In this edition of our newsletter, we are pleased to introduce a few of our board members at Street Health, as we get a chance to learn more about their experience working on behalf of our organization.

Tina Usman Jann

1. How long have you been a Board Member:

Tina: Less than a year.

Usman: Just under a year.

Jann: I have been a board member for 3.5 years.

2. How would you describe the culture of the SH Board of Directors:

Tina: It is a kind and welcoming space that is accepting of diverse experiences and viewpoints. The board works to support the Executive Director in leading Street Health to support the many people who depend on their services and care.

Usman: The culture of the Board of Directors is collaborative, inclusive, and mission driven. The board is comprised of passionate individuals who are deeply committed to improving the health and well-being of the community Street Health serves. We value diverse perspectives, foster open communication, and work together with a shared vision to create meaningful impact.

Jann: The board are a diverse group of people who bring a wide range of experiences and believe in Street Health's values of social justice, equity, collaboration, client-focused low barrier care and harm reduction approaches. Board members are caring, friendly, supportive, and passionate about Street Health.

3. Tell us about a highlight or the most interesting thing you've learned since joining the board:

Tina: I used to be a student nurse at Street Health over 13 years ago, so as a board member I have been pleasantly surprised with how much services have evolved to meet more community members where they are at. This organization has a long-standing legacy with the Sherbourne and Dundas community and it is a good fit that we are continuing to fill some much-needed gaps.

Usman: One of the highlights since joining the board has been witnessing the profound impact of Street Health's harm reduction programs. I've learned how critical these services are in addressing the needs of the community served, particularly in providing low-barrier care and support to people who experience homelessness. Understanding that anyone's life circumstances can change, making them vulnerable to homelessness and substance use regardless of their background or status, highlights the profound significance and humanity of Street Health's work.

Jann: What surprised me most when I joined the Street Health board is how much the organization depends on donations to operate. Some of the services are funded solely from donations. I was also impressed by the generosity of donors and, thanks to our amazing staff, the success of our fundraising campaigns. A highlight for me has been hearing from staff about their work and the difference they are making in people's lives. I love being part of an organization that truly puts clients' needs first, provides accessible, low barrier services and empowers people with lived experience to be part of the organization.

4. If someone was considering becoming a Board Member what advice would you offer?

Tina: I think that finding the right fit and making sure your heart is in the work is the most important thing. Evaluate if your skills, experiences, and values align with an organization's mission and you will find yourself in good company.

Usman: If you are considering becoming a Board Member, I would advise you to come with an open mind and a willingness to learn. Be prepared to engage deeply with the issues affecting the community and to collaborate with a diverse group of individuals. Your commitment and passion will be essential in driving Street Health's mission forward. It's a rewarding experience that offers both personal growth and the opportunity to make a positive impact in the city.

Jann: It is helpful to talk with someone who is either currently on the board or was a board member in the past to find out what their experience has been like. I would also encourage people to talk with the Executive Director to understand the time commitment and expectations of board members. Also don't hesitate to put your name forward. Sometimes people think they don't have the right experience or won't be able to contribute. What the board benefits most from are people who are passionate about the work of Street Health and are committed to improving the health and well-being of people who are homeless or underhoused.

Street Health's Board of Directors is a volunteer community board. The Board is currently recruiting new members, including positions for those who have lived experience of homelessness and/or substance use.

We are seeking and encouraging applications from Indigenous and Black individuals and individuals from diverse, racialized, and marginalized communities and backgrounds who are reflective of our diverse community. We are also interested in applicants with experience or a background in fundraising or finance. There are 10 board meetings in a year, once a month with the exception of the summer months.

If you are interested in community health initiatives, governance and making a positive impact in the lives of vulnerable community members, contact **board@streethealth.ca** for more information.

StreetHealth

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Attack on overdose prevention, harm reduction and lifesaving service

- **Safe Consumption Sites (SCS)/Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS)/Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) in Ontario have reversed at least 21,000 overdoses since 2020.**
- **One person dies of an opioid overdose in Ontario every 3 hours due to the toxic drug supply.**
- **No one has ever died at a SCS/CTS/OPS.**

The August 20 Ministry of Health announcement to close ten SCS/CTS/OPS in the province, five of which are in downtown Toronto, means the elimination of safe and supervised spaces for people to use their substances. These closures will push more drug use and overdoses onto our public spaces and city streets. This will also mean more pressure on other vital services including EMS, first responders, and hospital emergency rooms.

The provincial government's focus on treatment, with a promise of 375 additional treatment spaces for the entire province, offers no plan to deal with the ongoing toxic drug crisis. Treatment is one part of a needed strategy, not a solution. The toxic drug crisis is a complex and often hidden issue. We need to build on existing, evidence-based approaches, not limit people's options, to save lives.

Street Health provides services to people who are homeless or lack secure housing. Currently, in Toronto there are 10,000+ individuals who are homeless, living in encampments and lack secure housing. Homelessness is often compounded by mental health challenges. The complexity of their situation leaves people relying on the toxic street drugs supply. This is not a simple crisis that can be eliminated with a "one size fits all" approach. Even the provincial government's own commissioned reports* indicate that maintaining SCS services and a comprehensive harm reduction approach is necessary to prevent more deaths.

Street Health's OPS offers a clean, sterile, community-centered space where individuals inject, snort or inhale their own purchased street drugs. The unregulated drug supply is constantly changing and frequently includes unknown and deadly additions. The OPS supports client drug testing, offers nursing care, provides referrals for healthcare potentially supports and provides life-saving, immediate care if a client experiences an overdose..

