

COMMUNITY HARM REDUCTION TEAM PEER PROGRAM

When Street Health's Harm Reduction Coordinator Mary Kay MacVicar proposed and developed the Community Harm Reduction Team Peer Program, she envisioned a program that would:

- bring together a number of harm reduction focused organizations,
- provide meaningful training and mentoring for people with lived experience,
- measure and share results in ways that other organizations could use and implement, and
- value and use participants' experience and learning in meaningful community engagement.

To her delight some of the unexpected benefits, as the program draws toward the completion of its initial 22-weeks of training, are the strong and supportive relationships

those in the program have developed. "From the very first session, the peers have been open, honest and supportive of each other," Mary Kay remarks. "As they begin to take on and expand their leadership roles, they are showing us how team work and interpersonal networks are key components for success."

For the next two years the peers will work with their sponsoring community organization while being mentored and continuing to learn from each other as a group. Classroom graduation marks the groups' next steps toward:

- providing harm reduction education and resources throughout the city,
- using their network to continue their personal development, and
- being the voices that will inform and create a shared best practices for peer program development.

Sharing an Experience of Change

By Hollyday, Community Harm Reduction Team Participant

Hollyday's connection began through Ve'ahavta, a community group that is one of the 10 partner agencies for this initiative.

My first harm reduction volunteer shift with Ve'ahavta was possibly my most memorable evening thus far this millennium! That night we drove around the core of Toronto to locations where people who are homeless, and those who are dealing with addictions, congregate and sleep. We provided: snacks, drinks, clothing, footwear, outerwear, sleeping blankets, harm reduction and hygiene supplies. While the volunteers distribute these essentials, the outreach worker links people with services such as I.D. clinics, drop-ins, shelters, counselling, mental health and OW/ODSP info. Every resource you can think of and things you didn't know about.

Sometimes too, we simply listened to where someone is coming from and what they are going through. Everybody needs to be heard. When someone on the street trusts you enough to let you in, it is a precious gift.

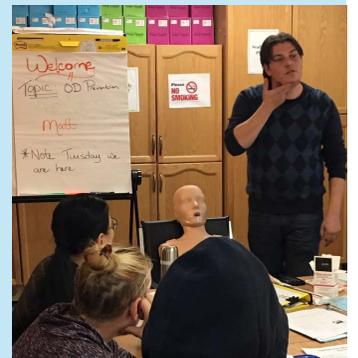
Over a short period of time, I have seen the difference this work makes in peoples' lives. From practising safer consumption, to having warm clothes and being more informed, clients are empowered and have greater control of the situation they are in. Life just looks and feels better.

A few weeks after my first outreach shift I was thrilled and honoured to be hired by Ve'ahavta as a Harm Reduction Outreach Worker and joined The Community Harm Reduction Team Peer Program at Street Health. The series of in-depth workshops have prepared me to go out there. Each guest instructor brought loads of information, insight and knowledge. Especially Monica, from Maggie's who speaks so candidly with such gentle powerful wisdom on incredibly sensitive subjects impacting sex workers. Thanks to the training I feel competent, well informed, confident, connected and responsible. I see myself in the near future working full time and self-sufficient.

One thing that surprised me most about this opportunity was the class dynamics. I enjoyed getting to know my classmates and I learned something from everyone. We've had our share of good laughs along the way too. Oh, and the food. Wow. So wonderful to come into class and always find the perfect nutritious and tasty snack. It made me feel valued and appreciated and a belly with food is a happy belly more able to learn!

I can tell you first-hand that harm reduction works. I practise harm reduction every day and in doing so I remain abstinent from my drug of choice because that drug will destroy me completely given the chance. I was enrolled and graduated at the school of hard knocks and I'm not going to let that "education" go to waste. I'm taking that lived experience and I am going to support my fellow human beings the best way I know how. In a weird turn of events, my addiction has provided me with an edge. Living and using on the streets of Toronto is a full-time job and neither the pay nor the benefits are that great. I know.

Thank you Mary Kay, Frank and everyone involved in The Community Harm Reduction Team Peer Program. It is providing me with such an amazing opportunity to grow, change and bring change.



HOW YOUR DONATION MATTERS

8,800

nursing and community mental health client contacts

700

individuals rely on safe storage for identification and mail

120

people requesting personal care/hygiene supplies and warmth items every day

11

overdoses reversed in the first months of OPS operation

1

person, like you, can make a difference!

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Street Health is honoured to be included in Charity Intelligence's (CI) 2018 Top 100 Charities. CI reviews charities across Canada to provide prospective donors with information to make informed, intelligent decisions with the greatest impact.



As the temperature drops, Street Health made an emergency request to **Just Socks**. This family charity was able to quickly deliver a two month supply of this much requested care item, providing both men's and women's sizes with extra sole padding for those who spend considerable time on their feet.

Street Health congratulates **Monica Forrester** on receiving an award from CGLCC - Canadian LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce for her work with Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project.



Nursing Students for Social Justice (NSSJ) is a Ryerson University student group spearheaded by Christina Usanov, a nursing student who completed a placement with Street Health's nursing team. Christina undertook a harm reduction outreach effort at Ryerson and coordinated a presentation of the acclaimed documentary *The Stairs*. At the beginning of November NSSJ held a two day awareness and giving day in the main Student Learning Center - creating awareness of the need for a non-judgmental and accessible approach to harm reduction and gathering much needed items for distribution to clients.

Need some inspiration for your 2019 resolutions?

"I am in the "have" category; I have a roof, and warm clothes, and ample food. When I see someone with their hand out, I can give – but does it help? I'm not always sure," states Kelly, a Street Health donor. *"Throughout the year I tally every person who crosses my path and is in need. During the holiday season I donate \$10 in their honour to organizations who are tackling the hard issues like addiction, mental health and homelessness. Last year, I gave \$940 to Street Health. That's 94 people who inspired and humbled me to lend them a hand they truly need."*



Join Street Health for **Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY)**
Saturday, February 23, 2019
5 to 8 pm

We need volunteer captains to form teams with friends and family members. Each team member secures pledges and participates in a 5 KM walk. Street Health will lead teams on a route highlighting our community partner locations and concluding with sharing a simple soup and bread meal. This event will be a great opportunity to share awareness about the issue of homelessness and help Street Health raise much needed funds. We are grateful to David Mintz Catering for their event support. For more information contact 416-921-8668, x 229.

