

HRW Training &
Apprenticeship Project



Connecting Community:

Innovative Training for Harm Reduction Workers

**HSJCC Conference Presentation
November 15/16 2023**



South Riverdale
COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTRE



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the existence of **Turtle Island**. We acknowledge that land ownership is a colonizer concept.

We acknowledge that many nations pre-dating colonizer contact lived on these lands. We acknowledge that these nations lived in relationship with the land.

We acknowledge that the nations traditionally living on these lands had complex and effective political structures. We acknowledge that they were smart and possessed scientific knowledge based on thousands of years of observational research. **We acknowledge that at no point prior to contact did the nations of Turtle Island need to be saved or "civilized".**

We acknowledge that every Canadian has been misinformed by the education system. The education system has been spouting half-truths and outright lies for generations now. It is our responsibility to know the truth.

We commit to learning and listening. We commit to hearing truths that are ugly. We commit to exploring and assessing my own defensiveness. We commit to a better world. We commit to being part of a society that will create a roadmap to reconciliation.

Introduction to the Team

Steph Moulton

(She/Her)

Community Health Worker



Emma Beer

(She/Her)

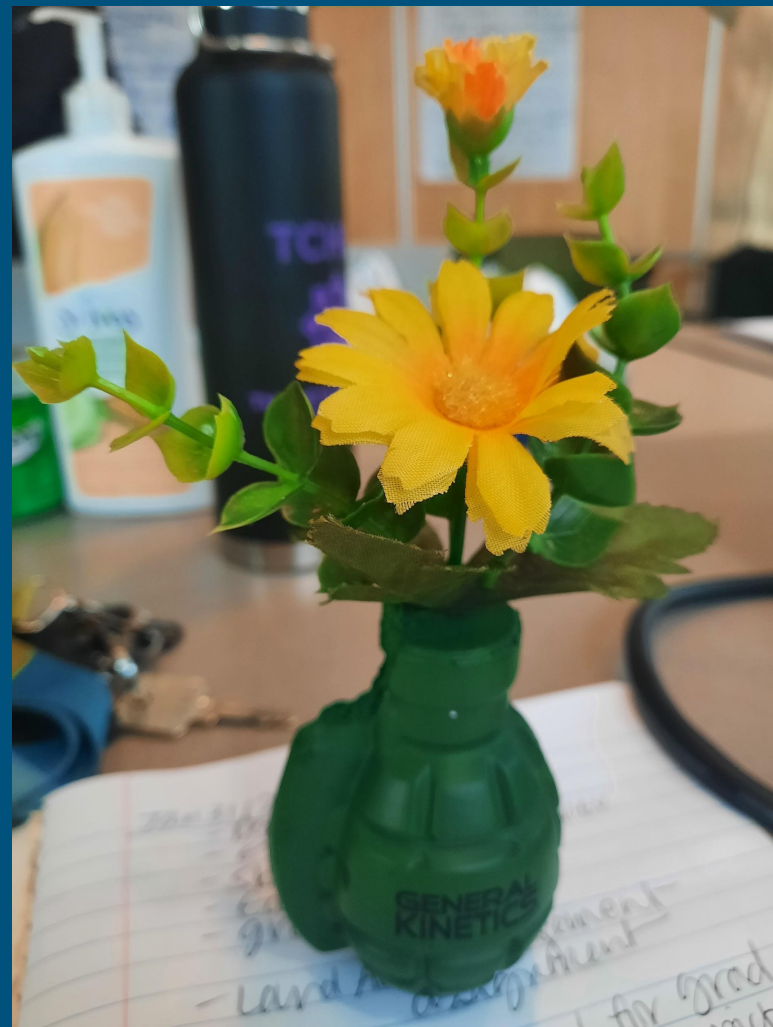
Health Promoter

When We Practice Harm Reduction...

- We are saying you are worthy of care in so many ways
- We are letting you know we don't judge you or where you are at
- We know you are capable of change
- We are reminding you that your life matters
- We are letting you know that seeing you high does not scare or threaten us
- We are showing you we can meet you where you're at because this is your experience, not ours!
- We are respecting you as a person who can make decisions
- We leave behind expectations and focus on our relationships instead
- We are giving you space to be honest and not be ashamed
- We are telling you that we love you

