

AGM report (April 1 – March 31)

With the announcement of the COVID-19 public health emergency in March 2020, this last year has been challenging in a multitude of ways. The following report will highlight successes and challenges experienced in my roles as the West Kootenay Harm-Reduction from my introduction to the role in November 2020 after the previous educator Joe Reiner stepped down after holding the role for many years.

Harm-Reduction/ Prevention Education

I began working at Ankors as an emergency relief staff in the overdose prevention site in July 2020, and transitioned into the Prev Ed. position in November 2020 upon Joe's exit. Some of the immediate challenges I faced as I moved into the role was the loss of in person presentations & outreach connections. As a new face on the Ankors education team community outreach it is important to get out into the West Kootenay boundary and remind folk of the reach & scope of services offered. This was difficult to achieve as most schools, businesses, community members, and other organizations were transitioning into an online format. This created many barriers in creating lines of communication that could be maintained rather than getting lost in the sea of emails.

The challenges with technology did slow down the amount of engagement at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic but it only mildly slowed the amount of engagement. With access to online zoom classes it allowed my program to deliver a wider range of tailored harm reduction programs to a multitude of organizations.

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 support to people living rough, technology and advocacy support accessing virtual appointments, and safer supply access. The ability to cut out travel time and expenses made room for virtual collaborations with other organizations spread all throughout the region in a timely manner where I could prepare and deliver presentations from my home or Nelson office.

Under my time in the harm-reduction prevention role from November 2020 to March 2021 I hosted approximately 50 workshops and served around 1200 participants. This included in person & virtual Naloxone training, Ankors services presentations, sexual health + drug safety information for highschool and college students, speaking with local radio stations such as kootenay co-op radio & CBC. Online platforms such as facebook and instagram played a very important role in distributing information and stirring up engagement with community members and business.

Although our methods for service delivery has changed dramatically it has not tarnished the successes we have seen and I look forward in developing more strategies to serve our community and maybe one day we will be able to use them when appropriate and we can come back together one day.