WRITERS’ CONTEST: WINNING ENTRY!

This fall, the THRTF sponsored a writing contest for community members. The winner of this contest was announced at the Annual General Meeting on November 5th.

What Is Harm Reduction Anyway
by Russell Reiter

I first heard the term harm reduction when I started attending the FUN (Finally Understanding Narcotics) group in Parkdale in 1995. The FUN group was started by Carol Polych (a Nurse Practitioner) and Walter Cavalieri (a Social Worker) at the Parkdale Community Health Centre several years earlier. This weekly meeting allows injection drug users to gather in a safe place, share a meal and discuss issues of concern to themselves and their community. However this “harm reduction” meeting is somewhat different from other similar gatherings as there is no requirement that people abstain from using prior to attending.

While some meetings looked like a convention of people who like to take naps, others got quite lively. The issues we discussed ranged from matters of personal health, to heated political debates. Most important of these discussions was how this using community can re-claim power and influence in society, at least in terms of dealing with it's own issues and concerns. Each meeting I attended provided me with some tools and information that I could use in my daily life and I came to look forward to Mondays. In addition to obtaining information on how to inject safely and maintain my health as a user, I listened to people relate their experiences with using and trying to take more control of their lives.

At the time, harm reduction was not really a part of any organized strategy in use by public health and there was little information available to people on the street regarding harm reduction practices. Many of the discussions within the group centered around promoting harm reduction principals and looking for innovative ways to approach the using community with this information. Defining the term harm reduction was also important and some meetings were devoted to pinpointing what is and is not harm reduction. As is usual in any gathering of people, there were varied opinions and I'm not sure that a unilateral definition of harm reduction was ever decided on by the group.

When asked about harm reduction, I say it is time to take the dispensing of dangerous narcotic substances out of the hands of the Mafia, CIA, Columbian cartels and other criminal organizations and place it back in the hands of health care professionals. While even this group cannot unilaterally agree on what is to be done about growing problem of substance misuse, at least these people have opinions based on the health issues, instead of abstractions like morality. All too often it is high cost of policing the drug trade that is the key issue in this debate. The health concerns of the people involved take a back seat to the issues of what some elements of society deem to be morally right and wrong. Essentially what harm reduction means to me is, to make sure that substance misuse is re-defined in people’s thoughts as a public health issue and not a criminal justice one.
2002-2003 Board of Directors

The THRTF held our AGM on November 5th, 2002. The following people will serve on the Board of Directors for the coming year:
Chris Gibson, Gail Yardy, Lorie Steer, Seth Clarke, David Collins, Tammy MacKenzie & Walter Cavalieri

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE IN VENUE:
Due to overwhelming response, the speakers series has been moved to Metro Hall, Council Chambers:
Monday November 18th: Harm Reduction in the Education System; Harvey Davey
Monday December 2nd: Harm Reduction & Pregnancy; St. Joseph’s Hospital Team
Both presentations will begin at 1:30 pm.

CLEAN POINTS: TIPS ABOUT HEPATITIS C
An educational video about Hepatitis C; produced by Streetworks, Edmonton, Alberta

In June 2002, a group of present and past injection drug users from Edmonton's downtown core launched an innovative health education video about Hepatitis C for the street community - "Clean Points: Tips about Hepatitis C".

"Clean Points: Tips about Hepatitis C" is unique in that it offers attainable advice about prevention, health promotion and support for HepC+ people living on the street, from the perspective of current and former drug users - the true experts on living with Hep C. It offers realistic tips about how to stay healthy with Hep C, in language and content appropriate to members of the street community. There are no lengthy ‘do’ or ‘don’t’ lists by health care professionals touting the importance of three square meals a day and getting plenty of rest - just good, effective and practical information.

The community members responsible for the "Clean Points" (we call them 'Natural Helpers'), worked with Streetworks, Edmonton's needle exchange/ harm reduction / health promotion program, and award-winning local filmmaker Theresa Wynnyk for more than nine months to develop this valuable harm reduction tool, with funding provided by Health Canada.

If you are interested in adding "Clean Points: Tips about Hepatitis C" to your organization's arsenal of harm reduction / health promotion material and want your clients to get Hep C information that is relevant and appropriate, contact us at Streetworks. If you are a front-line, not for profit service provider in Canada, the US, or anywhere else in the world, you can purchase this video for $20.00 Canadian, plus shipping & handling. Large organizations (health agencies, universities, government departments, etc.) can purchase the video for $100.00 Canadian, plus shipping & handling, to help us provide this video for others below cost.

