

## To Give is Better than to Receive – Tzu Chi Foundation

For 15 years the Tzu Chi Foundation of Toronto has been helping Street Health clients by donating warmth kits and serving a hot community lunch each winter. They also provide a month's over the counter medications to ensure these supplies are available during the peak of the cold and flu season. The supplies also include wound and foot care items which enable nurses to help clients prevent bigger health issues.

During their most recent delivery, Elizabeth Harrison, RN, met with the group and shared her thanks, "The clients we work with live in respite centers or on the street. They don't have access to nonprescription medications that are effective and essential to help those with illness and chronic pain. Your delivery today will help those who are forced to rely on the shelter system in the coming weeks."

Tzu Chi volunteers operate on the teachings of their Dharma Master Cheng Yen who advises, "Do what you are capable of doing now. Don't wait until you think you're ready, because by then all your good intentions may amount to nothing." With this in mind volunteers have been helping several organizations in Toronto. "We operate on the principle that all creatures live under the same sky and on the same soil," states Director Hui Fei Tsai. "We must do good deeds to cultivate blessings and save the whole world from disasters and disease."

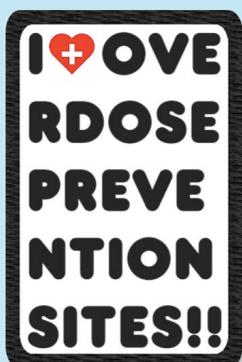
"Thanks to the long standing and compassionate commitment of the Tzu Chi Foundation of Toronto, Street Health continues to meet the needs of clients," acknowledges Kapri Rabin, Executive Director. "Tzu Chi volunteers always bring a spirit of giving, preparing everything to ensure clients feel cared for. This reliable, ongoing support helps hundreds and provides a much needed opportunity to connect in a relaxed, community focused setting."



## Overdose Prevention Site (OPS) Update

**Thanks to our wonderful donors, Street Health has the funding needed to continue operating our Overdose Prevention Site until March 31st, 2021. We have also successfully renewed our exemption with Health Canada.**

The OPS is grateful to have this stable period of funding and be able to focus on improving and expanding our range of services for clients. We are excited to begin partnering with agencies to provide targeted outreach to women in the community and even begin providing occasional specialized workshops, such as the Frontline Workers' & Drug Users' Writing Groups that we began hosting in February.



Created by Andrew Townsend

At the end of February, supervised consumption sites in Toronto saw a sudden spike in overdoses. This spike was echoed across the province, with Toronto Paramedic Services receiving their highest number of overdose calls on record. The overdose crisis shows no signs of slowing down, and we are thankful to be able to keep our doors open and provide much needed lifesaving services to our community.

**This past January a press conference was held to share the OPS Evaluation. The summary and full evaluation documents are available on Street Health's website – [www.streethealth.ca/research](http://www.streethealth.ca/research)**

*"The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned." ~ Maya Angelou*

## Housing Support at Street Health

By Marion Roberts

As a Housing Support Worker I assist Street Health clients with finding or maintaining housing. This work is possible through a partnership with St. Clare's, an organization that works with 17 community agencies to provide affordable mixed-income housing in downtown Toronto. St. Clare's is a social justice landlord acting in solidarity with people who have experienced homelessness. Their focus is to ensure people have the support needed to achieve stability by improving and expanding access to healthy, secure, safe, affordable and diverse housing communities.

To secure a home in a St. Clare's building or through market housing many clients must obtain a Homes for Good Subsidy (HFG). HFG is a housing subsidy through the City of Toronto, which can provide up to \$800 towards a rental.

Even with this allowance the current housing crisis means finding a rental is difficult:

- across Toronto there is a less than a 2% vacancy rate
- from Scarborough to Etobicoke to North York, prices for housing are comparable to living in the Downtown East or West of Toronto at \$1300 for a bachelor or \$1600 for a 1 bedroom
- in this competitive market landlords have dozens of applicants with a higher living wage, than those relying on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or Ontario Works (OW), applying for the same units
- it is not unusual for my clients to experience various forms of prejudice and assumptions about why they are on OW or ODSP. In one case a landlord looked up Street Health's services and used a judgmental word to ask if the client I was representing had any mental health issues.

Often, clients understandably struggle to maintain their housing, especially when their financial situation is compounded by competing priorities including mental and physical health needs.

John\* is a client who suffers from depression and multiple health issues. He lost his job in 2018 and his housing the following year. He has been staying at a shelter where the restricted environment and lack of privacy have added to his mental health stress. John is on a waiting list for a St. Clare's placement. He, like many of my clients that are forced to reside in a shelter, may become entrenched in shelter life for a prolonged period of time. He may struggle with accepting housing opportunities, when they rarely produce themselves, as his depression makes it hard to engage.

Despite these challenges there is strength in community. St. Clare's and other organizations are mobilizing to secure more housing in Toronto. I spend considerable time building relationships with different organizations to utilize each other's resources. I have connected with services that have their own landlord relations and housing options to support our clients. I have then referred other agencies to our services to support their clients. As a community we do our best to subvert present housing pressures, scarcity and inequities when we work through collaboration and advocacy.

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

## We did it!

**Thank you to our amazing walkers, fundraisers, sponsors, volunteers, board members and staff who made the 2020 Coldest Night of the Year a success! Together we surpassed our fundraising goal – \$24K and spent a night learning more about local services for those who are homeless.**



### Special thanks to:

**Lead Sponsor – Motion Clothing**

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**Walk Break: Starbucks**