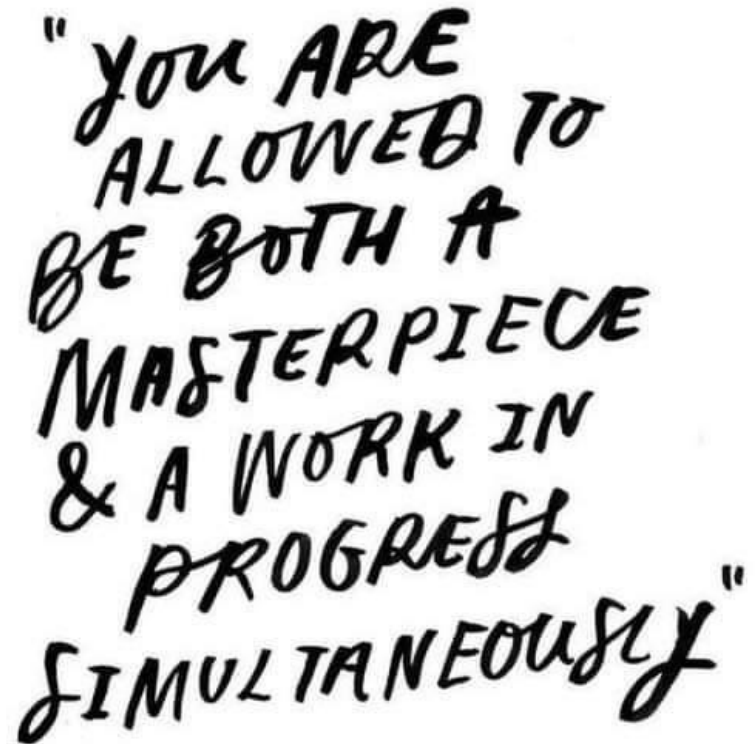
About HRWTAP

- Modelled after the Toronto Community Hep C Program peer training series, with tweaks!
- 16 weeks of comprehensive harm reduction relevant training for people with lived/living experience
- Onboarding trainings required in order to work in harm reduction based settings
- Makeup sessions held for those who needed it
- 6 month paid apprenticeship with South Riverdale CHC working in a variety of Harm Reduction programs in the community
- Ongoing supports, meetups, and engagement opportunities
- 15+ apprenticeship opportunities across 7 organizations in Toronto



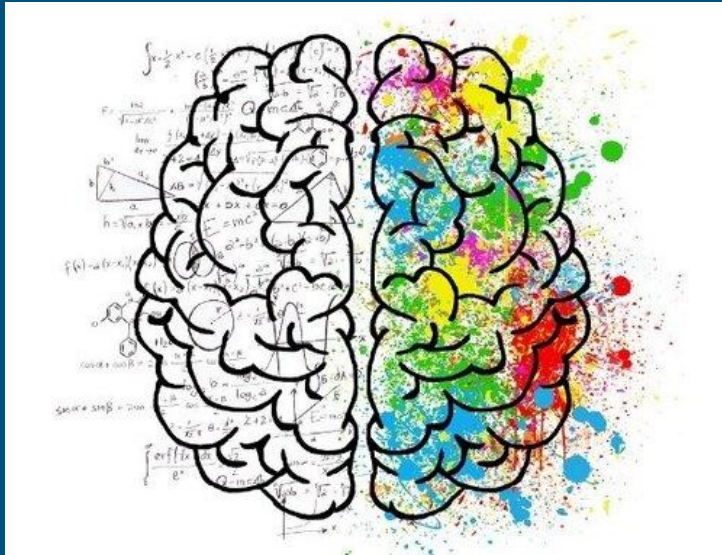
Guiding Philosophy

- Every person who walks through the door as a service user has the potential to leave as a service provider - credit to Raffi Balian, founder of harm reduction programming at SRCHC
- Everyone deserves a second, third, or fourth chance
- Celebrate changes no matter how small
- We are all different- and those differences should be honoured
- We are all capable of change and we are not defined by our past



"YOU ARE
ALLOWED TO
BE BOTH A
MASTERPIECE
& A WORK IN
PROGRESS
SIMULTANEOUSLY"

How can we incorporate neuro-diverse affirming practice into our work?



Neurodiversity Affirming Practice

The Core Principles

intersectionality

respecting autonomy

validating differences

presuming competence

reframing expectations

promoting self-advocacy

rejecting neuronormativity

prioritising lived experience

nurturing positive self-identity

adapting systems and environments

honouring all forms of communication

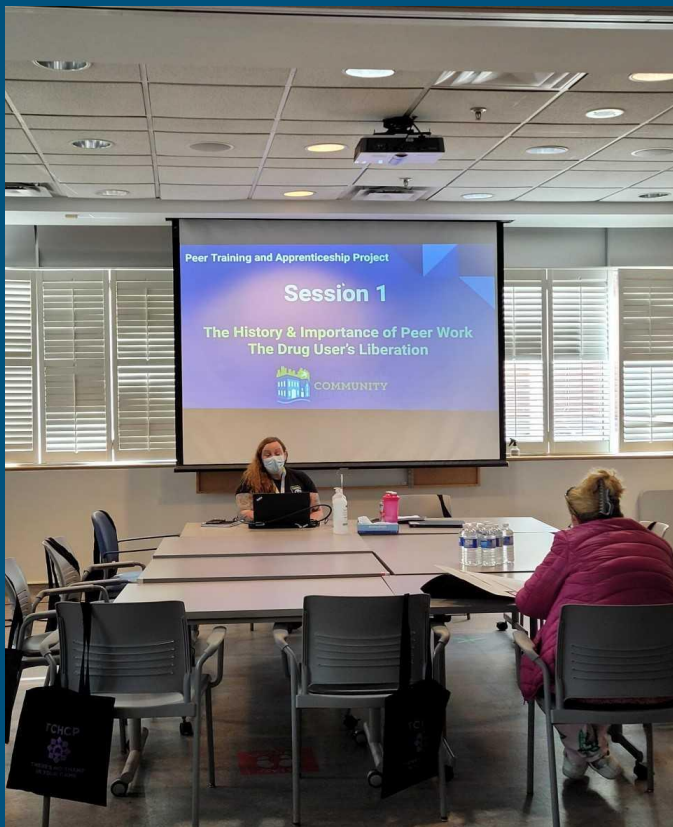
Program Design & Things To Consider

- Learning styles
- Neurodivergent learners (Autism, ADHD)
- Brain injuries, concussions and history of overdoses
- Emotional regulation
- Institutionalization experiences
- Serious Illnesses, Hearing Loss & Vision Challenges
- Neurodiverse/Trauma Informed Practices
- Homelessness and chaotic living situations
- Violence in community
- Advocacy
- Keeping lines of communication open, even after blow outs
- Text and phone call reminders
- Make up session
- TCHCP



Why We Did It

- **NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US.**
- Low barrier training and employment opportunities identified as a community resource gap by community members
- Investing in community creates healthier community members and reduces isolation
- Results go far beyond people's participation in the program, teachings translate to real life skills
- Nearly 3/4 of us have had interactions with the justice system throughout our lives (an extra layer of stigma & trauma)
- Drug User lives are so valuable and we have the power to work towards a better world where no one is left behind
- We love to debunk myths about Drug Culture Experts to help fight stigma!



