

Organization: Yonge Street Mission – Evergreen Centre
Project Presenter: Karen Bach, Program Officer
Project Sponsor: Winston Bow

Project: A multi-layered pilot project which addresses the needs of local street youth struggling with addiction issues.

Background and Aim of the Organization:

Since 1896 we have worked to meet the needs of people living in poverty, providing emergency care and fostering long-term positive transformation in the lives of individuals and families. We serve everyone who comes to us for assistance, regardless of colour, culture, economic status, gender, religion, sexual orientation or social condition. Last year we welcomed 14,500 people in over 180,000 visits. Over 120 staff and some 4,000 volunteers reached out to offer 100 programs and services. YSM's Evergreen Centre for Street Youth opened in 1986, and has become an integral force in helping young people build meaningful lives away from the streets. The centre offers a safe place where homeless youth can rest, eat, obtain health care and counselling and get help with finding a job or a place to stay or pursuing education. In the last fiscal year, almost 80,000 visits were made to Evergreen by street youth.

Current research estimates that up to 10,000 youth live rough on Toronto streets, with up to 2,000 homeless on any one night. Of these, 60% are from Toronto or within a 100 kilometre radius of Toronto; the remainder comes from other parts of Canada. Almost all street youth come from broken or high-conflict homes; 65% have been in a foster home or group home. Over 60% have suffered physical or sexual abuse. Up to 90% of street youth admit to using drugs, often beginning in their early teens. These range from marijuana and heroin to the highly-addictive crystal meth and crack cocaine. A recent study where YSM partnered with Health Canada and St. Joseph's Health Centre found compromised health among drug users, with 6% being HIV positive, and many having mental health issues.

Conventional drug treatment programs are not effective with street youth (some estimates say 2-20% successful). Alternative integrated approaches are necessary to address the broader determinants of health issues.

Addictions keep many youth in the shelter system unable to achieve stability in their lives. There is a high cost to our society as youth with addictions place a burden on our criminal justice system and social services.

Project: *Addictions Program*

Of the over 5,400 street-involved or homeless youth who visit YSM's Evergreen Centre every year, a large majority have a substance abuse problem. In the fall of 2010, YSM launched a pilot project to address the needs of street youth who have addiction issues. A qualified and experienced Addictions Counsellor was hired. After some research of various models, a Pilot Program was implemented.

1. A structured relapse prevention model (adopted from Toronto's Centre for Addiction & Mental Health) consists of a 16-week, structured program with participants developing goals and individualized action plans.
2. A Harm Reduction approach is taken (a hierarchy of step-by-step goals) as opposed to sudden, complete abstinence. The long-term goal is to help youth achieve a sustainable, self-sufficient lifestyle.
3. Full support of each participant is part of Evergreen's holistic approach, including help with other health issues, housing, education and employment at the same time as addictions counselling. We also refer youth to external detox and rehabilitation programs but note that these programs have very long waiting lists. We now are seeing youth referred to us for addiction support by other community youth agencies.

A case load of 25 youth is in place as of March 2011 with another 15 expected by the end of July. The goal is to support 50 youth during the first year with formal one-on-one support, plus dozens more on an informal basis.

Seed money of \$12,000 is urgently required to see this project complete its first full year of operation. If funding is secured beyond October 1, we will:

- develop a case load of 75 addicted youth
- pilot an Addictions Support Group
- provide training on addiction to other Evergreen staff and other agencies serving youth
- pilot a Peer Mentoring component - 2 graduates will be trained to mentor new youth seeking help with addictions

“Evergreen was the first place I ever went in my life where I felt accepted. I never would have got off drugs without the support from staff and from my mentor. Now I live on my own and support myself,” said a 20-year-old girl, showing how Evergreen successfully engages youth and has made a difference already in the struggle against addiction.

BUDGET:

Expenses		Revenue	
Salary and benefits:	\$46,000	Donations from funders	\$35,000
Program Costs	5,000	Evergreen Drop In budget	4,000
Total	\$51,000	Total to date	\$39,000

Note: Upon a positive evaluation value of the Addictions Program after three years, we will incorporate the cost into our General Fund budget, in the same way as we do all new initiatives following a three-year probationary/pilot period.

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