

## **ANKORS Street College (2022-23)**

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Over the last year, ANKORS Street College peer education programming has focused on mini-workshops and trainings at REDUN meetings to maximize accessibility and reach. Adapting to meet emergent and variable needs, these engagements have covered a variety of topics, including: drug checking and fentanyl test strips, advanced overdose response training, BC's decriminalization exemption education, overdose and brain injury, xylazine and benzodiazepine contamination, how to use hammer pipes, fire safety, know your rights workshops with PIVOT Legal Society, dopesickness vs benzo withdrawal, safer supply options and access, and much much more. REDUN has also provided first aid training for dozens of peer workers, and continues to grow capacity among leadership. Additional one-on-one and small group sessions provide opportunity to focus information and provide tailored support as needed.

Community education opportunities continue to extend the reach of harm reduction and shift public perspectives. We are receiving more requests for presentations and training, and from new audiences. The dialogue that emerges in these new spaces is often refreshingly curious, honest, and compassionate, allowing for the essential work of reducing stigma and enhancing engagement. With over 8000 page views and nearly 6000 unique visits, <https://www.ankorsstreetcollege.com/> continues to provide information and resources within and beyond our region. Our instagram, while underutilized, has over 340 followers, indicating a broad need for this type of information sharing and reaffirming the potential to reach wider audiences with relative ease.

In the spring of 2022, we participated in community education at local farmers markets. That summer, we supported peer leaders to participate in the Grand Forks *Compassion in Action* conference in June, took REDUN members from multiple chapters camping near Castlegar, and submitted to the Select Standing Committee on Health. Following a tragic loss in my personal life on August 1st, I was unable to work for much of the remaining summer and early fall. This unexpected loss of someone very close to me both devastated me and drove me back to the work - but it also revealed the strength of our team and ANKORS commitment to worker wellness in a complex and challenging context.

With gratitude and caution, I returned to a busy fall schedule. October 2022 brought the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition to Nelson with their *Getting To Tomorrow* campaign. Bringing together multiple stakeholders, including over a dozen people with lived/living experience, this 2-day event fostered productive dialogue, relationship building, and highlighted the innovative harm reduction work happening in our region (<https://gettingtomorrow.ca/communities/nelson/>). Following this engagement, CDPC has produced a short video showcasing the work of REDUN's eops outreach team (an Interior Health supported project which emerged in the summer of 2022 following a spike in overdose events in Nelson).



(Balfour, October 2022)

Later in October, EKNPUD and REDUN collaborated to bring together peers from the East and West Kootenays for a short peer wellness retreat in Balfour. In December, REDUN hosted holiday meals in all of our communities. In January, I began working with a UVic practicum student to produce a research proposal to study the implementation of rural fentanyl patch prescribed safe supply programs.

At the beginning of March 2023, REDUN hosted a full-day region-wide strategic planning event that was attended by over 30 elected members and 4 ANKORS staff, resulting in a motion to elect a regional steering committee to take up the strategic priorities identified, and support high-level decision-making in collaboration with REDUN and ANKORS leadership. This group has met a few times, has participated in applying for funding, and is reviewing some of REDUN's policies and procedures.

Overall, the primary challenges experienced in providing learning opportunities for PWLLE remains the chaos caused by an unpredictable drug supply (especially due to high rates of benzodiazepine contamination), homelessness, stigma, violence, poverty, mental health challenges, trauma, grief, and despair. Additionally, varying levels of knowledge and engagement within and across communities (PWLLE, and non) requires a high level of adaptability, which, while at times challenging, is ultimately a great opportunity to meet everyone where they're at. The fluidity and creativity required to address a wide range of educational needs across diverse audiences ensures that ANKORS Street College remains grounded, pragmatic, and compassionate. Looking ahead to the 2023-24 year, I am hopeful that this program can continue to have positive impacts on our communities by increasing capacity and confidence amongst peer leaders, raising awareness throughout the region, facilitating future opportunities and strengthening collaborations, and most importantly, reducing harm.