First day - October 2022



First day - February 2023

The Recruitment Process

- Information session development and execution, reaching out to community organizations and TCHC buildings to host info session + a q&a period
- Met with program leads in SRCHC programs to share project info and match with potential applicants
- Reconnected with individuals who have expressed interest in doing paid harm reduction work in the past
- Recruitment poster sent out to harm reduction programs in Toronto
- Received 70+ applications for 40 spots

Peer Training and Apprenticeship Project

Have you ever considered getting into harm reduction work as a paid gig but weren't sure where to start?

Who Should Apply:

- People who are drug culture experts; have lived or living experience with homelessness, drug use, mental health survivors, and/or incarceration experience who want to be a part of a training and apprenticeship program!
- We have 10 spots per round of training.**

What is it:

- Comprehensive 16-week peer training program and 6-month apprenticeship

Why:

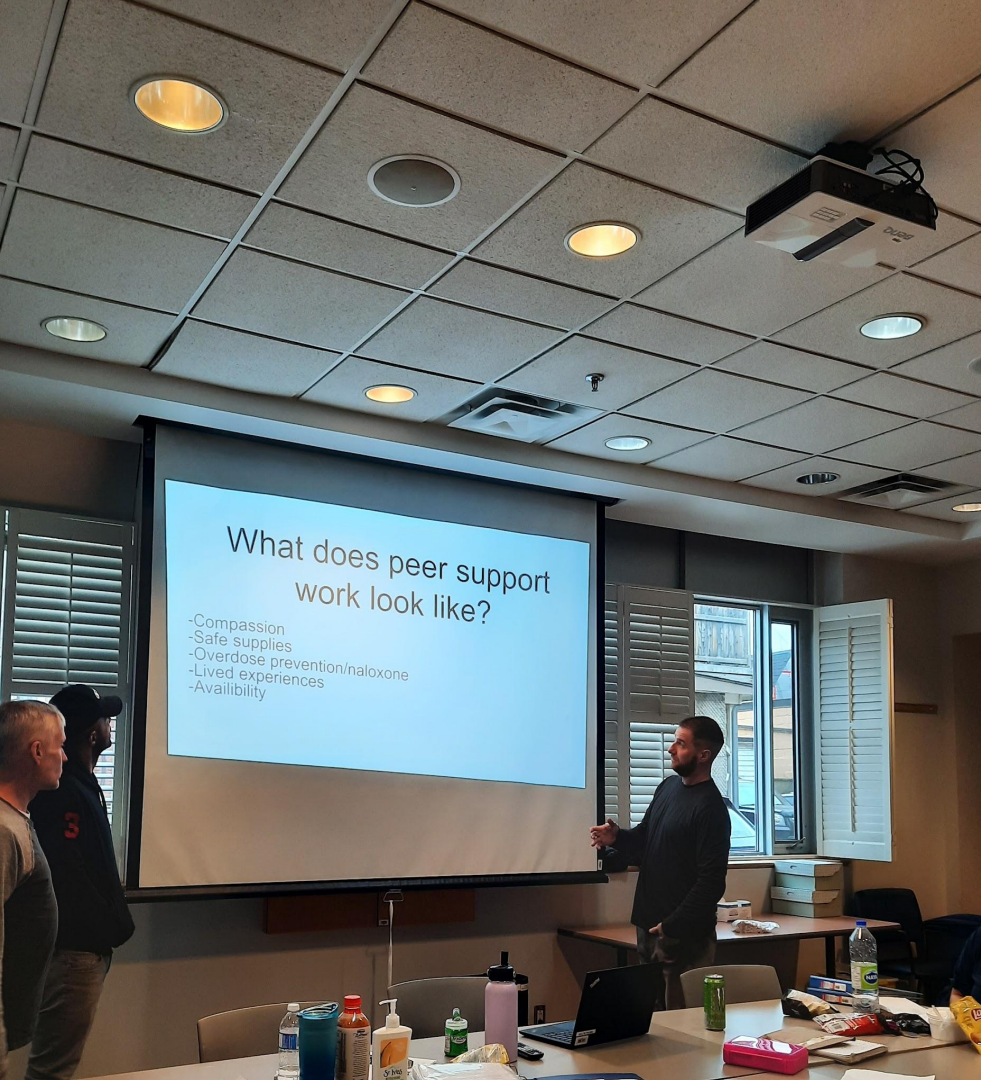
- The aim of the project is to provide participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to work in the Harm Reduction field. Training will cover topics including Harm Reduction, OD response, trauma-informed care, communication skills, boundary setting, conflict resolution, self-care, group facilitation, and more!

