

NO: R209

COUNCIL DATE: September 17, 2018

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **September 11, 2018**

FROM: **General Manager, Planning & Development** FILE: **5080-20 (SVWG)**
General Manager, Finance

SUBJECT: **Update on the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group and Funding Request**

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning & Development Department and the Finance Department recommend that Council:

1. Receive this report for information; and
2. Approve a contribution of \$15,000 from the Council Initiatives Fund for the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group (“SVWG”) to support its continued efforts to collaborate on understanding and responding to the needs of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey.

INTENT

The intent of this report is to provide Council with an update on the SVWG, a community-driven, multi-agency collaboration that increases understanding and takes action to enhance the lives of highly vulnerable women and girls in Surrey. In addition, this report serves as a request for a financial contribution of \$15,000 from the Council Initiatives Fund, to be assigned to support the facilitation of the SVWG.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The SVWG is a community-driven, multi-agency collaborative that supports a key priority identified in the Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surrey (“the Homeless Plan”; adopted in 2013). Specifically, the Homeless Plan identifies a need for housing, drop-in, and outreach services for women.

The SVWG also supports the City’s Public Safety Strategy (adopted in 2016) and its priority to “support vulnerable people.”

BACKGROUND

The SVWG is a multi-agency partnership which was formed in 2013 to take a proactive and collaborative approach to understand and address the needs of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey.

On June 15, 2015 Council received an update on research and consultation that had been conducted by the SVWG and presented in the report entitled: *“In their Own Words: A service and housing needs assessment for vulnerable women and youth in Surrey”* (Corporate Report No. R098; 2015, attached as Appendix “I”).

The Social Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC) receives regular updates on the activities of the SVWG. The SPAC Chair, Councillor Villeneuve, and Vice-Chair, Councillor LeFranc, have been actively engaged in the SVWG, along with Social Planning and Public Safety staff.

DISCUSSION

The SVWG formed in 2013 in response to the brutal beating death of a woman, Janice Shore, who was homeless in Surrey. Janice Shore’s tragic and unnecessary death was a catalyst for action, as it became evident that Janice was not unique in her struggles with homelessness, mental health and addictions, and that Surrey did not have the services needed to adequately support the needs of highly vulnerable women and girls. At the time, leaders from non-profit and government agencies, including the City, decided to create a collaborative table (the SVWG) to ensure that street-engaged females’ unique needs were better understood and addressed.

Defining Vulnerable Women and Girls

Particular sub-populations of women and girls in Surrey are highly vulnerable. This includes women and girls who are homeless, involved in survival sex work, dealing with a mental illness, addiction or untreated trauma, living in poverty, and/or fleeing domestic violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or a parent/guardian.

It is difficult to quantify the population of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey. The 2017 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count identified that approximately 30% of the homeless population in Surrey was female. Anecdotal reports indicate that the proportion of females accessing minimum-barrier housing services in Surrey has been increasing, and Surrey’s female-only housing facilities are all operating at capacity. There is no data available on the number of females currently involved in Surrey’s street-based sex trade.

As well, Surrey has a large and growing Indigenous population. At 13,460 people, Surrey has the second largest urban Indigenous population in BC (Statistics Canada, Census 2016). The National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has highlighted the various ways in which Indigenous women and girls are more at risk for violence.

Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group

The SVWG consists of representatives from a broad range of community and government agencies focused on health, safety and support services for women and girls in Surrey. Members include representatives from:

- Atira Women's Resource Centre;
- BC Housing;
- City of Surrey – Public Safety and Social Planning;
- Elizabeth Fry Society;
- Fraser Health;
- Lookout Housing & Health Society;
- Ministry of Children and Family Development;
- Options Community Services;
- Pacific Community Resources Society;
- Public Safety Canada;
- Surrey RCMP;
- Surrey Women's Centre; and
- YWCA.

The SVWG meets quarterly, and these meetings are an opportunity for members to provide input on projects, as well as providing a forum for service providers and government agencies to exchange information and identify opportunities for collaboration. A smaller Executive Committee meets regularly to plan and coordinate collaborative projects, SVWG agendas, and other activities (e.g. the SVWG was a witness at an inquest into the death of an Indigenous woman in Surrey).

