we use our credit line to start on these renovations?' It would mean we would've had to pay it back over the next 10 years.

"An hour later, this came in."

An anonymous donor pledged $1 million to be shared by six local charities, including Potential Place. Its cheque for $166,670 is expected by Christmas.

"Talk about prayers being answered," said Young. "It was really a godsend."

The Calgary donor used rankings published by Charity Intelligence to pick the recipients.

Potential Place received $25,000 in donations last year for its clubhouse program that gives clients operational roles in the agency to build a sense of belonging and self-esteem. The agency also houses 27 people in two apartment buildings it owns and helps develop employment skills.

Also receiving a share of the funds are the Calgary Food Bank, Fresh Start Recovery, Inn From the Cold, Momentum Community Economic Recovery and Simon House.

All six were on Charity Intelligence's annual list of 36 outstanding Canadian charities. The Toronto-based outfit analyzes the finances of nonprofit agencies and measures those with the highest social returns on donations.

"The whole raison d'etre of our work is to help Canadians give well," said Kate Bahen, managing director of Charity Intelligence. **"This is exactly what the report is there for."**