When/Where:

- 1st and 2nd round begins October 2022 to January 2023 - Tuesday OR Thursday
- 3rd and 4th round begins January 2023
- 955 Queen St. East (Queen & Carlaw) Room 1 South B

For more information please contact:
Emma, Health Promoter @ 437 997 6732 or
Steph, Community Health Worker @ 437 244 5145





Eligibility

- Lived/living experience of drug use, homelessness, sex work, incarceration/institutionalization, any type of differing ability; or navigating mental health systems
- Has not completed a harm reduction training & apprenticeship program before
- Has significant gaps in employment history or has difficulty getting hired or succeeding in traditional employment environments
- Submits a letter expressing interest in the training program (can be handwritten or drawn)

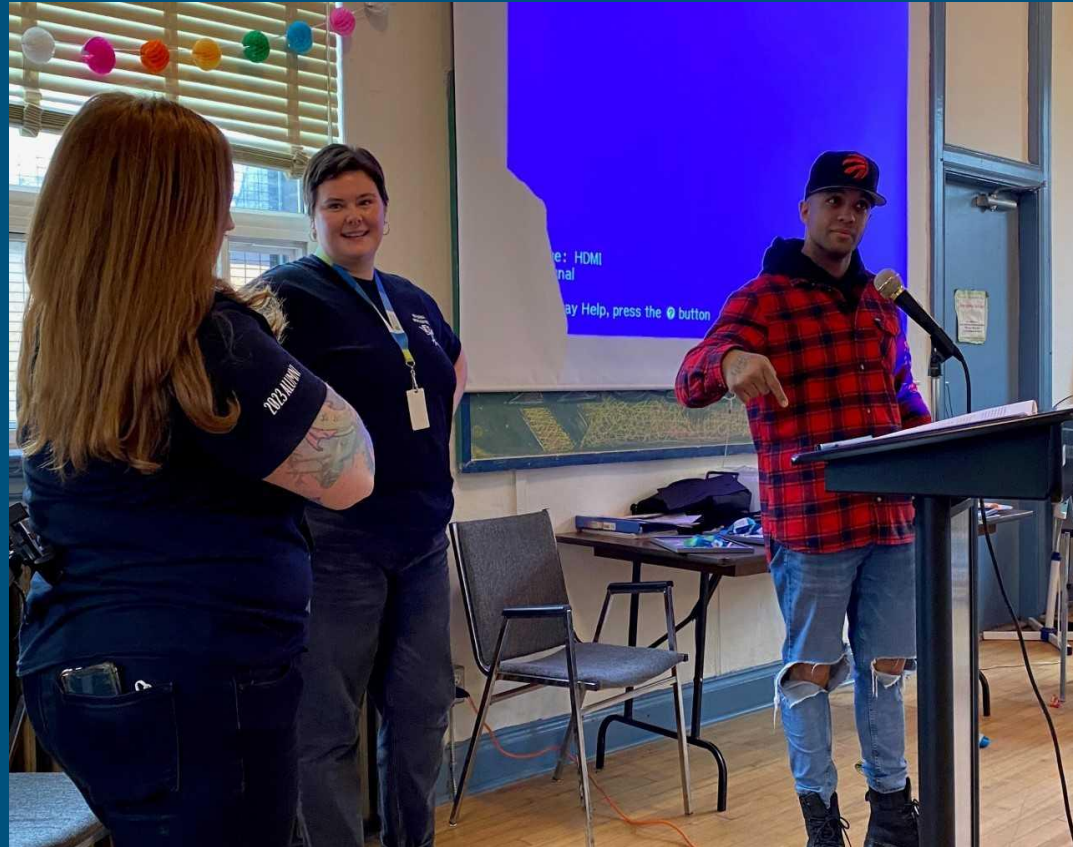
Enhancing and Expanding!



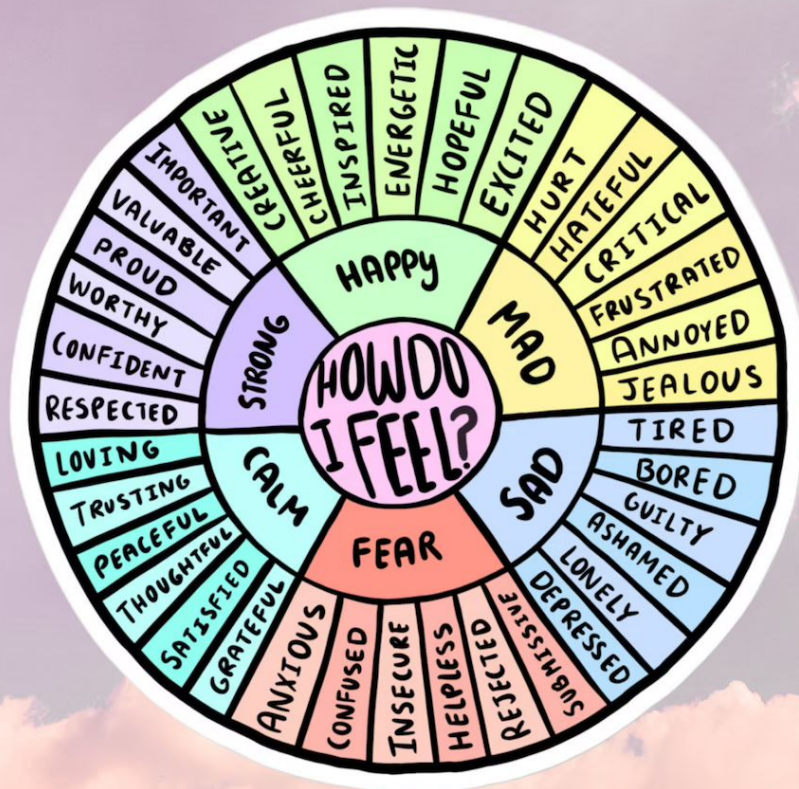
- Excellent training programs are offered at a number of agencies in Toronto, but none have had the capacity to provide a paid apprenticeship before now.
- Multiple barriers still exist that can make it difficult for PWLLE to have the tools necessary for success in their chosen field.
- The apprenticeship was intended to bridge these gaps & give people hands on work experience in the field. It's also a great way to build relationships with placement host organizations.
- Apprentices are not promised positions once the program ends, but we focus on job postings that fit well and work on the entire application and interview process together - from resume creation all the way to references to potential employers.

