

StreetHealth

STREET HEALTH NURSING: MAKING THE LINKS

Men and women visiting the All Saints' Church drop-in at Dundas and Sherbourne Streets patiently wait for their names to be called by the volunteer assistant who keeps the logbook listing those who have signed up to see one of the Street Health nurses. The next name is called, and a woman gets up and ventures into a brightly lit room off the church kitchen where one of four nurses is waiting to provide aid, support, and a connection to further health care and community resources.



Street Health nurse Laura Hanson checks a client's blood pressure at one of the nursing clinics at a drop-in.

This is a common sight on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the drop-in for homeless people located in the All Saints' Church. For twenty-two years now, Street Health nurses have been working tirelessly, going out into drop-ins like this one and elsewhere in the community to bring health-care and promote well-being to the homeless and underhoused.

Street Health has expanded since its founding and the nurses' duties have grown as well. Not only do they provide basic healthcare but also referrals to doctors, nurse practitioners, dentists and chiropractors; facilitating entry into a health care system that is often inaccessible and unwelcoming to homeless people. Street Health nurses often accompany patients to medical appointments, helping them to navigate our complex health care system and advocating on their behalf with other health care providers.

Street Health nurses also help clients to address the social determinants of health by helping them to secure housing, personal identification, and social assistance. For example, although many Street Health clients are eligible to receive Ontario Disability Support Program income, they are unable to complete the onerous application process without additional support.

Beth Pelton, who began working at Street Health as a nurse this past November, describes the nursing role here as "facilitating a series of vital linkages". Through nursing

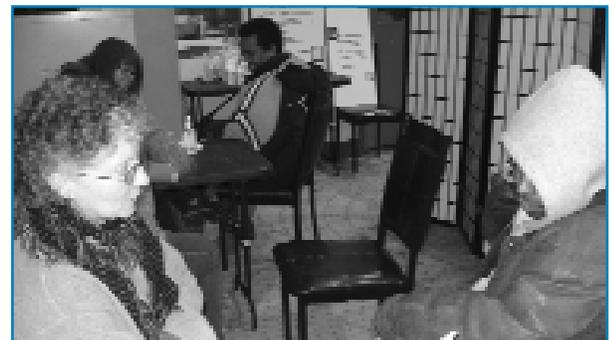
clinics and through street outreach, Street Health nurses connect and build ongoing relationships with clients and, if necessary, link them with other essential supports and services.

Andrea Hanlan, who has worked at Street Health as a nurse for just a few months, already feels that "these all-important partnerships with other community agencies allow us to pull the safety net a little tighter in supporting our clients in their everyday lives." As the newest member of the nursing team, Andrea says she has "felt the freedom and support to pursue innovative avenues for improving health outcomes for our clients."

Laura Hanson has been nursing at Street Health for almost two years. Laura enjoys the systemic advocacy work that is an integral part of her role here. As she puts it: "I recently did a presentation about the Street Health nursing program to a group of hospital nurses. These nurses felt they were not listened to when they tried to speak up about unfair and even discriminatory practices within their institutions. At Street Health, on the other hand, we are encouraged to address injustices that we might witness throughout the system. Influencing government and institutional policy to incorporate the social determinants of health, is a priority in our work. In this job it feels like we can make a difference, not just for the people in our neighbourhood, but for all homeless people across the city."

After twenty-two years, Street Health nurses continue to improve the health of homeless people in Toronto by building community partnerships, facilitating access to health care, advocating for systemic change and by working as a well organized team both out in the community and in the office. Their dedication and commitment are evident when, at the All Saints' Church, the last name is called and in the air there is a tangible sense of accomplishment and progress, even when there is still much work to be done. Everyday, in innovative ways, the Street Health nurses are bringing to life the Street Health motto, "together we can make it work."

Written by: June Rogers



Street Health nurse Beth Pelton has a chat with one of her regular clients.

Thank you to everyone who cares deeply about the issues facing homeless people. We are not able to continue our good work without you. A special thank you to our major donors!

Major Gifts - Organizations

Foundations:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| The Ben & Hilda Katz Foundation | The J.P. Bickell Foundation |
| The Caring Foundation | The McLean Foundation |
| The Charles Johnson Foundation | The Paloma Foundation |
| The EJLB Foundation | The Rainbow Foundation |
| The Green Shield Canada Foundation | The RBC Foundation |
| The Harold E. Ballard Foundation | The Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation |
| The Jackman Foundation | |

Churches:

- Fairlawn Avenue United Church
- St. Andrew-by-the-Lake Anglican Church
- The St. Andrew's Society Charitable Foundation
- Timothy Eaton Memorial Church
- Wexford Heights United Church

Corporations:

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Other Donors:

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Thank you to everyone who donates their time, products, or services to Street Health.

