

THE WOMEN OF THE SAFER STROLL PROJECT



Dynamic Duo: Graduates of the Safer Stroll Project, April (left) and Tesha (right) share their knowledge and experience with the community.

The Safer Stroll Project, now in its 2nd year of operation is one of the most innovative and client-centred initiatives in the history of Street Health. Coordinated by Mary Kay McVicar, the project is aimed at engaging women who are involved in street-based sex work. One of the goals is to enhance access to specific violence prevention methods and resources. The project builds relationships and networks among sex workers and the social service system. This comprehensive approach addresses the exclusion and isolation sex workers experience, the discrediting and reducing of social status of sex workers, as well as the violence that targets the sex worker community.

The women involved in this project face many challenges including poverty and homelessness, barriers to social and health services, and frequent incidences of violence. Two successful graduates of the program are April and Tesha, an unlikely duo whom, since completing the program in February 2011, have been reaching out to help other sex workers in the community. They help to organize workshops at drop-ins and community centres in an effort to teach other women how they can better protect themselves. April and Tesha also conduct regular outreach on the street in the evenings and try to assist in any way possible.

“We have both come so far since joining the Stroll Project,” says April.

By the time she was 25 years old, poverty and drug use had long since been a part of April's life. She recalls being very young when her aunt introduced her to crack cocaine. She has been in and out of correctional facilities many times and homeless most of her adult life. Despite those significant challenges, April attempted several peer training programs through Street Health, but it never seemed to be the right time as her addictions always seemed to win over her will to stay engaged in the programs. After an overdose that almost killed her while living in an abandoned truck, April thought, “I have had enough”. She enrolled in the Safer Stroll Project, determined to make it work for her and immediately felt her life changing. April was always early for sessions, contributed to discussions, and volunteered whenever possible. She graduated from the project armed with knowledge and skills to share with other women who needed help. “I feel like now I am able to give back what I took from the community, I have done a lot of damage, and now I can make amends,” says April. Now, for the first time in many years April is drug free and has no charges pending against her. She has been able to pursue her creative interests through a community art program and she is even taking classes at George Brown College.



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Tesha is the very first trans-gendered graduate of the Safer Stroll Project. She is very well known in the community which helps her to connect more easily with people who are isolated. Tesha grew up in Etobicoke in an abusive, middle-class family. Tesha realized she was different at a very early age and after high school, she moved to Toronto and began living as a woman. Tesha attended the Toronto School of Business and lived in a small apartment with her boyfriend for a while. One night, she came home from a part-time job and found her boyfriend had committed suicide. Grief and confusion lead Tesha into sex work, drugs, and gang involvement. Over the next few years she underwent several gender reassignment surgeries. Tesha's experiences in the community lead her to the Safer Stroll Project "I felt like I could really share something with other women who are victims of violence". Her friends describe her as funny, enthusiastic and very supportive.

Together, April and Tesha share their knowledge and experience throughout the community. Along with regular outreach efforts, both women work on the production of the "Bad Date Book", a written record documenting violent clients and incidents as well as community resources and tips for protecting yourself. The books are updated either as needed or on a monthly basis and handed out to sex workers on the street. They are also available in drop-ins and community centres.

"Without the project and the guidance of Mary Kay, I don't know where I would be," says April. The Safer Stroll Project has inspired, encouraged and given hope to many women. Most importantly, it has taught women that being a victim of violence — no matter what your profession — is not acceptable.

STREET HEALTH KICKS OFF A YEAR-LONG CELEBRATION!

On February 16th, 2011 staff and clients celebrated Street Health's Silver Anniversary! For 25 years we have been providing care and services to the homeless and under-housed community of Toronto, and we are still going strong! Each year, the Street Health team throws a party for our homeless and under-housed clients. A full course meal including cake, music, and an opportunity for our clients to socialize in a warm and inviting environment were provided. Each person who attended the event received a cozy commemorative 25th Anniversary Street Health sweatshirt.

The celebration was held at the Toronto Friendship Centre, across the street from our offices. **Jewell Catering Company** continued their generous tradition of donating and serving a hot delicious meal to over 400 partygoers. Thank you 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. We will be hosting several events over the coming year to celebrate this milestone, watch your mailbox for details! Happy 25th Birthday Street Health!



Staff members Jane Mountain and Joyce Rankin catch up at our 25th Anniversary Kick off Party!

DONATE YOUR OLD CELL PHONE TODAY!

Do you have an old cell phone sitting in a drawer at home? Is it functional? Do you have a charger for it?

If so, please donate your old cell phone to Street Health. We will be giving the phones to clients who participate in the Safer Stroll Project. All cell phones, whether they have a plan on them or not, are capable of making emergency calls. You could be helping someone stay safe just by donating your old phone.

Please contact Mary Kay at marykay@streethealth.ca

Thank you for your help!

*We're getting a Makeover!
A new logo to kick off the next 25
years serving the community.*

25th Anniversary
Street Health
Together We Can Make It Work

HISTORY OF STREET HEALTH

I want to share with you a story of hope and a story of possibility. This is the story of Street Health. A story you have helped make possible.