How We Made It Our Own

- Being transparent about our own experiences and backgrounds
- Welcoming input & giving people ownership over their own experience(s) in the program
- Being clear and also flexible with expectations
- Using humour as medicine
- Consulting with other Harm Reduction workers with lived experiences in the community
- Not assuming ourselves as the experts
- Making corrections and edits in real time

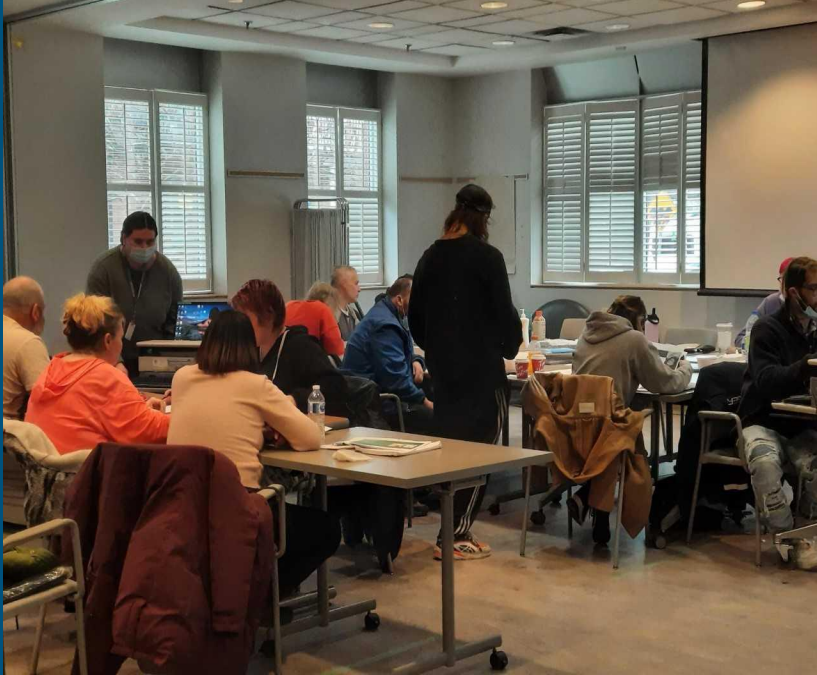


Finding ways to give language to emotion



..to better understand ourselves & others

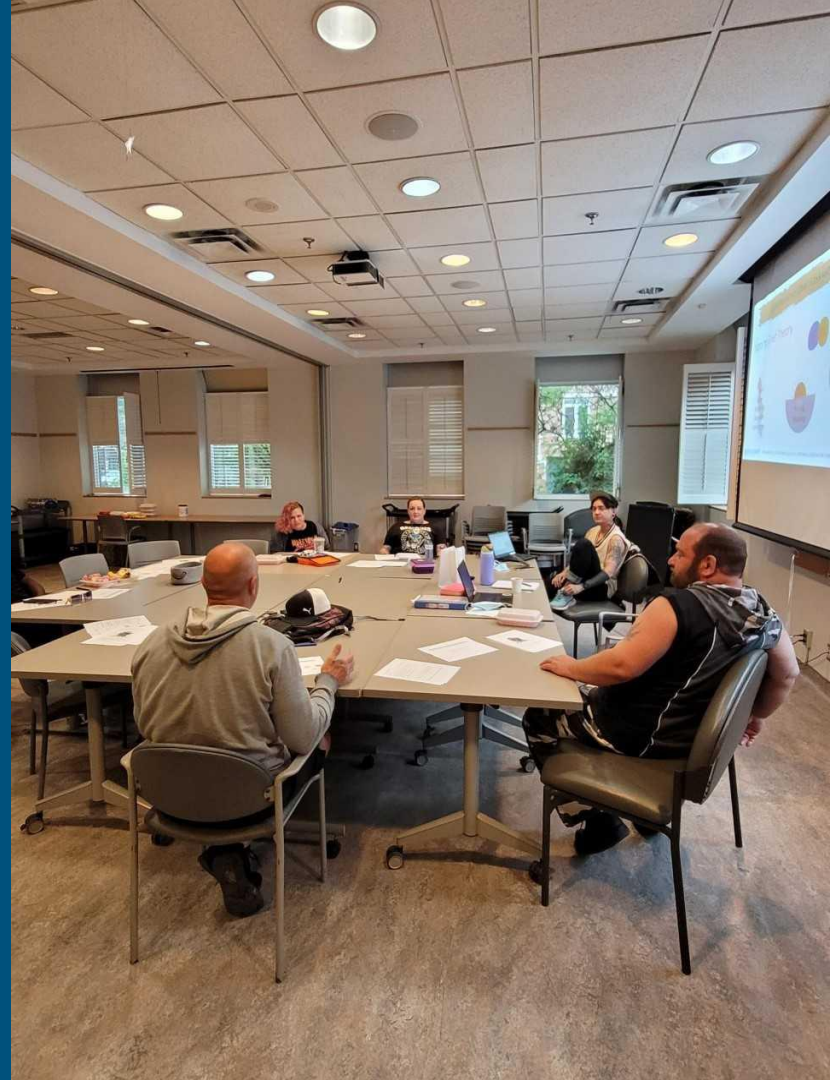
Training Schedule



1. History and Importance of Peer Work and Drug Users Liberation: Why We're Here
2. Harm Reduction: Theory and Practice
3. Negative Self Talk: Addressing Self Limiting Beliefs.
4. Communication Skills: Types of Communication, Communication in the Workplace, Effective Communication
5. Overdose Awareness, Prevention and Response + Naloxone training
6. Safety for Peers, Debriefing, Community and Self-Care
7. Trauma Informed Care: Working in a Triggering Workplace
8. Conflict resolution & De-escalation skills
9. Indigenous Cultural Safety Training
10. Ethical Issues, Confidentiality, Boundaries
11. Mental Health
12. Advocacy- Individual and Collective
13. Social Determinants of Health
14. Grief and Loss
15. Community Resources & Resume Building
16. Group Facilitation

Guest Speakers

- An integral part of the training program was inviting experienced front line workers, most of whom have lived experience, to our sessions
