



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Honorary Degree Citation
The degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*,
conferred on Dr. Diane Sowden
Thursday, June 11, 2020

Diane Sowden is a tireless champion in the struggle against the sexual exploitation of children. Through her passionate advocacy and outreach, she personifies SFU's core value of engaging the community for the public good.

A long-time Coquitlam school trustee, Ms. Sowden is actively committed to supporting children and youth in all areas of her life. Diane and her husband, Rob are parents and caregivers to 30 biological, adopted, and foster children, including adults with disabilities. She is the founder and recently retired Executive Director of the Coquitlam-based Children of the Street society—recently renamed PLEA Community Services. For 25 years, she has helped to educate parents, teachers, caregivers, police and community agencies about how to prevent youth from being drawn into the sex trade.

It was a calling born from crisis: in the early 1990s, her own daughter—just 13 years old—had been lured into drug addiction and sold into sex work to cover a drug debt. Helpless under the law—her daughter was free to sign herself out of treatment. Sowden sought to make a difference for other families, co-founding Children of the Street in 1995.

During Ms. Sowden's tenure, the organization made a deep and lasting contribution to the public's awareness around issues of child-luring and sex trafficking, presenting more than 500 workshops in BC schools each year; advocating for child victims and their families in court; and helping to raise the age of consent from 14 to 16. Last year, the federal government announced funding of \$150,000 over two years to help teach children and teens about how to stay safe online.

Ms. Sowden's efforts have garnered a number of awards including Ministry of the Attorney General's Anthony J. Hulme Award of Distinction; the Solicitor General's Crime Prevention and Community Safety Awards; and the BC Association of Broadcasters Humanitarian Award.

In recognition of Diane Sowden's strength, vision and determination to make British Columbia a safer place for children, she is conferred the honorary degree Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.