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- ... and many other generous individuals and companies!

STREET HEALTH'S HARM REDUCTION PROGRAM RECOGNIZES OUR CLIENT VOLUNTEERS!!!

Harm reduction services are a key part of Street Health's mission to improve the health of homeless and low income people. For many years Street Health has offered programs and services aimed at addressing the health and social harms associated with drug use.

Research has shown that crack users are at greater risk for TB, HIV, Hepatitis, and other sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, people who use crack cocaine are among the most isolated groups of drug users and often face lives of discrimination, incarceration, violence, poverty, and homelessness. In response to concerns about the health risks associated with the use of crack cocaine, Street Health was one of several community-based agencies that helped to establish the distribution of safer crack use kits in Toronto in 2001.

For the last four years, a dedicated team of volunteers have been coming to Street Health every week to assemble the kits. The kits include information pamphlets on disease prevention practices, and how to access harm reduction and treatment services, as well as supplies for safer use including a sterile needle, glass stems, alcohol swaps, and condoms.

Many of the volunteers are clients or are involved in other Street Health peer activities and training programs. Craig has been helping to assemble the kits for about 8 months now and says: "It makes me feel good to do something good for somebody else. I look forward to coming down here." Russ McKim, a harm reduction worker at Street Health thinks that putting together the kits is a form of therapy for some people, even helping them to work through their addiction and to stay connected with their community in a healthier and more positive way.



Street Health harm reduction worker Wendy Babcock and kit-making volunteers hard at work assembling all of the many components that make up a safer crack use kit.

Safer crack use kits are a valuable tool for disease prevention but are also a way for Street Health's outreach workers to develop and maintain relationships with people who would otherwise have little or no contact with health or social services. Many thanks to our dedicated group of kit-making volunteers – we couldn't do it without you!

Written by: [Kate Mason](#)

Last winter, Street Health conducted a comprehensive survey on the health, access to health care and daily life experiences of homeless people in Toronto. *The Street Health Report 2007*, which was released this past September, revealed a detailed picture of homelessness and its root causes, and set out an action plan consisting of recommendations for key policies and services affecting homeless people.

However, the release of *The Street Health Report 2007* was only the first step in our efforts to create social change and more equitable public policy. Since the release of the report, Street Health has been broadly disseminating and advocating on the report findings and key messages to a wide range of community, academic, policy and political stakeholders.

In the year to come, Street Health will continue to advocate, raise awareness, and generate dialogue based on the study findings. We are also continuing to work with the enormous wealth of information that was collected in the survey to create a series of focused research bulletins on specific key issues that have been identified by our key advisors and community partners.

Community involvement has been a central component of the Street Health survey project since its inception. As this work continues, we will continue to work with the team of peer researchers who participated in the data collection and first phases of the survey. Peer researchers will participate in regular advisory meetings to direct our strategy and participate in policy advocacy.

This next phase of our project is perhaps the most critical in terms of our efforts to achieve lasting social and policy impact. Would you like to help? Sign up for Research & Advocacy Updates! Send your name to info@streethhealth.ca and we'll keep you updated on future research and advocacy initiatives at Street Health. Please put "research and advocacy updates" in the subject header.

The Street Health Report 2007 can be downloaded from our website at www.streethhealth.ca.

Written by: Erika Khandor

HOLISTIC CARE AND TREATMENT MODEL: A HEPATITIS C SUCCESS STORY

The innovative *East Toronto Hepatitis C Project* is only about a year and a half old but it is already helping street-involved people with Hepatitis C to access vital medical treatment and support. People like Robert Keagan.

Hepatitis C is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can lead to liver disease, including cirrhosis and cancer. Nearly one quarter of homeless people reported being Hepatitis C positive in the recent *Street Health Report 2007*. Hepatitis C can be effectively treated, but the treatment is difficult and requires stability and support. It requires following a strict schedule of medication and monitoring by a physician for at least six months. The side effects can be debilitating and include severe depression, hair loss, and flu-like symptoms. Many health care providers are unwilling or unable to provide the extensive support homeless people need to successfully undergo treatment.

The East Toronto Hepatitis C Project is a collaboration between Street Health, Regent Park Community Health Centre, and South Riverdale Community Health Centre. Staff at each agency help to co-facilitate weekly Hepatitis C support groups for street-involved people while, at the same time enabling group participants to access clinical care and treatment through interdisciplinary health care provider teams at the Community Health Centres.