- Guest speakers were linked to host programs so participants could meet their potential mentors in person prior to the apprenticeship starting
- Participants feedback of guest speakers was that they enhanced the sessions significantly, and it was nice to have guests present for questions and gaining insight into all of the different aspects of Harm Reduction work
- Guest speakers from programs at SRCHC:
 - K6 (SCTS), Hep C, Indigenous HR, Counselling, Counterfit, & management
 - Breakaway Grief and Loss (outside of srchc)



Graduation Requirements

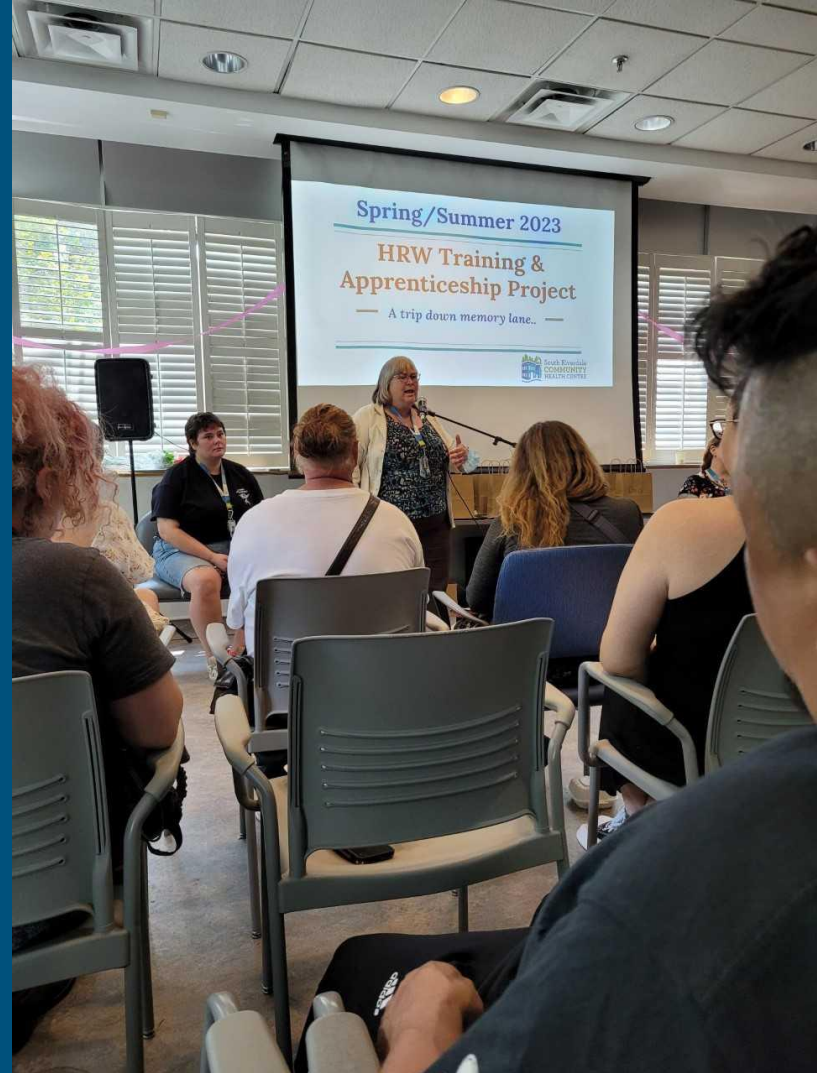


What we took into consideration:

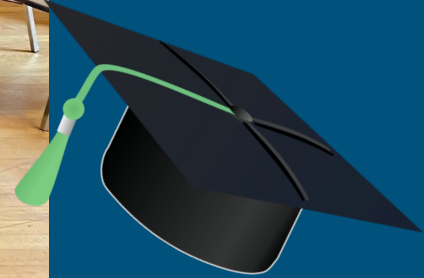
- Must attend 14/16 classes OR attend mandatory make-up session to make up for missed classes
- Demonstrated ability to set boundaries
- Demonstrated appropriate behaviour in class
- Respectful behaviour towards peers, facilitators, and guest speakers
- Demonstrated willingness to learn and work with others
- Demonstrated commitment to harm reduction

Celebrating Hard Work & Dedication

- Hosting graduation ceremonies was one of the highlights of the project
- For many, graduating this program was representative of much more than finishing a course. It was proof that they could commit to something positive, that they could show up for themselves, and their communities.
- In a world where we are so often told that we can't do things, it feels really good to prove that we can.
- Ways we honoured our grads: fresh fruit and vegetables, ice cream cake, goodie bags, program t-shirts, flowers, etc.



