

I started at the OPS in March of 2022. Since then, I've been working on average four shifts a week both at the ANKORS main office and the Hub in Nelson. The most noteworthy part of the job for me is the resiliency of our clients. Despite horrible living conditions, addiction, mental illness and stigma; generally the folks using our space are polite, respectful, humorous, creative and show a keen interest in how services are provided in our community. Even though we all have bad days, I find it to be the exception rather than the rule in our space.

Based on my almost daily observations of people experiencing homelessness, addiction and mental illness, the most obvious shortcoming is how health care is administered to our most vulnerable citizens. Our clients often face humiliation, shame and inadequate care when they seek help. In the long run, this is costing all of society since it is more expensive and time consuming to engage with half measures rather than address root causes. I have watched people become addicted to substances like benzodiazepines unwillingly as a result of a tainted black market drug supply. As well, people are being injured by Xylazine, which leads to painful sores which can and do become infected. Although the OPS undoubtedly saved lives, many continue to die on the street because our community does not have a Safe Inhalation Site. Although it should be relatively simple to provide a tent or other structure for people to smoke under supervision, the City, Health Authority, Elected Officials and the Non-Profit Sector have so far been unable to make it happen. My hope is that by this time next year, we will have fewer deaths on the street due to this highly preventable scourge.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the dedication of my co-workers in the OPS. We have a diverse group with each individual bringing their own unique abilities. It is a pleasure to work in an environment that feels supportive and cohesive.

Ben Duncan