STREETWORKS: 10116-105 Ave., Edmonton, Alberta, T5H 0K2
phone: (780) 424-4106, ext. 210 email: mtaylor@boylestco-op.org

OUT FROM THE SHADOWS

Ottawa opens door to safe injection sites

Proposals from cities expected by end of year, says Health Canada

Arpon Basu
CANADIAN PRESS

MONTREAL — Health Canada is reviewing the criteria for safe injection sites for drug addicts and will be ready to accept proposals from interested cities by the end of this year.

The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act has already been reviewed to ensure there is no legal impediment to creating centres where intravenous drug users could safely inject their drugs.

The ministry is now shaping the guidelines under which cities could make proposals to open a safe injection centre, Farah Mohamed, a spokesperson for Health Minister Anne McLellan, said yesterday. "We're in the process," Mohamed said.

"The minister, by the end of this year, will be able to accept proposals (from individual cities)."

It would take 60 days for Health Canada to review each proposal, Mohamed said.

Upon approval, the city would be free to establish a safe injection centre.

A safe injection site differs from a needle-exchange centre in that it would provide intravenous drug users with trained medical professionals to monitor the injection of drugs.

A report in Montreal's Le Devoir yesterday said Health Canada would not play a role in funding the injection sites.

But Mohamed said no decision has been made. "There's been some people saying they think Health Canada should fund it, but we're not at that stage yet to even determine the amounts of money it would cost," she said.

Any decision on funding would come only when a prospective safe injection site was identified.

One person who feels Health Canada needs to play some role in paying for the sites is Ralf Jurgens, executive director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network.

"Health Canada needs to at least co-fund these safe injection facilities," he said.

The legal network completed a report in April calling for the creation of trial safe-injection sites and citing a Canadian Medical Association Journal article from August, 2001, that supports its position.

"Supervised injection rooms are a logical next step," the article stated, "one that combines the merits of realism and compassion."

There are 125,000 intravenous drug users in Canada, according to the HIV/AIDS legal network, and Jurgens said these people are at a high risk of exposure to hepatitis C, HIV and overdoses.

"Safe injection facilities help address those issues," Jurgens said.

He believes trial safe injection sites should begin in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto, adding that other cities such as Edmonton and Quebec City have shown interest.

The legal network report also quotes a 1998 study that estimated the direct and indirect costs of HIV and AIDS attributed to intravenous drug use in Canada would amount to $8.7 billion over six years if current trends continue.

The THRTF will present a networking session at the Canadian Harm Reduction Conference on Friday, November 22nd. For further information, go to www.harmreduction2002.ca
“If you have made mistakes...there is always another chance for you...you may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing we call “failure” is not the falling down, but the staying down.”

-Mary Pickford

Get ready for National Housing Strategy Day

National Housing and Homelessness Network

Get ready for the 3rd Annual National Housing Strategy Day: Friday, November 22nd 2002

It has been four years since the Big City Mayors Caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, cities and regions, and community advocates everywhere declared Homelessness a National Disaster.

Last November 2001, the federal, territorial and provincial housing ministers finally signed a housing agreement in Quebec City. Since then most of the provinces have failed to meet the commitments they made and the federal government, bogged down in negotiating bilateral deals, has not moved beyond the modest 'first step' of the agreement.

On National Housing Strategy Day we will reissue our call for a fully-funded National Housing Programme through the One Percent Solution (The One Percent Solutions calls on the federal government to commit $2 billion dollars annually for new social housing, with matching funds from the provinces combined.)

Last year, the mayors of Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, North Bay, Parry Sound, Toronto, Ottawa and Halifax issued official proclamations backing National Housing Strategy Day and 21 communities across the country participated.

Get Involved in National Housing Strategy Day!

FOR MORE INFORMATION Contact phone: 416-599-8372
Contact email: tdrc@tdrc.net
www.housingagain.web.net

The Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force is an alliance of individuals and agency representatives working together to reduce the harms associated with drug use in Toronto. We welcome and value your input and feedback, and invite you to become a member. Please feel free to contact us on any matter related to harm reduction. We can be reached at 677-222-4420 or at torontoharmreduction@lycos.com

Funding for THRTF projects is provided by the Government of Canada’s Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, administered by the City of Toronto, and through the Drug Abuse Prevention Program of the City of Toronto.