

AGM report (April 1 – March 31)

With the declaration of the COVID-19 public health emergency in March 2020, this last year has been unique and challenging for all. The following report will highlight successes and challenges experienced in my roles as Peer Health Navigator, REDUN Coordinator, and Street College Program Coordinator.

Peer Health Navigation

Upon the declaration of the COVID-19 public health emergency, we all pivoted very quickly to respond to urgent and imminent needs faced by people who use drugs. Peer health navigation shifted quickly to respond to imminent needs, including providing outreach supports to people living rough, technology and advocacy support accessing virtual appointments, and safer supply access.

As lockdown closed all services, and appointments transitioned to virtual platforms, people experiencing homelessness faced tremendous challenges relating to meeting their basic needs. The early days of lockdown felt frenzied. Many days I was working from my car, meeting with people out in community, and collaborating virtually with service providers and advocating for the needs of people who use drugs during the development of new services (including showers, the Civic campground, government road campground, access to temporary shelter, etc).

REDUN Coordination

As REDUN was coming to the end of CAI funding when lockdown occurred, we were able to reallocate a large portion of this budget to emergency needs and technology supports, enabling us to provide cell phones to dozens of folks. Access to technology and communication was a significant need, especially for folks with medical needs and those experiencing homelessness.

In the summer of 2020, we also obtained a PHSA emergency grant which enabled us to pay peers to assemble first aid kits for distribution throughout the region. BCYADWS also provided REDUN with emergency funding, which allowed us to empower peer leaders doing harm reduction outreach support during the early days of COVID.

Initially, REDUN cancelled all in-person meetings. Through the summer we began hosting small group outdoor meetings on a rotating schedule to maximize accommodation for our members. COVID restrictions remain an obstacle to consistent and accessible engagement. In January 2021, Nelson REDUN moved into its own office at 601 Front St, where this group meets weekly with limited capacity. Our Trail and Grand Forks groups continue to meet in rented community spaces.



Acknowledging the tremendous loss experienced in 2020, REDUN participated in a small action for International Overdose Awareness Day in August.

REDUN secured core funding from BCYADWS in September 2020 and was thus able to hire coordinators in Grand Forks, Trail, and Nelson and a program coordinator to oversee the groups. Mentorship for these new hires continues to be provided by myself and Alex.

REDUN Outreach acquired small grants from the Le Roi Foundation in Trail and the Osprey Foundation in Nelson to continue our community clean-up projects in these communities. These groups have been having a positive impact on community engagement in both towns.

Street College

In October 2020, I transitioned into the role of Program Coordinator for ANKORS Street College and continue to provide some navigational support and supervision to our new Peer Health Navigator, Sam.

Given the emphasis on virtual engagement due to COVID, part of my objective with Street College at this time has been to make the website more accessible to people who use drugs. This project is ongoing and will also ideally include French translation of content, in time. The Meth Booklet has been added to the website and translated into French.

In terms of in-person Street College engagement, I have been offering mini-workshops at REDUN meetings and larger workshops with support from BC Responsible and Problem Gambling, with quite variable levels of participation (ranging from 1 to 20 people). These larger workshops have covered topics including: safer supply, peer work, and resilience. Mini-workshops have prioritized topics such as Hepatitis C, STBBIs, and other infections as there was a marked decline in testing and treatment during COVID. As I am trained in HCV POC testing, I have been able to offer this alongside Street College educational sessions and am looking forward to offering this training to other staff in June 2021.

New collaborations continue to emerge. In March, REDUN and Street College presented to a course at Selkirk College on drug user advocacy work. In Trail, we were able to support a group of REDUN members to participate in a Photovoice project to raise awareness. We continue to collaborate with other agencies and allies in Trail to develop community responses to emergent issues that are respectful towards people who use drugs.

COVID restrictions have posed a significant challenge to providing in-person Street College workshops. For a period in the winter months, I offered drop-in hours at REDUN and ANKORS offices, but these were very poorly attended. Some folks who were previously quite active with REDUN have stopped participating – there are likely many reasons for this, including challenges with mask wearing, space limitations, reduced contact and communication, and increased isolation. The year ahead will require some reparative work to restore these relationships and ensure inclusively and accessibility.

In the coming year, I will work on developing new modules for Street College, finishing the website modifications, continuing to provide educational opportunities to our groups and to new locations, and hopefully developing a webinar series for the winter months. With a re-opening plan in place, I am optimistic that the year ahead will be restorative and productive.