It was 1986 when a diverse team of four nurses came together for the first time. Although each nurse came from a different background, they each shared a passion and vision for how they could improve the lives of homeless people in Toronto. For three years they volunteered their time and energy to running “low-tech” nursing clinics in the Toronto Friendship Centre drop-in located at the corner of Dundas and Sherbourne streets. Through some savvy political advocacy, the provincial government first awarded funding for this fledgling agency in 1989 and Street Health Community Nursing Foundation was officially born.

These early days at Street Health were challenging. A small office space, set up in the basement of the church provided less than ideal working conditions. Yet the Street Health nurses maintained their passion and fervour for their work in attempting to meet the needs of a very impoverished community.

The original Street Health Report (1992) outlined the severity of the health of homeless people in Toronto and the conditions in which they were living. The report helped Street Health to focus its efforts and it provided valuable data to support its advocacy efforts.

1995 was a watershed year for the less advantaged in Ontario. The government of Premier Mike Harris made dramatic cuts to social assistance rates and removed the restrictions on rent increases. It was a period of rising eviction rates and increased homelessness. Our determined nurses and advocates persevered and it soon became impossible for the city and the province to deny the homelessness issue any longer. Street Health received funding to move their office to a larger more functional space at 338 Dundas Street East, where we now reside.



1998 - Street Health nurse provides outreach care to people living in tent city.

It was around this time that Laura Cowan, Executive Director of Street Health, joined the team. Laura came to Street Health as a nurse and remembers with some sadness the clients she has provided services to over the years. “Some of the clients I met 15 years ago are still around, coming to nursing clinics and dropping in regularly to our office to say hello,” Laura says. “Others have moved on. They have battled their demons and won. I still hear from one or two ex-clients on a regular basis. They like to call to say hi and check in. Maybe it's a reminder to them of how far they have come and they remember that Street Health was a part of that journey”.

As the client base and services grew at Street Health, so did acknowledgement by funders that our services were necessary for the many people who were now homeless or under-housed. The Ministry of Health provided the funding to eventually purchase the property at 338 Dundas Street in 2000. Fundraising began in earnest at that time and with the help of many generous donors we continued to more easily meet the emerging needs in this vulnerable and growing community.

Through its 25 years, Street Health has undergone massive growth and change. In 1997 we added case workers to our staff in order to address the countless people struggling with mental health issues. In 1999 we introduced the first identification replacement program that we know of in Canada. *Access to Health Cards* assists homeless people with the task of applying for health cards and the other personal identification they need in order to access health and social services. The ID Safe program was added in 2003 and offered homeless people a place to store their important identification documents that were often being lost or stolen.

Although a relatively popular premise today, “harm reduction” as an approach to working with people who use illicit drugs was embraced by Street Health in its early days. It is still seen as a way to help people live healthier lives. Street Health was among the first agency in downtown Toronto to distribute clean needles to injection drug users. In 2004 the Crack Users Project was introduced. The goal of this ground-breaking program was to reduce the harms associated with the use of crack cocaine.

At Street Health we feel strongly that providing programs and services alone will not alleviate the hardships experienced by those who live on the margins. We have proudly participated in many of the milestones in the war against poverty in Ontario. In 1996, our staff participated in a public inquiry into a freezing death of three homeless men in Toronto. Some of the recommendations made to the jury were later adopted by the City of Toronto. Our involvement in Toronto Disaster Relief Coalition helped push the municipal government to declare homelessness a National Disaster in 2001. With this declaration came an immediate flow of federal funding for services across the country for those who are homeless. In July of 2001 Street Health was recognized for our ground breaking efforts by being the lead agency for the first National Harm Reduction Conference. Again in 2007, a follow-up Street Health Report was conducted and has been used across the country as an education and advocacy tool.

Although today there are numerous services in Toronto that are geared toward helping the homeless, Street Health was one of the first and remains focused on individual client values and needs. We will continue to stay true to our roots by advocating for those less fortunate by raising issues related to housing and health and by providing a compassionate place for people to turn. This is our role in the community - this is what people have come to expect from Street Health. No one could have guessed that those four nurses so long ago would start a powerful movement that is Street Health today. Happy 25th anniversary Street Health and here's to another 25!

THE 2ND ANNUAL STREET HEALTH SHOE PARTY!



On Friday, April 8th, Street Health hosted our 2nd Annual Shoe Party! Through a very generous partnership with **Ron White Shoes**, Street Health distributed over 1000 pairs of gently used shoes to our clients. As a recipient of the 2011 Ron White Shoe Drive, we were able to give people in the community a very important survival tool.

One of the biggest issues facing homeless people in Toronto is wear and tear on their feet. It can be difficult 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 and open sores.

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. Those who attended were thrilled to have a new pair of shoes for spring!

Over the past 2 years, Street Health had tried to address this persistent problem for our clients by offering specialized foot care clinics and services. As well, many of our clients come to our regularly scheduled nursing clinics for a medicinal foot soak. [Thank you Ron White for your incredible donation!](#)

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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STREET HEALTH'S current board members include:

Eleanor Lester, Chair
Michael Treuman, Vice Chair
Adam Borovilos, Treasurer
Samuel Awe
Tracy Campbell
Jill Evans
Scott Goodman
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