

Rise Up AGM Report June23/2022

Rise Up is working with Nelson, Trail and GF Peer groups and some work with other provincial peer groups. Also much of what's being done is in regards to participation and collaboration with organizations, agencies and groups of people working together trying to bring down the endless overdose crisis, homelessness and poor physical and mental health in our street populations. Zoom workshops are common during work week, providing information and knowledge, discussion re-current issues in our communities throughout the West Kootenay Boundary region. Information sharing and planning new initiatives to tackle desperate situations in our communities is focused on at many of the zoom meeting as well as learning workshops. Despite our best efforts homelessness, despair and OD death rates keeps climbing.

Nelson, Trail REDUN and Grand Forks HOPE peer groups are being accessed by increasing numbers of street entrenched folks seeking a safe place to be and hoping for justice to be served in all that has transpired through Loss, Stigma & Discrimination, Housing systems in place, healthcare issues, and legal issues and all that has transpired for people through this.

Having said that in some cases where we have up to 20 people at REDUN meetings it can be extremely challenging to help facilitate the meetings. I've noticed that people who live in a more stigmatized community (ie Trail, Grandforks,) tend to be suffering from depression, fear, anxiety/anger and in many cases end up taking it out on each other. I've also noticed that many peers end up falling asleep as soon as they enter meeting room and sit down. I believe there is a feeling of safety that peers won't die or have their stuff stolen or be attacked at the meetings so sleeping at meetings is a common practice where we have to watch carefully in particular breathing. High doses of Benzodiazepines in the street Fentanyl has accented on this phenomenon. With the use of Methamphetamines prior to participation of peer meetings can also make workshops and discussions challenging. However people with lived and living experience are able to tell their story and participate in community CATS and events are working together to find solutions. REDUN help to influence policy and change for the betterment of PWLLE in our communities in affect better for all.

The Nelson REDUN group has tailored an updated reading at the beginning of each meeting that highlights Indigenous territorial acknowledgement, mission statement and a piece about the importance of safety for all. The format of meeting is structured to keep us on track and adherence to safety which helps provide empowerment to make positive change in oneself and community rather than the peer rivalry reflecting in bursts of anger regarding what our street populations endure on a day to day basis. This accents on how peers react in a peer meeting setting where people can speak about their injustices without prejudice and make plans to alleviate issues and to partner with agencies and organization in hopes to make daily survival acceptable and a better community at large. Grandforks and Trail peer meetings are experiencing similar issues and are looking at updating their meeting readings highlighting the safety factor.

Rise Up has participated in a landslide of zoom meeting with Grand Forks CAT, Nelson Fentanyl Task Force, Castlegar Fentanyl Opioid Working Group, Castlegar Collaborative, Trail CAT and Centre for Research Institute of Substance Misuse more so since the pandemic. Each meeting has their own challenges and outcomes. I've tried to focus on Grand Forks and Trail more so because I believe these communities are struggling with a higher rate of stigma and discrimination, vigilantism and overall poor treatment of people who use drugs.

Grand Forks and Trail are heavily stigmatized communities towards the people we serve. Key REDUN peers continue to participate in CAT meetings to give their perspective on how things are and how they would like to see their lives transpire to help make for a balanced life throughout the challenges of the poisoned drug supply, overdose and homeless epidemic. This helps the CAT group to plan to alleviate issues that face the community whether it being our peers or medical system, housing, stigma, etc.

Some of the coming summer plans are focused on more face to face events. REDUN representation has been requested to participate in a partnership with BC Coalition of organizations of people who use drugs to help host a meeting with interior health and northern health peers in Kelowna on Aug 3rd. This meeting will be a follow up of a meeting with peers from Vancouver Island Health, Coastal Health and Fraser Health authorities hosted on June 8th in Vancouver.

REDUN is hosting its annual campout at Beaver Lake near New Denver July 10th and return on the 14th. We are expecting approximately 20 WK/B peers and will invite East Kootenay peers. Some of the Coastal peers may attend as well. We are also participating in the Grand Forks Compassion in Action event only to name a few events.

Trail OPS has been in operation since September 2021. We started the ops because of the overdose risk tends to rise on check day. The OPS facilities in Trail are being used more so towards the later afternoon so we changed the times accordingly. Most PWLE tend to come towards the later afternoon. We have an approximate average of 6 to 10 people accessing inhalation and injection ops services throughout each day on Social service pay days. SS paydays tend to bring peoples risk up because of the increase in drug use. We know the drug supply is toxic and I feel it's important to have OPS available at least on check day and following day in all communities but for now only have resources for Trail OPS. The inhalation pop up is made of a plastic type tent and leave us to the weather elements aside from having a roof over our heads and walls to block some of the wind. Outside ops in the winter is very challenging for many reasons. We have also run into challenges with the increase of PWLE accessing the United church. Items have disappeared from the church since our arrival as well as a broken window, etc. We are seeking a facility that we can rent as the church hierarchy is feeling a little overwhelmed with some of the issues that arise from folks gathering at OPS and REDUN meetings.

Overall I believe we have saved lives although there is still an increase OD death, homelessness and whole lot of demise with our street populations. On occasion I hear some good luck stories but for the most a lot of this is disheartening although I still have hopes of positive change. The biggest hope is that we get a safe drug supply and homes for our street population. Whichever comes first will be a welcome sight.