



Press release – for immediate release

Toronto Overdose Prevention Society gives \$20,000 donation to both Street Health and St. Stephen’s Community House to support the operation of their life-saving Overdose Prevention Sites

Toronto, April 18th, 2019: Since its inception, community donations have generously supported the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society (TOPS) and due to this continuing generosity, the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society is giving a donation of \$20,000 each to both Street Health and St. Stephen’s Community House. These monies will support them as they continue providing life-saving overdose prevention services in their communities.

“The community has been giving generously to us to support life-saving overdose prevention and response. And while it’s the responsibility of the government to fund these essential health services, we are stepping up to help since the government clearly doesn’t care that people will die if these services are closed,” said Sarah Ovens, of the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society.

With no warning, the Conservative government pulled funding from 6 Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) and Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS) on March 29th, 2019. Two of these sites were in Toronto: the OPS at Street Health and OPS at St. Stephen’s Community House. Withdrawing this funding demonstrates that the Conservative government has a complete lack of understanding regarding the severity of the overdose crisis. This was compounded by the inhumane nature of the announcement - the OPS at Street Health and St Stephen’s were told to shut their doors from one day to the next, without even being given time to let the vulnerable clients they serve know they were closing, and with no opportunity to develop plans for their safety. Luckily, Street Health OPS and St Stephen’s OPS received an exemption from the federal government, allowing them to stay open and operate legally, but they have no funding from the provincial or federal government to do so.

“St. Stephen’s Community House has received a tremendous amount of support from the community in the form of generous and urgent donations, letters of support, and even a community support rally by our neighbours in front of our site. The people of Toronto understand the importance and need for all of the life-saving Overdose Prevention and Supervised Injection Sites to be there for people in our community. We are very grateful for this incredible donation of \$20,000 from TOPS, and it will help ensure our site stays open while we seek a permanent solution,” said Bill Sinclair, Executive Director of St. Stephen’s Community House.

Despite the conservative government rhetoric, *communities do support overdose prevention sites.* Ever since TOPS announced the opening of Ontario’s first overdose prevention site in Moss Park in August of 2017, the community has generously given their time to volunteer at the OPS, and their money and resources in support of the lifesaving services being offered. The financial and in-kind donations from the community allowed TOPS to operate an unsanctioned site in Moss Park for 11 months, and then again, to open a second unsanctioned site in Parkdale in August of 2018. The community support will again allow us to support life-saving overdose prevention services at Street Health and St. Stephen’s Community House.



“The government is shirking its responsibility to provide an essential health services in the middle of a public health emergency. These services are evidence-based, and we should not be crowdfunding or fundraising for a lifesaving service ever, and particularly not in the middle of a crisis,” said Gillian Kolla of the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society.

Both Street Health and St Stephen’s Community House provide a full range of wrap-around services to their clients, and have been doing this work in their communities for decades. The OPS at both organizations educate and provide clients with information about drug alerts, provide sterile equipment, and offer support, counselling, and nursing care. They also ensure clients are referred to other community services such as treatment, housing, food, and income supports.

“Street Health’s OPS offers a stigma-free and caring environment where people can access wrap-around services including healthcare, referrals, supplies and safety. Relationships of trust are key to linking people to other services, and staff at Street Health do that every day. OPS are saving lives every day, and we are devastated that the government is not supporting this essential health service,” said Kapri Rabin, Executive Director of Street Health.

It is the responsibility of the provincial government to provide funding for healthcare services in the province, particularly for the most vulnerable members of our community. We therefore strongly reiterate our call on the provincial government to restore funding for all currently operating Overdose Prevention and Supervised Consumption Sites currently operating in the province. Since the provincial government continues to neglect its responsibility for the health and safety of its citizen, then we must call on the federal government to step in with emergency funding to allow Overdose Prevention Sites to stay open during this public health emergency.

Press availability: A press conference announcing these donations will be held on Thursday, April 18th, at 10am at Street Health – 338 Dundas St. East.

For more information, please contact:

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