

StreetHealth

STREET HEALTH NURSING PROGRAM CONTINUES TO THRIVE

Care and compassion. Since 1986 when a small group of nurses came together to begin providing health services to the poor and homeless communities of south east Toronto, this has been the cornerstone philosophy of nursing at Street Health. Today as Street Health approaches its 25th anniversary, the nurses who work here carry on the tradition of providing a high degree of care and compassion in a community that has been historically disadvantaged.

The Street Health nursing program is always in great demand. This creates a sometimes hectic schedule for the four full-time staff nurses and five rotating volunteer nurses who operate weekly clinics in drop-in centres where homeless people traditionally gather to rest, eat and socialize. Although “clinic” may conjure up an image of a typical doctor's office, this is far from the reality at Street Health. Tables and chairs are grouped informally together and although space and privacy is at a premium, there is an atmosphere of calm and of mutual trust and respect. There is no exam table and no fancy equipment, but there is a fierce commitment on the part of the nurses to assist this vulnerable group of people to become, and remain, as healthy as possible.

Throughout the week the nurses also walk the streets and parks of south east Toronto carrying their now familiar red backpacks. It is not unusual for the nurses to be greeted along their route with a wave or a “hey nurse”, by clients who have been grateful in the past for their assistance in resolving a health problem, or simply for the kindness and respect they show. Home visits by the nurses are not uncommon for those people who are having difficulty attending the weekly clinics. The nurses are very often a person's entry point into the health care system and establishing trust with someone is the first step to making this connection.

Mentoring nursing students is a key component of our nursing program. Nursing students from universities across Canada often compete to secure a placement at Street Health. The opportunity to work with our wide-ranging and stimulating client group, while learning from our skilled nurses, is a highly coveted experience. *“Street Health was a very rewarding experience. I enjoyed developing therapeutic relationships with such a diverse group of community members. They have inspired me to work with the homeless and under-housed in my future nursing career”,* says Kendra, a 4th year student nurse who recently completed her consolidation placement with Street Health. Nursing student placements are typically 3 months in length which allows the students to make real connections with our clients, while bringing new ideas and a fresh perspective to the program. Students are also encouraged to network and learn about some of the other programs at Street Health such as mental health case support and harm reduction. Students are often amazed at the level of expertise and knowledge it takes to serve this community and want to learn as much as possible from our nurses.

After graduating, students have returned to volunteer their time at Street Health. Volunteer nurses generously donate their time and energy to working with Street Health clients and are a vital part of our team. Liz Del Bello, also known as “The Cookie Lady”, is our longest serving volunteer nurse. Liz, who recently retired from nursing, has been volunteering twice a month for over 20 years, sharing her compassion and unique perspective. *“Through my work at Street Health I was able to gain a deeper understanding of what these people go through to survive. It is a constant struggle and I hope I was able to help in some small way”.*

At Street Health, nursing goes beyond applying a bandage. Each nurse is committed to helping a person in any way possible; providing both physical and emotional support. *“When I was sick, my nurse took care of me. She gave me medicine. I was afraid to go to the hospital but she went with me and stayed with me until I saw a doctor. She made me feel safe”,* says one of our long-time clients.



All Smiles!! Nurses Allana and Anne Marie pose for a quick picture at clinic with long-time Street Health client, Danny.



Student nursing is an important component of the Nursing Program at Street Health. Seen here, nursing student Kendra is taking a client's blood pressure at clinic.

SPRING 2010

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THANK YOU to everyone who cares deeply about the issues facing homeless people. We could not continue to provide our crucial services without you. A special thank you to our major donors of 2009-2010!

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... and many other generous individuals and companies!

The illnesses affecting homeless people can be vast and complex. Among the most prevalent ailments seen in clinic today relate to cardiac health issues. Many of our clients are middle-aged to senior men, a demographic that has the highest incidence of heart disease. Factors that can contribute to cardiac health issues within the homeless population include a poor diet due to a lack of available healthy food options in shelters, as well as high levels of stress. When faulty heart conditions are identified in our clinics, an appointment is made immediately with a general practitioner, very often at the local community health centre. If the condition is assessed to be of a more serious nature, the nurse will accompany the client directly to the emergency department.