Actions and Achievements, 2014 – 2018

The goal of the SVWG is to take a proactive and collaborative approach to understanding the challenges and needs of vulnerable females in Surrey and finding solutions. This has included activities such as:

- Research on the gaps and needs of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey;
- Forums and workshops to explore emerging trends, identify collective priorities, share information and best practices, and foster cross-sector relationships;
- Creation of resources to increase access to information and resources for vulnerable women and girls;
- Activities to decrease stigma experienced by vulnerable females when accessing services; and
- Amplifying the voices of vulnerable women and girls by engaging them in research, planning and identifying priorities for action.

In Their Own Words: Research and Report (2014 - 2015)

When the SVWG first convened, it found very little available research on vulnerable women and girls in Surrey. The SVWG initiated a research project, funded by the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society, to develop a better understanding of the service and housing needs of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey.

Altogether, 50 women and female youth and 12 service providers in Surrey participated in focus groups or interviews. The women and youth who participated in the study were either currently living on the street, had recently exited a street engaged life, or have stabilized and were moving on in their lives. The service providers were front-line staff who works with this population.

Based on interviews and focus groups with women and female youth and front-line service providers, the final report, *In Their Own Words* (attached as Appendix “II”) provides an assessment of services and needs for vulnerable women and youth in Surrey.

A series of three half-day collaborative planning workshops brought together a broad cross-section of government and non-profit representatives to review the findings in the report, and strategize together to identify priority projects. In terms of service gaps, a mobile crisis service centre (van) for sex workers and a women-only overnight drop-in were identified as the immediate key service-related priorities.

The SVWG has been successful in making progress on many of the priorities identified in 2015, as well as continuing to identify and respond to emerging gaps and trends.

Digital Equality (2016-2017)

Improved computer and internet access for street-engaged women and youth was identified as a need, in order for them to better access information and services, including being able to call 911 when in danger.

In 2016 and 2017, the City donated recycled cell phones and laptops to organizations working with vulnerable women and girls as part of the City's Smart Surrey Strategy. This Digital Equality Initiative is a joint-project of IT, Social Planning and Healthy Communities. A follow-up survey with the agencies that received and distributed the used IT equipment indicated that overall the equipment had a positive impact. City staff is currently planning for the distribution of additional recycled IT equipment in the coming year to agencies serving vulnerable populations in Surrey.

Anti-Stigma Training (2016)

The *In Their Own Words* research found that stigma and discrimination are common barriers for accessing services for Surrey women and girls who are street-engaged, dealing with addictions and/or mental illness, and/or involved in survival sex work.

In 2016, SVWG organized anti-stigma workshops for front-line service workers who come into contact with sex workers in the course of their work. Provided by Living in Community staff, the four-hour interactive workshops examined: individual, cultural and societal beliefs, values and understandings of sex work; how organizational culture impacts service delivery; and skills for responding effectively to the self-identified needs of sex workers.

Using a Gender Lens to Understand the Current Homeless Crisis in Surrey (2016 – 2017)

In 2016, service providers in Surrey began noticing an increasing number of women experiencing homelessness and on the streets in Surrey. In response, the SVWG initiated a research project to understand what is changing and why there are a growing number of women who are homeless in Surrey.

Research was conducted with service providers and women in Surrey who were experiencing homelessness. In November 2016, a collaborative workshop was convened with over 30 community leaders to share research results, and start to identify priorities. A Briefing Document was prepared, identifying current trends and emerging issues (attached as Appendix “III”).

SMART Van (2017)

Beginning in 2014, SVWG members worked together to secure funding for a mobile crisis service centre (van) for sex workers. The SVWG provided resources to assist the Surrey Women's Centre and Options in drafting funding proposals. The previous research conducted by the SVWG provided a strong rationale for these proposals. Funding was secured from the provincial government for the operations, and the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society contributed to the purchase and retrofit of a van.

In 2017 the Surrey Women's Centre launched the new Surrey Mobile Assault Response Team (SMART) Van. The van currently operates five nights a week, from 10:00 pm to 2:30 am, when most services are closed and women are more vulnerable. The van reaches women at the street level where they are involved in sex work, reducing barriers to access vital aid, resources and options.