HRWTAP's First Graduating Class - February 2023



A few cohort 2 grads



June 2023



It's
about
CHANGE.



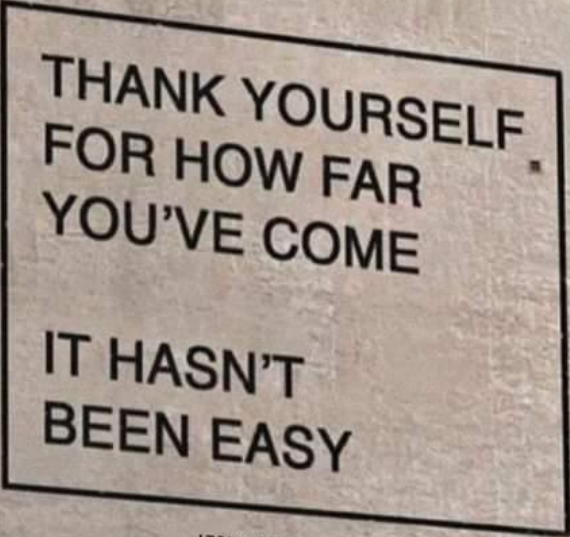
Importance Of Apprenticeships

- A chance to learn in a supportive working environment where it's okay to make mistakes
- An opportunity to apply knowledge/skills learned in class to real life
- A low barrier way to learn
- An opportunity to connect to like minded community members and make working connections
- A chance to familiarize themselves with formal workplace procedures and norms
- Preferred learning style for experiential learners

Community Event Support

- Strawberry Ceremony
- SRCHC Earth Day clean up (pictured left)
- SRCHC OD outrage day
- 519 Pride
- SRCHC Pride (pictured left)
- Oakridge Harm Reduction Hub Community BBQ





THANK YOURSELF
FOR HOW FAR
YOU'VE COME

IT HASN'T
BEEN EASY

ITSLYRICSART

Continuing Care: Monthly Meet-Up

- Stay connected to HRWTAP
- Share resources, job postings/ stay in the know
- Hear from other community members and guest speakers about learning opportunities
- Meet grads from different cohorts and catch up with friends
- Have discussions about community trends
- Have lunch together and check in!



Data/Numbers/Reporting Focus Group Results



Training goals

- Three main themes (1) to help others/the community; (2) to learn and build on existing harm reduction knowledge and lived experiences; and, (3) to obtain employment.
- A desire to help other people who use drugs was the most commonly cited training goal.

Participant profiles

- 39 training participants overall, 25 graduates & 22 who moved onto apprenticeships
- Slightly more participants who identified as men
- Median age for both cohorts was 41 years old
- Between one third and half identifying as LGBTQIA+
- 80% reported a lifetime history of drug use
- Between 50-75% had a history of criminalization

**To access the full evaluation- email our evaluator
[srhc@srhc.com](mailto:srchc@srhc.com)**

Focus Group Key Findings

Personal impact

- Increased self-confidence or a decrease in social anxiety.
- Improvement in negative self-talk
- The opportunity for self-reflection and new personal insights
- Improvements to personal relationships and improved community belonging were personal impacts that were also noted throughout the focus group.

Staying involved in the program

- the calm and supportive environment created by the facilitators. This included both practical (make-up sessions) and emotional (non-judgmental) components.
- the convenient location supported engagement
- TTC and honoraria

COMMUNICATION
BE ASSERTIVE
COMMITMENT
CONFIDENTIALITY
HONOR PRONOUNS/NAMES
ATTENDANCE
MORE THAN ONE WAY TO
SOLVE A PROBLEM
VULNERABILITY
L.A. -
UNITY

TEAM WORK
DON'T VOLUNTEER TOLD PPL
HOLD SPACE FOR EVERYONE
INCLUSIVITY
GROUP AGREEMENTS
/ RULES
ACCOMMODATION
RESPECT = BOUNDARIES - SELF
CONSENT - ENTHUSIASTIC!
SUPPORTIVE!!
FAIRNESS
EMERGENCY TRAININGS

Community belonging & HR knowledge transfer

- Average community belonging increased from 2.6 to 3.8 out of 5, pre/post training.
- Every person (100%) reported that they have used things they have learned about harm reduction throughout the training in their personal lives
- New skills/ knowledge apprentices have developed on the job: listening, patience, observation, needs assessment (of clients), self-advocacy, time management, problem solving and de-briefing.

