

ANKORS East Harm Reduction Team Lead/Peer development Coordinator: Polly Sutherland

In April 2019 we hosted our first ever Rural and Remote Harm Reduction Conference. This was a huge success (approximately 130 people attending) with service providers, ANKORS staff, community partners and most importantly, the folks who use our service, have lived or living experience with substance use. Plans to host a peer only conference this past March were of course postponed because of Covid 19.

The Cranbrook office has seen an amazing year of growth and changes. I want to put a huge shout out to Retiree Gary Dalton whom without his strength, wisdom and “never give up” attitude toward harm reduction practice within the East Kootenay would look very different today without his contribution.

As we carry forward, I’m thrilled to be on a team with amazing Peer Health navigators and drug checkers (Nikki Martin, Jaqueline Roth, Patrick Evans, Karen McConnell, Amber Schultz and our educator, Alexis Hekker whom are reaching the unreachable, with dignity and strength and who are forcing this community to take notice that stigma and discrimination will not be tolerated against the people we serve. I also want to note that every day, I learn from them, this helps me in so many ways, but mostly it teaches me how to have a service that fosters strength, resiliency and compassion. We have all sorts of programming going on; Our Love Your Health group, sees upwards of 25 people each month, many of whom are indigenous, coming to learn a health topic, break bread with one another, and foster connectivity. This is the essence of the peer program. We now have a Womens support group, have created a drop in, are setting up our own vending machine, the list goes on and on. We are in many ways, the baby sister of the Nelson office, that is growing daily, that is blossoming into a solid harm reduction center where community partners look to for direction and best practice ideas and where folks can find a team that legitimately cares for them.

I wanted to end by introducing folks to Rose Silvey whom we lost recently from Overdose. Rose was a light, a love and our friend. Rose worked tirelessly to help with our groups, to facilitate, to support the most vulnerable people. Rose constantly offered to help do volunteer work. She was a community champion that made life better for the people of Cranbrook that she helped. Her life has not gone unnoticed, it’s with a heavy, heavy heart that as we look at the May, 2020 stats on 170 deaths within this province, I ask “Are we doing enough”? “Could we do better”? I don’t want her death to just pass by, I want to make a commitment to her legacy to keep striving to end stigma and discrimination and to foster love and compassion. Rose was a part of the compassion Project in 2019, this was an opportunity to do a photo voice project. Folks were asked what it like is to be you? And how do you want to be understood? Please see her beautiful picture and powerful words and ask yourselves....what can I do to make her words help another.....she would have loved that.

Polly Sutherland