

ANKORS Street College
April 2021-March 2022
Amber Streukens

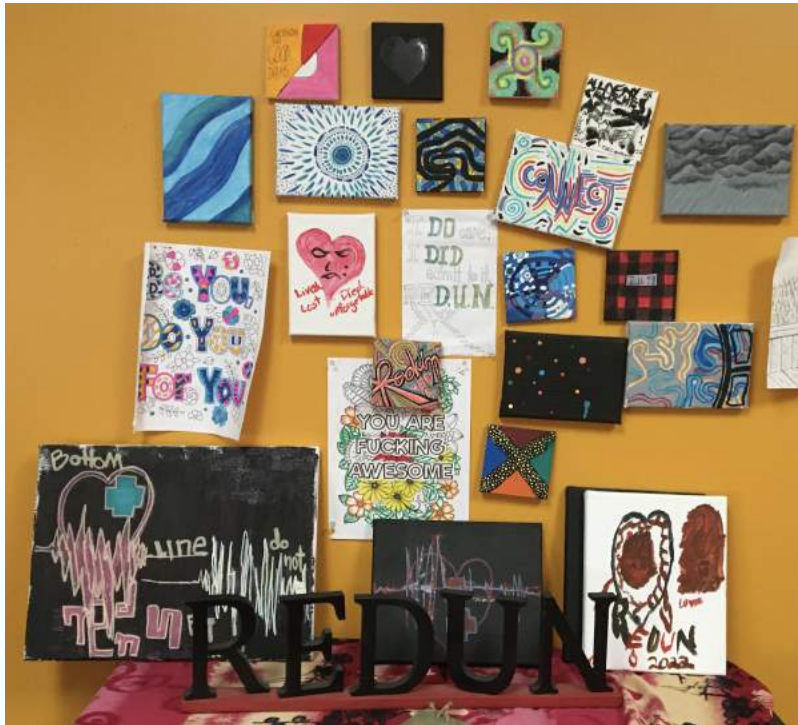
The last year has brought many educational opportunities through ANKORS Street College. From drop-in sessions and small workshops with people who use drugs hosted in a variety of community settings, to broad community engagements and webinars to reduce stigma, it's been a busy year.

We have supported participation in a variety of research engagements, including longitudinal safer supply surveys with CISUR, and BCCDC harm reduction client surveys and focus groups.

In collaboration with Amanda Erickson, I contributed to the Nelson Fentanyl Task Force: NFTF Interviews Project "Peer Equity and Healthcare Equity in the West Kootenays". Bringing voice to lived experiences of healthcare in/equity among people who use/d drugs, my contribution to this research has brought me before a number of groups interested in learning about stigma and barriers in healthcare. In some ways this work has opened doors to decision makers through presentations to city councils and provincial networks.

We have engaged in numerous webinars and workshops with community partners, including the Community Action Team network, Interior Health, and First Nations Health Authority. In collaboration with FNHA, we were able to participate in Courageous Conversations and Lateral Kindness workshops, both of which provided opportunities to engage with difficult topics in supportive ways.

In the fall I completed the BC Bereavement Helpline Traumatic Grief and Loss Support Group Facilitation training to expand my capacity to provide support as we continue to endure the ongoing toxic drug poisoning crisis. Feeling that a structured online group would not meet the needs of people who use drugs, Street College collaborated with the Kootenai Art Therapy Institute to work with 2 practicum students to offer a 9-week drop-in therapeutic art group for folks impacted by traumatic grief and loss associated with substance related harms. I am now in discussion with another student around offering a summer session. This group met weekly to create and connect, and is creating an ongoing mural wall to capture the collective work of holding our grief.



Throughout the winter months, Street College hosted weekly documentary screenings at REDUN's office. These provided opportunities to engage with material on topics around substance use, harm reduction, and recovery - as well as safe warm inviting space in harsh winter months.

Providing mentorship to REDUN's leadership has been an uplifting part of my role recently. Watching this network grow in size and force is inspiring and we are regularly receiving invitations to collaborate, which is highly encouraging. Many of our peer workers were able to participate in First Aid and Mental Health First Aid this year.

I have trained many staff to provide Hepatitis C Point of Care testing, expanding our ability to provide low barrier ways meet the needs of those we serve.

Naloxone trainings in a variety of settings with a variety of audiences have resulted in increased community capacity to respond to overdose, and has created opportunity for many important conversations around substance use and harm reduction.

As REDUN in Trail expanded and began to gain momentum, so too did other stakeholder engagement. This year I was involved in the development of the Trail CAT and continue to participate and support peer engagement at this table. There is a great need for expanded harm reduction and overdose prevention services in Trail, and as such we have been operating 2-day pop-up overdose prevention services monthly since the fall. We continue to evaluate and adapt our program delivery and are working to secure a more permanent location for this service



In the development of these services, I provided some support to Selkirk students conducting survey research to support OPS development. We have also supported other Selkirk students on other projects this year, including the creation of a short video on wound care, and a series of Naloxone trainings for businesses in Trail.

In everything we do, anti-stigma education is key. In the fall of 2021 we began offering a monthly info booth at the Castlegar farmers market. This space enables fun accessible education and fosters community engagement. It has been a pleasure to connect with new people through this opportunity, which contributes to the development of lasting working relationships and future engagements.



With support from Tyler Harper, editor at the Nelson Star, I have been supporting a monthly contribution on behalf of ANKORS. This is a low-barrier opportunity to raise awareness in the general public by bringing forward such topics as HIV/AIDS prevention, testing, and treatment; decriminalization; supportive recovery; overdose awareness; drug checking; and community engagement and peer inclusion. The feedback from these articles has been overwhelmingly positive.

On behalf of REDUN, I was invited to participate on the MMHA's Decriminalization Core Planning Table and continue to engage around this approach to decriminalization, recently approved by Health Canada. More recently, I have also joined PEEP and continue to consult with this provincial group on a weekly basis, keeping me up-to-date on emerging data, projects, policy, and practice.

I appreciate the ways in which this work branches out and roots back, and the overall culture of change and growth. It is this solidarity and unity of vision, more than anything, that sustains me in what is otherwise an undeniably challenging landscape of grief and frustration. Much gratitude to everyone here, whether on the front lines or in the background, for all that you bring to this collective effort.