

# StreetHealth

## A GARDEN THAT GROWS VEGETABLES, FLOWERS, CONFIDENCE AND FRIENDSHIPS!

You might be surprised to see what is growing in downtown Toronto. As unusual as rows of vegetables, herbs, and flowers are amongst the backdrop of skyscrapers, there is something even more special being cultivated at *The Garden Group*. For twenty years, *The Garden Group*, a project run in partnership between Street Health and the Fred Victor Centre, has provided an outlet for homeless people to learn new skills, work as a team and nurture their own capacity to grow. For a few hours a week, homeless and under housed people can come and contribute to something truly meaningful.



The Garden Group on a fun-filled field trip to the Canadian National Exhibition.

Situated within a larger community garden in Moss Park at Sherbourne and Shuter streets, the project promotes social interaction for those who would otherwise be isolated. Research has shown that people who are isolated for various reasons experience a number of health benefits from participation in community activities. This rare opportunity to interact with others, sharing gardening tips and stories over a small plot of soil, does more than just provide a nice way to spend an afternoon. It builds confidence, friendship, and nurtures the skills needed to thrive in society.

Members of *The Garden Group* say they feel less stress and have improved physical and mental health. They also report a decrease in substance use as a result of their participation. In addition, the project acts as a gateway to other services that are provided by Street Health and The Fred Victor Centre, such as mental health case support and housing options. Together, coordinators Fiona Husband of Street Health and Audrey Alfred-Duggan of the Fred Victor Centre bring a wealth of knowledge and experience in working with the homeless community of Toronto.

Each year *The Garden Group* focuses on one special project. These projects keep participants engaged in the group when the garden is at a low maintenance point in the season. Past projects include:

- Creating greeting cards, featuring photography of the garden
- Publishing a *Garden Book* filled with stories, anecdotes, recipes, gardening tips and artwork by clients;
- Making a video featuring the work of *The Garden Group*, with help from Ashley Heaslip, a research student doing her placement at Street Health
- This year the group is making a calendar that will be part of a research project. The participants in the research project will help to design a page for the calendar that represents how they feel about *The Garden Group*.

There is also an annual Harvest Festival to celebrate the group's accomplishments. Volunteers and friends in the community are invited to come and see the garden and share in their success. At the festival, the special project items are sold to raise funds for *The Garden Group*.

*The Garden Group* graduates participants on an individual basis. When a person has built the necessary skills and confidence, they can then sign up for their very own plot within the larger garden. In this way participants remain connected to the group and continue to be supported.

Over the years, *The Garden Group* has forged relationships with other gardening groups across the city. Participants go on regular field trips to visit other gardens for inspiration and to feel as though they are a part of something significant and wide-spread in our city. A network of gardeners across Toronto!

Recently the coordinators of *The Garden Group* were invited to give a presentation at the Making Gains in Mental Health and Addictions Conference 2009, taking place November 2-4 in Toronto. The presentation will focus on the importance of community programming and inclusion. Congratulations!

Who would have thought a few seeds and some dirt could do so much.

If you would like more information on *The Garden Group*, please contact Fiona Husband at [Fiona@streethealth.ca](mailto:Fiona@streethealth.ca).



Garden Group member and graduate Hamid Pajman shows off his impressive plot of flowers.

## **A PICTURE OF HOMELESSNESS IN TORONTO - BUILDING ON OUR RESEARCH**

*The Street Health Report 2007* was completed in September 2007 and provides a comprehensive overview of a wide range of health and social issues affecting homeless people, as well as a practical set of solutions for key policies and services affecting homeless people. The report has received much attention across Canada and is currently the only report of its kind that provides a detailed picture of the difficult daily realities of homeless people in Toronto, and the health consequence of this reality. Over this past year, Street Health has continued to build on this knowledge through more in-depth analysis of the Street Health Report data and the creation of a series of focused research bulletins on important topics and groups of people in the homeless community.

*The Homelessness & Hepatitis C Research Bulletin #1* was released in May 2008 at the 19th International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm held in Barcelona, Spain. Since then, nearly 1,000 copies have been disseminated to community health centres in Toronto and across Ontario, to policy makers working specifically in the area of Hepatitis C, and at academic conferences in San Diego, CA and Vancouver. The report found that nearly one quarter of homeless people in Toronto have Hepatitis C and face major barriers to health care.

*The Women & Homelessness Research Bulletin #2* was strategically launched in June 2008, at a time when the provincial government was holding consultations for its poverty reduction strategy. For the creation of this bulletin we partnered with Sistering, a community-based agency serving homeless women in Toronto. A community forum where low-income and homeless women talked about their experiences of poverty was held in connection with the release of the bulletin. Homeless women are 10 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than homeless men, have more serious health problems, and are twice as likely to have received a mental health diagnosis.

*The Homelessness & Crack Use Research Bulletin #3* was completed in the fall of 2008. In partnership with the Safer Crack Use Coalition of Toronto, the Toronto Harm Reduction Taskforce, and the Toronto Drug Strategy, a community forum at Toronto City Hall was held to publicly present the study findings and recommendations from this bulletin. Nearly half of homeless adults in Toronto reported regular crack use and face major barriers to health care and other services.