Robert's treatment for his Hepatitis C was part of a three-year long journey to turn his entire life around. Originally from Cape Breton, Robert moved to Toronto to escape from his concerned family who worried about his chaotic and substance abusing lifestyle. In Toronto, Robert was homeless on and off for fourteen years.

Although he was first diagnosed with Hepatitis C in 1997, Robert did not receive any treatment for another ten years. This was partly because his doctor did not communicate to him the urgency of the virus, merely referring to his condition as "dirty blood". After hearing from others on the street that Hepatitis C was a "life sentence", Robert became severely depressed. It wasn't until his health began to dramatically deteriorate that he finally decided to seek help.

Robert first heard about the Hepatitis C support group through his family doctor at Regent Park Community Health Centre. It was through the group that he learned that there was help for Hepatitis C and that it could be treated without total abstinence from substance use. At the support group, Robert also learned more about the virus, including information about transmission and dietary concerns. With the support of the group and access to non-judgmental health care services, Robert was able to complete a year-long course of treatment and has successfully cleared the virus!



Robert Keagan poses with Street Health Hepatitis C Support Worker Zoe Dodd and a model liver used to teach people about Hepatitis C.

For the past three years, Robert has lived in social housing and has remained sober. He works as a weekend housekeeper at the Good Shepherd homeless shelter, where he coordinates volunteers and also attends educational sessions offered through this employment on topics such as first aid and anti-racism. He has even obtained a diploma on Addictions Counseling from CDI College.

Robert's health has improved in many ways since becoming involved with the Hepatitis C group. He's sleeping better, eating healthier, and has put on weight. The group has also helped him to develop good work habits and his critical thinking abilities, which in turn have helped Robert to change his entire outlook on life. Robert has also made several long-term friends from the group and they still have occasional lunches and barbeque get-togethers. Robert wishes there were more of these programs in Toronto and advises that "The best cure for anything is education. Get educated yourself; don't just take someone else's words!"

Robert's future plans include finding full-time employment in addictions counseling. We congratulate Robert on his success and wish him all the best in the future!

Written by: Xiao Jin Chen

GOING TO GREAT HEIGHTS TO SUPPORT STREET HEALTH

In our last newsletter we told you about Elizabeth DalBello's plans to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania as a fundraiser in support of the Street Health nursing team. Despite a bout of altitude sickness, Elizabeth climbed 4,700 feet and raised almost \$2,000 for Street Health. In addition to her efforts on behalf of Street Health, Elizabeth also spent time visiting a nearby school, as well as an orphanage where she distributed school supplies, clothing, glasses, and soccer balls.

Many thanks for your adventurous and generous gift to Street Health, Elizabeth!

HOW DO YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A HOME?

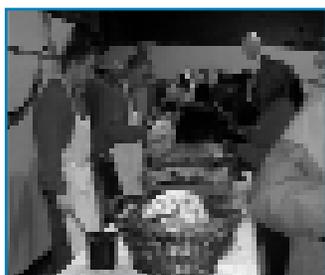


STREET HEALTH STORIES is an 8-minute film produced for by the National Film Board of Canada that asked this question as part of *The Street Health Report 2007* research project.

Through audio interviews and stunning portrait-photographs of a smaller group of survey participants this film gives a human voice to the statistics in *The Street Health Report 2007*.

STREET HEALTH STORIES can now be seen on YouTube or from the Street Health website. Look for the link on our homepage at www.streethealth.ca.

22 YEARS AND STILL MAKING A DIFFERENCE!!!



Partygoers enjoying a hot delicious meal donated by Jewell Catering on a cold day at Street Health's 22nd anniversary celebration.

On February 19th the staff and clients of Street Health marked our 22nd year of providing care and services to the homeless and under-housed community of Toronto. Each year, the Street Health team throws a party for our clients. We provide a full course meal, music, and an opportunity for people to socialize in a warm and inviting environment. Each person who attended the event received a cozy Street Health sweatshirt.

The celebration was held at the Toronto Friendship Centre, across the street from our Street Health office. In honour of our birthday, Jewell Catering Company once again donated and served up a hot delicious meal to over 200 partygoers. Thank you so much to Michael Jewell and his team for their kindness and generosity. As well, a very special thank-you to the volunteers at the Toronto Friendship Centre, who helped us make our party a huge success. Happy 22nd Street Health!

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 or club about our programs and the needs of our clients.

DONATE SLEEPING BAGS - Please give your used sleeping bags to Street Health for our Sleeping Bag Distribution 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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