

Street Health

MAY I SEE A PIECE OF I.D.?

- by Terry Peters

For most people, when asked this question, you can easily produce identification. Your driver's license, passport or Health Card are kept handy and are often essential to accessing services - like seeing a doctor, banking or voting in an election.

For the homeless community, however, one of the biggest challenges can be getting and then keeping identification documents. I.D. theft is common on the street and in the shelter system, mental health or addiction issues sometimes cloud memory, being estranged from family or growing up in child-protection services can leave some people with only vague details of their personal history. Without I.D. homeless people cannot access healthcare, income support, shelter or food banks. Nor can they apply for jobs, housing, other pieces of I.D., or open a bank account. [Helping clients to replace \(and safely store\) their ID is one of the essential services we provide here at Street Health.](#)

Our I.D. Replacement team holds nine ID Clinics each month. Replacing a birth certificate, proof of legal status, or Ontario Health Card can give clients hope, a sense of inclusion and grant them access to other vital services. The team applies experience, agency collaboration, compassion and hard-nosed detective work to track down documents for clients who sometimes



Client Jason McPherson meets with Krystopher Giovannelli to set up a bank account.

arrive with no I.D. at all. Documents are mailed to Street Health and distributed by our in-house mail service, one of the services in our ID Safe program.

The I.D. Safe provides secure storage of important documents for our clients. All documents are kept locked up and confidential, no client information is shared with other agencies without written consent, and we can issue a customized ID Safe photo card so clients need not carry original documents. Whenever they need to see a doctor, apply for services, or go to the bank, clients can sign out their documents and then return them for storage. Our Mail Service allows homeless clients to receive mail at our address, including personal mail, important identification, and government cheques.

Last year the federal government announced that it would stop mailing cheques as of April 2016, switching exclusively to issuing payments via direct-deposit. Anyone looking forward to a tax refund, GST rebate, Old Age Security or Canada Pension payment, Family Tax Benefit or any other federal payments needs to have a bank account to receive them. This change might reduce government spending, and be convenient for the average Canadian, but the negative impact it could have on more vulnerable communities was quickly responded to by Street Health.

Anticipating that people who have limited I.D., who rely on income supports, who require assistance in opening a bank account or even understanding the process, our staff responded with an innovative solution. Jessica from the Mental Health Team and Myra from the ID Team contacted the folks from a local TD Canada Trust branch and built a collaborative initiative to host a



ID Safe Worker, Narinder ensures clients like Ken have a safe location to send and receive their mail.

monthly Bank Account Clinic. On the third Friday of each month, representatives from the bank assist clients with opening an account and with filing the direct-deposit enrolment forms. Clients bring at least one piece of ID, which Street Health helps them apply for, and the bank staff do the rest! Barriers to opening an account are overcome, government payments will arrive more quickly and more securely, and clients no longer have to cash cheques at high-fee cheque cashing service.

Krystopher Giovannelli, from TD Canada Trust has helped our clients before and said, "TD Canada Trust -and the Queen & Parliament branch in particular- has a commitment to building relationships that strengthen the community. We work with Street Health, helping clients set up personal bank accounts, so their support program income will not be impacted by the government's change to direct-deposit. This will also help individuals embark on the path to financial literacy and independence."

At Street Health, we strive to anticipate and respond to the needs of our clients with innovative, collaborative programming. From Nursing foot-care clinics, to warm winter clothing, to community special events, monthly ID Clinics, and now Bank Account Clinics ... we work to improve the health and well-being of the people whom we serve.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



2016 marks Street Health's 30th Anniversary. Street Health was one of the first agencies to identify that the health needs of Toronto's homeless community were being ignored and brought public attention to the gap in health services. From the passion and vision of four volunteer nurses in 1986, the organization has grown, while remaining true to our core values. We respond to the needs of the community, focus on the health and well-being of clients, share our knowledge, and address systemic issues such as homelessness and poverty. We are committed to this work and ensuring our services are nonjudgmental, caring, friendly, approachable and respectful.

Do you have stories, memories and photos from Street Health's first 30 years? Please share your memories with us at info@streethealth.ca to help us recognize the past, and pave the way for the next 30 years!

"SAVE ONE LIFE, YOU'RE A HERO. SAVE 100 LIVES, YOU'RE A NURSE."

- Anonymous

Just one year ago, Street Health's Board of Directors committed to pilot-testing a Nurse Practitioner (NP) position. NP's have an advanced nursing degree, with extra training and experience which enables them to conduct health screening, order tests, diagnose and prescribe medication. [For the underserved and often stigmatized clients of Street Health, this increased level of care enables acute and chronically ill individuals to receive a more holistic approach to their healthcare needs.](#)

Street Health clients often face complex and daunting barriers to healthcare;

- many don't have a family physician, or the relationship they have with a doctor lacks honesty and trust,
- many have been unable to comply with past healthcare recommendations

Street Health is closer to becoming wheelchair accessible. In February, Toronto's Committee of Adjustment approved our application for a minor variance change. The next step is to obtain building permits and then construction on the Coach House will begin! We want to thank Lawyer David Bronskill, whose excellent pro bono representation supported our application. We also want to thank our funding partners the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Echo Foundation and the Toronto Central LHIN. We remain optimistic that this project will be completed in 2016 so watch for more updates coming soon!