*The Homelessness, Mental Health & Substance Use Research Bulletin #4* was launched in May 2009, in partnership with the Centre for Research on Inner City Health at St. Michael's Hospital. Homeless people with concurrent disorders (defined as having both mental health and substance use issues) are more vulnerable than other homeless people and face even greater barriers to health care and community services. Over 85% had at least one serious chronic health condition and 40% had considered suicide in the last year.

The release of these research reports has been accompanied by numerous presentations, consultations, briefings and meetings. The research team at Street Health hopes to build on these findings further in 2009-2010. Our new research coordinator, Stephanie Gee brings a wealth on knowledge and expertise to the role. We are thrilled to have her join the team. Welcome Stephanie!

All of these reports can be downloaded from our website at [www.streethealth.ca](http://www.streethealth.ca). If you would like a paper copy of any of these reports, please contact our office at [info@streethealth.ca](mailto:info@streethealth.ca) or call 416 921 8668 x229.

Without access to basic needs such as shelter, adequate income, safe places to work, and the necessary support network - women are being left exposed to violence at an alarming rate. In the neighborhood surrounding Street Health, violence against women is a regular occurrence. This can not continue. Women in our community along with Street Health are organizing to publicly demand an end to violence against women in our community. We demand that all women get the necessities for a chance at a safe life.

## Downtown East End Reclaim the Streets 2009

### Rally and March

### To Stop Violence Against Women

Friday October 23, 2009

5:30pm - food/music

6pm - rally 6:30pm - march - meal to follow

Regent Park Community Health Centre

Please contact [Danielle@streethealth.ca](mailto:Danielle@streethealth.ca) if you would like to support this worthy cause.



## STREET HEALTH CLIENTS GET A NEW RIDE!

Once again our wonderful friends at the Merchandise Building on Dalhousie Street extended their kindness to our low income clients here at Street Health. In late August the residents of the building donated 15 gently used bicycles. For a person living below the poverty line, a bicycle is essential. It reduces the necessity of spending on public transit and provides a freedom of movement that they may not otherwise have. Many people living on a fixed income are rarely able to leave the neighbourhood they live in. With a bike, several of our clients are now able to travel throughout the city accessing services and job opportunities. Each person who received one of these bikes would like to express their gratitude for such a generous and meaningful donation. Thank you so much!



Long time Street Health client Kevin showing off his new wheels donated by the residents of the Merchandise Building.

## ANOTHER AMAZING YEAR AT THE BALL PARK

On September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009 the Street Health baseball team attended a rousing Blue Jays Game at the Rogers Centre. It was a great day at the park! In a nail-bitter against the Seattle Mariners the Jays won the game in the 10th inning 4-5. Go Jays!

The Street Health baseball team are members of the Downtown East End Softball League (DEESL), coordinated by The City of Toronto Parks and Recreation Department. Since the league is specifically for homeless individuals, a variety of physical and mental disabilities are anticipated. Physical fitness is not a requirement and accommodations are made so that everyone has an opportunity to get involved. The league provides a positive element in the lives of street people that they would otherwise not have. Weekly games give people the opportunity to engage in team building activities and develop important social skills. Games teach people structure and rules, which can be transferred into their personal lives.

This year our team finished strong, making it to the playoffs before being eliminated in the first round. A tremendous effort was made by all! The team is always in need of gently used equipment. If you would like to make a contribution please contact Linda at [linda@streethealth.ca](mailto:linda@streethealth.ca)

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

~ SEND A DONATION TO STREET HEALTH ~

Your donation will help us expand our programs to better serve our clients.

~ ORGANIZE A FUNDRAISER ~

Street Health would love to help you plan a fundraising event through your club, church or office. Please call for more details.

~ ADVOCATE FOR THE HOMELESS ~

Express your concerns to your municipal, provincial and federal politicians...  
WRITING A LETTER CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

~ GIVE STREET HEALTH A VOICE ~

Our staff would be happy to speak to your organization, staff, club or church about our programs and the needs of our clients.

~ DONATE SLEEPING BAGS AND WINTER WARMTH ITEMS ~

Please give your used sleeping bags, winter coats, warm clothing, new socks and footwear to Street Health for our Sleeping Bag Distribution and Winter Warmth Program.

This symbol was used by American hoboes in the early part of the twentieth century. It indicated that "if you are sick, they will care for you here"

## MISSION STATEMENT

Street Health works to improve the health and well being of homeless and underhoused individuals in southeast Toronto by addressing the social determinants of health through programs, services, education and advocacy.

## STREET HEALTH

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Charitable Registration  
# 11920-0541-RR0001

STREET HEALTH'S current board members include:

Eleanor Lester, Chair  
Tracy Campbell, Vice Chair  
Adam Borovilos, Treasurer  
Mel Starkman, Community Liaison  
Dennis Chow  
Karen Cormack  
Jill Evans  
Sharolee Gabrielle  
Scott Goodman  
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