Apprenticeship Impact

- Increased compassion, hope, acceptance of others and how to treat people equally were commonly cited,
- Pattern of identifying personal learnings that participants felt made them better workers. This included: the importance of slowly building a foundation when working towards personal changes, increased understanding of and confidence to assert one's own needs, and a better understanding one's own feelings and triggers

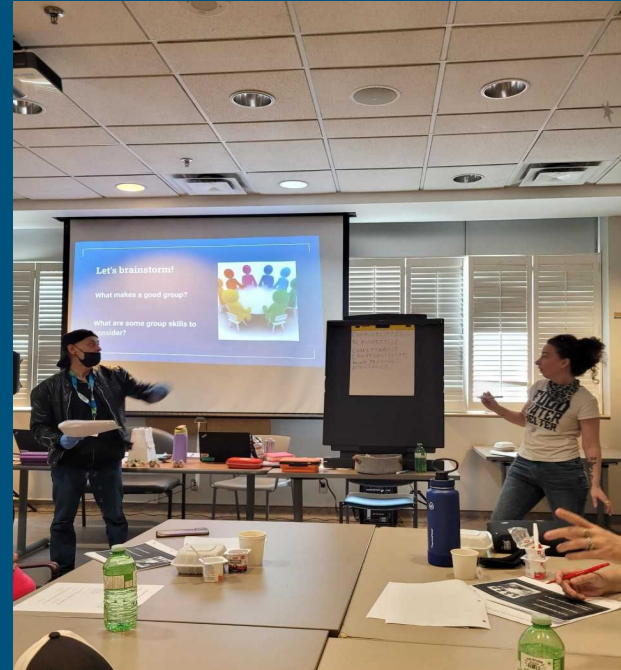
Apprentices at Work: **Hearing from Grads**

"If I wasn't in this class right now, I would be using – to be honest. So, this is actually helping me to decrease my substance use every week. Even for a few hours. And that's an improvement – even if it's just one day. Hopefully it'll keep getting better."

"It helped me to structure my life, given me a source of hope, something to do, and the psychological skills to identify my own emotions and to prepare me for the work. Learning about the trauma informed approach helped me personally and to understand others."

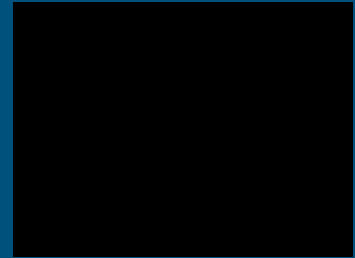
"I've been kicked out of a lot of schools, people here have a diversity of experiences, I felt a lot more comfortable – don't have to hide who I am. My brother died last week but I still chose to come to this program because I felt like I belonged somewhere. It's something I'm good at. This program pretty much saved my life."

"I'd just really like to feel like my life was for a reason, everything I've gone through had a purpose. Like, that young woman who walks through the door and her body language and her lack of eye contact – nobody else is going to notice that, but I will. I want to make sure that she doesn't have to go through what I did"



Graduate Testimonials

"If not for this training, I don't believe I would have found a way out of a cyclic isolated existence. As a result of the training, I have been entrusted to support and learn alongside the Women's Drop In group. The training also instilled the confidence in me to take a chance and join the advocacy committee at Regent Park Community health center. Steph and Emma are like cheerleaders with a social work backbone and community care hearts of gold. Thank you for the world that opened up for me since that cold March afternoon"



Lisa



Gabe



Lyda



Salomon

Apprenticeship Host Details

Organization	Role(s)/ Programs
South Riverdale Community Health Center	COUNTERFIT HR room, Hep C co-facilitation & outreach, cooking group, women's HR breakfast & kit making, drop-ins, Indigenous HR, SCTS
Sherbourne Health	STASH HR room, health bus outreach
The 519	2SLGBTQIA+ specific programming- drop-ins, outreach, older adults groups, social justice hub
Street Health Community Nursing	Kit making, outreach, community events
The Mustard Seed (Fontbonne Ministries)	Food programming, drop-ins
SKETCH Working Arts	Arts based group facilitation, HR supplies, connecting to youth
Regent Park Community Health Centre	HR room (kit making, basic needs, informal counselling)

Feedback from placement hosts

- Apprentices were described as having a **'wealth of knowledge'**. Apprentices came with **good communication skills, were receptive to feedback and ongoing learning, had enthusiasm for the work and comfort in sharing their life experiences in ways that were helpful and appropriate.**
- Themes reported re- influence on harm reduction services were: **increased program capacity, enhancing trust with service users, providing role modeling for service users, normalizing drug use/conversations regarding drug use and reducing stigma and making program spaces feel more caring, inclusive and welcoming.**
- For the most part, hosts **described smooth transitions into roles. Some identified ongoing learning/job readiness needs** that they were able accommodate, such as the need to start the placement with more practical/support tasks before taking on a client-facing role.

Host feedback cont'd

- While hosts provided **immediate, on site support**, support from project facilitators was frequently cited as critical to the program and for the ongoing professional development, difficult conversations or problem solving and for administrative needs.
- Other things hosts said worked well: having introductory meetings as a low-pressure way to interview and identify apprentices and match their interests with available placements, the flexibility of start dates, and that the roles were paid.

“I’ve seen people hired without any training and it doesn’t really work out. You need that almost clinical supervision and support at first, which this project provided. It’s been really thoughtfully done. I think it’s a great program””

Land Acknowledgements & Reconciliation Work



Making it personal

Keeping it mindful

Creating meaning

Committing to action

...and then doing the work

Hello and Welcome.

My name is _____ and my ancestors are from _____.

Some of us have been separated from our families and cultures. And for a few of us, our ancestors remain a mystery to this day. We would like to acknowledge our chosen families, loved ones and pets as integral to our survival.

I would like to honour the existence of the First Peoples by acknowledging that we are on the traditional lands of the _____ in this place that is known today as _____.

I appreciate this place because _____.

As a learner, I now understand that this place has significance to the First Peoples because
_____.

As a builder of the future, my hope for this place is _____.

And I commit to _____.



**Want an e-copy of our guidebook?
Email us!**

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