We are now one year into our three year Strategic Plan (2015-2018). Board and Staff recently met to review our progress and ensure we are keeping on track.

The directions and priorities of this plan are to:

- Strengthen Street Health's unique program and services
- Engage effectively in advocacy
- Facilitate meaningful community representation

which puts an additional strain on their relationship with primary providers,

- compounded mental and physical health issues mean they may lack the ability to articulate their challenges and needs,
- some may receive care for their most urgent issue without underlying problems receiving treatment
- time, distance and poverty also impede their ability to find and maintain adequate healthcare

"Our commitment to providing equitable access, in a nonjudgmental environment, means that we support clients with health issues that generally go untreated," says Nurse Practitioner Jessica Hales. "Street Health has developed a care model which is based on using the right provider at the right time to meet a client's needs. This means I'm seeing many clients with complex issues, and helping them progress in their health management and recovery."

One example is Joe* who is 55 years-old and spent several years on the street before securing a space in a local rooming house. Joe had a physician who diagnosed his diabetes, but had not seen him

Working toward these priorities in 2015/16 we have:

- Evaluated the Harm Reduction Peer Program - watch for details on this work in the Fall newsletter,
- Developed a 3 year Advocacy work plan and strategy
- Developed 30th anniversary activities for 2016

We will continue to:

- Broaden Street Health's accessibility, scope and reach to be responsive to client needs
- Identify and pursue new partnership opportunities
- Enhance our staff capacity to provide integrated and culturally relevant services
- Build our agency membership and engagement
- Update Street Health's Vision, Mission and Values

This Strategic Plan is a living and breathing reality for our Board and Staff. It will continue to shape the organization in the weeks and months ahead.

for more than two years. This lack of care had pushed Joe's blood sugar to extreme levels which could have led to serious complications. *"We helped Joe stabilize his condition with the correct medicine which he picks up from us each week. I've also been able to liaise with his physician, helping to articulate his challenges and needs,"* states Jessica. *"His doctor knows we are here helping and they have reconnected. Joe has gained more stability and is now at a point that he is starting to think about his eating, exercise and substance use concerns."* [Nurses are often the key in building a client's trust and starting to work together on issues.](#)

"We have seen the whole nursing team become more empowered through the addition of the NP," observes Joyce Rankin, Clinical Manager. *"As we move into year two, we are going to continue working toward the best practice of health providers and support workers working as a team to help homeless and under housed individuals take steps toward better health and well-being."*

* Client's name has been changed to maintain his privacy.

STREET HEALTH SUPPORTERS AROUND THE BLOCK AND AROUND THE WORLD!

Every season brings challenging conditions for people who live on the street or are under housed in situations that lack security and a sense of community. During this winter's cold, dark months, many Street Health supporters stepped up to help those facing the complex issues that lead to homelessness.

Every week, donors who "want to provide a bit of help" arrived at Street Health with personal care items (toothpaste, toothbrushes, body lotion, soap, lip balm and personal hygiene products). They ensured that Street Health could provide the essentials needed by clients who survive on a limited income.

Dry socks are in high demand both at Street Health's front desk and for those who attend the Nursing foot care clinics. Donations of new socks arrived from local church groups, and from an individual who received some support from a Street Health program and wanted to help other clients. A large donation was also received from the Just Socks Foundation, which works with 26 community partners to distribute McGregor socks.

Donations of new as well as freshly-laundered, gently-used items come to Street Health from many thoughtful donors, including:

- some friends now residing in Seoul, Korea, who told us, "... as fellow Torontonians, we hope these scarves will keep someone warm on those cold Canadian days and nights."
- a local handmade textile artist;
- Gareth, who organized a coat drive and asked his 9th birthday guests to make a donation to Street Health instead of a birthday present: *"I felt really sad when I saw a man sleeping on the street. I want to do something to help and I hope other people will too!"*



Supporters from as far away as Seoul, Korea sent winter warmth items for clients. Executive Director Kapri, and Frontline workers Richard and Grace, get items ready for distribution to clients.

Support also came from community groups like Liberty Village Cares, which organized a clothing drive, and the St. Lawrence Dinner Club, which designated its annual club donation to Street Health.

Winter events provide people who are living on the streets, in shelters, and in rooming houses with a welcome opportunity to receive some care and compassion. In December, employees from our generous corporate supporter Janssen, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson, organized and served a wonderful holiday lunch which was enjoyed by 400 clients. In February, the Tzu Chi Foundation, hosted a hot lunch for 300 clients and provided each attendee with a personal care package which included a blanket, hat and gloves. The Tzu Chi Foundation also contributed a month's worth of nursing supplies to ensure that Street Health's



Tzu Chi Foundation served a hot lunch and provided care packages to 300 clients.

community clinics would be well stocked during this time of high need; the Foundation has been a regular supporter of Street Health for several years and their volunteers bring a generous and kind approach to serving the community.

