



Taylor Yonkman

AGM 2026 Report

HIV & HCV Education & Outreach, Sexual Health & Substance Use Education, Drug Checking Technician, Shambhala & Wicked Woods Drug Checking Coordination Co-Lead

Overview - I entered my second year full-time with ANKORS in January 2026, I am continuing to expand my work in HIV and HCV education and support, community education events, drug checking and festival coordination. Throughout the year, my work centered around creating meaningful connections, reducing stigma, increasing access to health information and community education. Alongside my regular role, I also supported the Emergency Winter Shelter with shift coverage.

HIV & HCV - Throughout the year, I worked on expanding HIV and HCV education, outreach, and Point-of-Care testing initiatives within ANKORS space. This included outreach and pop-up testing opportunities at the shelter, after-hours space, wellness events, and other community settings. I worked with different community partners to support linkage to care and improve access to HIV and HCV knowledge and support services.

I hosted and supported multiple sexual health and HIV awareness initiatives, including a World AIDS Day wellness and POC testing event focused on anti-stigma education, wellness, and open dialogue surrounding HIV.

Drug Checking & Festival Drug Checking - Throughout the year, I worked as an in-office Drug Checking Technician as well as Drug Checking Coordination Co-Lead for both Shambhala Music Festival and Wicked Woods Music Festival.

A large portion of my role as a drug checking technician is to focus on public education of drug checking, both with schools and in community. I support James to fill in the gaps with drug checking in community, both through outreach as well as in our main office. I also support in online education by creating physical and social media advertisements as well as infographics surrounding drug checking.

My role with Wicked Woods and Shambhala includes volunteer coordination, trainings, logistics, scheduling, supply preparation and on-site supports. Festival drug checking services continued to grow significantly this year.

Shambhala Music Festival has approximately 25,000 attendees, I coordinated a team of approximately 60 volunteers from across Canada while operating four FTIR spectrometers over five days alongside harm reduction education, Elrich reagent testing, naloxone training, sexual health supplies and substance use education. We are currently planning and hiring our 2026 team and are well into the preparation. We tested over 2,000 samples and had over 3,000 service users through drug checking as well as our education table.

Wicked Woods Music Festival has approximately 3,000 attendees, we coordinated a volunteer team of approximately 20 people supporting FTIR testing, harm reduction workshops, naloxone training and supply distribution for festival attendees. We tested over 400 samples and had almost 600 service users through our drug checking and education table.

A highlight of my year was creating a new interactive drug checking education activity partnering with James. The activity uses real-world scenarios and testing results to encourage discussion surrounding drug checking, informed decision-making, and substance use safety. The activity was piloted with College of the Rockies 3rd Year Nursing Students and later I brought into community and school education sessions with very positive feedback.

Tabling & Education Events - Throughout the year, I attended and supported a variety of education events, outreach tables, workshops, and community gatherings throughout the East Kootenays. These events focused on harm reduction, sexual health, HIV/HCV awareness, overdose prevention, drug checking, consent education, and anti-stigma work.

A major focus of my work this year was in education and community engagement. I developed and facilitated presentations and hands-on activities surrounding harm reduction, sexual health, consent, substance use awareness, HIV/HCV, anti-stigma and drug checking within schools and community settings. This included ongoing monthly educational sessions with Cranbrook Alternate School and Kimberley Alternate School for students in grades 10–12. I developed these sessions to be paired with hands-on activities and to match with learning outcomes of the school district. I also supported practicum students and staff in developing educational resources, presentations, and activities to help expand ANKORS East's library of educational materials.

I participated in multiple community education and engagement events including Pride festivals (Cranbrook, Kimberley and Fernie), wellness tables, hosted a community town hall, open houses, naloxone trainings, youth-focused education sessions, and outreach-based events.

One of the larger community events this year was “Let’s Talk: Harm Reduction,” a community town hall held in partnership with Community Response & Resilience Program at the College of the Rockies. The event focused on increasing community understanding of harm reduction and reducing stigma.

Celebrations - A major success was the positive response from youth and staff during school-based education sessions. In all of these sessions, majority of students are engaging in conversations, asking questions and have given feedback that they enjoy these sessions. I look forward to continuing them in SD5 and SD6 next year!

Seeing more open conversations surrounding HIV, substance use, and harm reduction throughout the community has been incredibly meaningful.

Supporting the Emergency Winter Shelter throughout the winter season was also a meaningful experience. Being able to provide support, connection, and consistency during difficult weather conditions reinforced the importance of compassion, accessibility, and community care.

Challenges – While progress is always being made, biggest on-going challenge is still continuing to navigate stigma surrounding substance use, HIV, and harm reduction within the community. While progress is being made

Through my supporting at the Emergency Winter Shelter it brought some challenges, mainly in seeing the impacts of winter, housing instability, and isolation on many of our community members. Seeing people struggle during extreme cold and difficult circumstances reinforced the need to continue advocating for more housing options and the need for a permanent, low barrier winter shelter.

An on-going challenge is coordinating large-scale festival services (as any large scale event does), this brought logistical challenges including volunteer coordination, scheduling and supply preparation. As 2025 was my first year coordinating, each year will get a bit easier!