Recently, a client at a clinic complained of indigestion, a common yet lesser known symptom of a heart attack. The Street Health nurse checked his heart rate, assessed his other vital signs and immediately called an ambulance. The nurse accompanied the client to the hospital where he received treatment in the emergency department and has made a full recovery. Today with the help of our nurses, this man taking his medications regularly, has quit smoking, is making an effort to eat a healthier diet, and visits Street Health for a check up on a consistent basis.

We are very proud of the rich and diverse history of the nursing program at Street Health. To be a Street Health nurse means that you are appreciated, trusted, and respected within the homeless community of Toronto. We hope to build on and continue this tradition for many years to come.

2009-2010 CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

In October 2009, a survey was conducted by Community Board Members with the assistance of our Research and Evaluation Coordinator. The survey collected client demographics, program and service utilization rates and satisfaction scores, and what clients would like to see added to our programs and services. Some highlights from the survey include:

- 94% of clients surveyed were either very satisfied or satisfied with the programs offered by Street Health.
- The programs at Street Health were described as: "accessible", "efficient", "essential", and "reliable".
- The Staff at Street Health were described as: "responsive", "helpful", "professional" and "communicative".
- 63% of clients surveyed visit the nursing clinics on a weekly basis.
- 59% of clients surveyed use Street Health Harm Reduction services on a weekly basis.

STREET HEALTH CLIENTS ARE A WELL-HEELED BUNCH!



Ron White Shoe Company donated over 2000 pairs of gently used shoes to Street Health's homeless and poor clients.



Volunteer Nicole hides behind a mountain of shoes at the Street Health Shoe Party.

This may be surprising, but one of the biggest issues facing homeless people in Toronto is wear and tear on their feet. It can be nearly impossible to keep feet clean and dry while struggling for survival on the streets. Days spent walking the streets mean shoes do not last long. Blisters and nail fungus when left untreated can lead to serious infection, open sores, and in some cases even sepsis.

Street Health offers a foot care clinic once a week that includes a podiatrist for people experiencing some of these issues. As well, many of our clients come to the nursing clinics for a medicinal foot soak on a regular basis.

On Thursday, March 11th, Street Health offered a new and unique solution to these persistent foot issues. Through a very generous partnership with **Ron White Shoes**, Street Health distributed over 2000 pairs of gently used shoes to our clients. As a recipient of the 2010 Ron White Shoe Drive, we were able to give people in the community a very important survival tool.

The event was held at the Toronto Friendship Centre where tables were piled high and sorted by size and gender. Each table had a volunteer ready to help people "shop" for the perfect pair. People were so grateful for the chance to choose a new pair of shoes; *"this is an amazing thing that you are doing for the community, we need shoes more than anything!"*

Thank you Ron White for your incredible donation!

STREET HEALTH TURNS ANOTHER YEAR OLDER

On February 11th, 2010 staff and clients marked Street Health's 24th 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 homeless and under-housed clients. A full course meal, music - even some dancing - as well as an opportunity for people to socialize in a warm and inviting environment, were present again this year. Each person who attended the event received a cozy red sweatshirt printed with the Street Health logo.

The celebration was held at the Toronto Friendship Centre, located across the street from our Street Health office. Jewell Catering Company continued their generous tradition of donating and serving a hot delicious meal to over 200 partygoers. Thanks to Michael Jewell and his amazing team for their kindness and generosity and to the volunteers at the Toronto Friendship Centre, who made our party a huge success. Happy 24th Birthday Street Health!



Beth, Street Health Registered Nurse, visits with a client while enjoying a delicious hot lunch courtesy of Jewell Catering.

ATTENTION DONORS!

Street Health is "Going Green"! As part of this campaign we would like to offer our donors the opportunity to begin receiving their Bi-Annual newsletter by email.

IT'S EASY TO SWITCH!

Just email info@streethealth.ca and let us know. Our goal is to switch 30% of our donors to an E-Newsletter by the end of the year for a savings of over \$2000. Any savings will go towards our much needed programs and services. Join the movement!

ANNOUNCEMENT

On January 31, 2010 Street Health Community Nursing Foundation settled their first collective agreement as part of CUPE Local 4308.

Congratulations!

ERNIE NORTH TURNS 80!

In December 2009 many of you may recall reading about our friend and long-time client Ernie North in our donor letter. Recently Street Health helped Ernie celebrate his 80th birthday! Happy Birthday Ernie!



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"

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.

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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