At the start of the new year, Engage and Change, a charity that gives companies opportunities to assist on the alleviation of poverty, rallied their corporate partners to provide Street Health with Winter Survival kits which included much-needed sleeping bags.

Each donor helps Street Health make a statement about the importance of providing respectful and non-judgmental support. Donations are vital to the care we offer and come in many forms including:

- the donor who designated Street Health as her charity of choice to receive an honorarium for a speaking event.



Gareth celebrated his 9th Birthday by gathering warm coats and asking his birthday guests to make a donation to Street Health. Clinical Manager Joyce and Office Manager Terry received the donation drop off.

- joining Street Health as a monthly donor. *"I work downtown and see homeless people trying to live on the street every day. It is truly heart-breaking, and I felt quite powerless, personally, to do anything to help,"* states donor Cheryl Litwack. *"I realized that I really wanted to be a regular supporter of Street Health's great work, so I decided to change from being an occasional donor to a monthly donor. I know it's one of the best ways that I can ensure people have the support they need to improve their health and wellbeing."*

Street Health's contributors are a compassionate and caring group. You are our stars, who work with and beside Street Health to support homeless and under housed individuals in our community. A huge thank you to everyone who is helping Street Health make a difference! We couldn't do what we do without you!



Just Socks provided 1,000 pairs of warm socks for Street Health clients.

HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED MAKING A BEQUEST TO STREET HEALTH?

Including Street Health as a beneficiary in your will is a wonderful way to create a legacy of your support to ensure homeless and under housed individuals have access to health care and support. If you would like more information about making a planned gift please contact Cathy Callaghan, Development and Fundraising Manager, (416) 921-8668, x 229 or cathy@streethealth.ca.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

With a grant from the City of Toronto, Community Safety Initiatives, Street Health is leading the Safety First Project. Project partners include the Bad Date Coalition, Sistering, the Regent Park Community Health Centre, All Saints Church/Community Centre and Agincourt Community Services Association. The project aims to create an online database, the Bad Date List, for sex workers to search and report "bad dates".

The term "bad date" is used to describe an episode of violence enacted upon a sex worker, as well as incidents of theft, refusal of payment, threats, rudeness, time wasting, harassment, aggressive behaviour, etc. Sex workers, like all workers, are entitled to safe and dignified working conditions. The Bad Date list is a tool used in the community to enhance safety. Currently, the Bad Date Coalition distributes printed Bad Date Booklets to community organizations in Toronto. The new online database will lead to the printed booklets being more current, and make the information easily accessible online and on cell phones.

Two new staff members have joined Street Health to facilitate the Safety First Project.



The red umbrella is a symbol for sex worker rights. The International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers happens annually on December 17th. On that day, many sex workers and allies march carrying red umbrellas at events around the world.

Monica Forrester is a two-spirit trans sex worker, working and advocating for the safety of all sex workers through a harm reduction approach. Ray has been involved with sex work advocacy and harm reduction since 2011, and is a former board member of Maggie's - Toronto Sex Workers' Action Project. They are both excited to be working together on this important project.

"Community members we spoke to are excited for a new and improved bad date list that they can use on their phones or access on computers," Monica reported after completing consultations with various drop-ins on the downtown east side. "People were excited that the Safety First Project was asking for a community response on how this project could be accessible for them. They felt a sense of ownership to it," she explained. Ray agreed, "This project would not be possible without sex workers generously sharing their expertise and experience. In fact the idea for the project came from a sex worker who spoke with staff at Street Health about the idea of creating a mobile application for bad date reporting; she thought it would be very practical and effective. We continue to learn a lot through the consultations, and that is shaping the project as we go".

The Safety First Project will also provide training for service providers aimed to enhance their capacity to work effectively with sex workers. Stigmatization, judgement, and a lack of sex work competency create barriers that frequently prevent sex workers from accessing health services and other resources and support. "Sex workers can experience stigma in many places, for example when interacting with health care workers. Sex workers deserve to have non-judgmental care, and not having that can be very isolating," explains Ray. The training will aim to expand participant's understanding of stigma, the effect of Canada's harmful laws, and to explore how their own attitudes surrounding sex work can impact

the care they provide. It will also introduce sex workers and social service providers to the new bad date reporting system.

Stigma, systemic discrimination and individual bias make it difficult for sex workers to report violence and access care. We hope the Bad Date List becomes a useful safety tool, and we look forward to sharing project results with our Street Health community this coming fall.

30 YEARS OF CARING



Ric Atcheson and Jordan Berman, Street Health Board Members; Kaspara Albertsen, David Mintz Catering; Samara Starkman, Board Chair; Michael Jewell, At Your Service Party Rentals; and Kapri Rabin, Executive Director at the annual birthday celebration.

On March 17, Street Health celebrated our 30th Anniversary with clients and friends.

This event was made possible thanks to our longstanding supporter Michael Jewell, At Your Service Party Rentals, and our amazing new friends at David Mintz Catering.

The day included a delicious hot lunch and tasty dessert, enjoyed with music and friends at All Saints Church. Clients also received a cozy sweatshirt. Many thanks to all of our caring community supporters for helping us mark this important milestone!

StreetHealth

Together We Can Make It Work

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www.streethealth.ca