Just like SCS and CTS, OPS staff help clients connect with treatment services. A client seeking treatment needs this service in a timely manner, provided when the individual is ready and able to proceed. The sad reality is that clients often face long wait times which leaves them continuing to rely on toxic drugs.

Street Health's OPS is not one of the five sites slated for closure, but our site was defunded by the Ontario government in 2019 and relies on private donations to continue providing service.

Why Harm Reduction Works

Harm Reduction is a philosophy to remove the negative health, social and economic consequences of drug use. Harm Reduction provides supplies so people who use drugs are not harmed by unsafe practices (sharing supplies, unprotected sex, etc.). It provides education and empowers people.

* South Riverdale Community Health Centre Consumption and Treatment Service Review (ontario.ca)

continued on next page

Attack on overdose prevention, harm reduction and lifesaving service — continued

In addition to the site closures, the announcement stated:

- No new consumption services will be opened in the province, leaving smaller communities, which are also experiencing toxic drug overdoses, to cope without support,
- No delivery of safer opioid supply programs that offer another option to reduce or end reliance on toxic street drugs and receive healthcare support,
- No needle exchange programs which threaten a continued focus on the proven success of harm reduction efforts.

Harm reduction and treatment are two sides of the same coin

SCS/CTS/OPS support clients to access treatment services. Accessing a detox bed in Ontario frequently has long wait times. The average treatment success rate of abstinence-based treatment is less than 10%. Individuals may relapse as they struggle to complete and maintain treatment and need SCS/CTS/OPS services. Treatment is rarely a "one and done" solution. Substance use is a complex issue. Removing parts of this approach will mean more lives lost.

Please join Street Health in opposing the site closures and restrictions by:

Signing a petition to oppose these site closures.

Visit linktr.ee/SAVEOURSITES or scan here:

Having your community organization send a letter to the government, like this one sent by the United Churches of Canada: qrco.de/bfMlgi

Sharing information and advocating with your network of family and friends

Making a donation to support Street Health's OPS by calling us at 416-921-8668, x274 or x229 — or at qrco.de/bfOLvQ

Street Health will continue offering OPS service and working with our community partners, our OPS Community Advisory Committee and the harm reduction network to explore all options to ensure continuing access to these lifesaving services.

Drug Checking Service

Earlier this year, Street Health's OPS joined Toronto's Drug Checking Service (TDCS) as a collection site. This service reduces the harms associated with substance use and prevents overdose by providing a timely and detailed analysis of drug content.

Both substance samples and used harm reduction equipment can be analyzed. Beyond educating individual service users, results for all samples are combined, analyzed, and publicly disseminated to communicate drug market trends and inform care.

At Street Health, this service has been a welcome addition for our clients and other community members. The service will also be impacted by the proposed SCS closures as more than 75% of the samples contributing to the drug market monitoring efforts were collected at SCS / CTS/ OPS in Toronto that are at risk of closure. Removing the sites from the TDCS will mean less service access and impact TDCS ability to monitor and share real-time information on the composition of the unregulated drug supply.

Advocate and Friend – Peter Leslie

Peter Leslie led a rich and unconventional life, he was a dedicated board member, community advocate and leader who touched many lives. His work in harm reduction was consequential, not only for the Street Health community, but his work also extended across Toronto and Canada. He was among the first wave of harm reduction advocates, an individual with lived experience of homelessness, substance use, frontline work and being a first responder. The breadth and depth of his experience was extensive and complemented all aspects of his work.

A member of Street Health's Board of Directors since 2018, and co-founder of the Toronto Harm Reduction Alliance and the Toronto Harm Reduction Workers Union, Peter's passion as a trainer and speaker, in both staff and volunteer roles, created wide-reaching awareness of homelessness, substance use and the need for harm reduction.

As a young person, Peter and his father witnessed a serious car accident and attended to the occupants until the paramedics arrived. This made a lasting impression and inspired him to study life sciences at university. He trained through the paramedic program at Centennial College and worked in Ottawa and Toronto. Years later this background became invaluable as Peter trained many in overdose awareness, airway management and administering naloxone. He was among the first to volunteer with the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society. Volunteers worked in tents and a trailer responding to overdoses before overdose prevention sites (OPS) were operational. The Moss Park OPS successfully pressured the government to respond to the toxic drug crisis that was unfolding, and Peter was at the forefront.

"I would say Peter spent his whole career helping others," remarks Jann Houston, Street Health, Board Chair. "He had an ability to connect with anyone and everyone. He was open about his experiences whether the audience was media, politicians, frontline workers or people on the street."

Peter strived to improve services for people who are stigmatised by homelessness and/or substance use. "He knew from his own experience and felt it personally when individuals would share the barriers they experienced," remembers MaryKay MacVicar, Street Health Harm Reduction Coordinator. "Peter never ignored or dismissed anyone. He had a drive to ensure all voices are heard and his work with people who use drugs supported many organizations to evaluate and improve services. Our community has described him as a kind soul, a brother, the greatest of advocates, a teacher, a mentor and a friend -now that's an enduring legacy," as MaryKay shared.

Over the last year or so he faced significant health issues, and he still worked tirelessly attending meetings, advisory groups and helping in the development of an overdose app, right up until his death.

Peter was an avid soccer fan, having developed his love of the game with a scholarship to St. Francis Xavier University. Soccer and skiing, along with reading and sharing a beer with friends were all life-long passions. Peter's stories on numerous topics were seemingly endless!

Sharing some reflections about Peter staff noted "It's hard to believe I'll never watch another soccer game with him or receive another exclamation-point-filled text … The city is dimmer without Peter's light." We remember Peter Leslie and Street Health continues to advocate and support people who face barriers in our community. Thank you, Peter!