Women's Resource Card and Care Packages (2017-2018)

A *Surrey Women's Resource Card* was created by the SVWG, highlighting services available for vulnerable women and girls in Surrey (attached as Appendix "IV"). The card helps to improve access to services for street-engaged women and youth.

On International Women's Day, March 8, 2018, 300 care packages were handed out to vulnerable women and girls in Surrey. Along with the resource card, the packages contained coffee cards and chocolates, warm socks, and personal hygiene items. The Surrey SMART Van distributed packages on the street, as well as through organizations that serve women and girls in Surrey. A further 200 care packages will be distributed during Homeless Action Week in October 2018.

The care packages and resource card distribution were made possible with a grant from the City's Community Grants, as well as the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society. The City's Bylaw Department staff and CUPE Local 402 donated items for the care packages.

Opioid Dialogues Report (2017 - 2018)

As is happening across BC, Surrey is experiencing a crisis in illicit drug overdose deaths linked to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and carfentanyl. Surrey has consistently had the second highest number of overdose deaths in BC. Although women represent a smaller proportion of illicit drug overdose deaths, vulnerable females face unique barriers and have needs that are currently not being adequately met.

With funding from the BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, in 2017 and 2018, SVWG hosted a series of four dialogue sessions with women and girls, which focused on substance use and the current opioid crisis. Dialogues were held at social service locations such as shelters, women's centres, transition houses and drop-ins. During each of the sessions, participants responded to questions about substance use and discussed their own experiences.

A report summarizing results was released in 2018: *I Never Thought It Would Happen to Me: Opioid Dialogues with Women and Girls in Surrey* (attached as Appendix "V"). The research results provide valuable information for decision-makers to deliver evidence-based service delivery that effectively responds to the needs of vulnerable women. The report has been

distributed widely to non-profit organizations and key decision makers including governments and funders.

Leaders' Forum (2018)

A key role of the SVWG is to convene forums and workshops focused specifically on vulnerable women and girls in Surrey that explore emerging trends, identify collective priorities, share information and best practices, and foster cross-sector relationships.

On June 15, 2018, over 50 participants from Surrey non-profit agencies, provincial ministries, the School District, Fraser Health, universities, the RCMP, Federal Corrections, the City, and the broader community attended a SVWG Leaders Forum.

The forum included a powerful keynote by Indigenous lawyer Michele Guerin, who shared the testimony that she had provided to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Her heartbreaking testimony included the recounting of tragic life events that led to Michele, at the age of 14 years, being homeless and sexually assaulted multiple times on the streets of Surrey.

The forum also included updates on Surrey-based projects focussed on vulnerable women and girls including:

- Research presentation on PCRS's Keeping Girls Safe Housing Project;
- SMART – Surrey Mobilization and Resiliency Table;
- New housing projects for women in Surrey – Atira's Little's Place and Elizabeth Fry's amalgamated shelter, housing, and health centre and FRAFCA Aboriginal Youth Housing;
- Opioid Dialogues for Women and Girls in Surrey highlights; and
- Operations reports for the night-time mobile service vans for women in Surrey.

City of Surrey: Council Initiatives Funding

Since the SVWG formed in 2013, it has been successful in securing a number of small project-specific grants from a variety of sources. Significant in-kind support has been provided by SVWG members who share a strong commitment to the value of this collaboration focusing on the unique needs of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey.

In order to sustain the momentum of this community-driven collaborative and ensure that the SVWG is able to continue to be convened and be productive in undertaking projects, the SVWG is requesting a contribution of \$15,000 from the Council Initiatives Fund. This funding will be used to retain a consultant to facilitate the SVWG and Executive Committee meetings, prepare funding proposals and other documents, and assist in conducting projects.

Appendix "VI" attached to this report documents the balance in the Council Initiatives Fund based on an assumption that Council will approve the recommendations of this report.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

This Corporate Report supports the following Desired Outcomes (DO) and Strategic Directions (SD) identified in the Sustainability Charter 2.0, and most especially DO25 and SD20 highlighted below.

Inclusion

- DO2:** Surrey is a caring and compassionate city that learns about and supports its residents of all backgrounds, demographics and life experiences.
- DO4:** Gender equity is realized throughout Surrey's economy, and political, community and family life.
- DO9:** Supports and services are in place to prevent and help people transition out of poverty.
- DO13:** Appropriate and affordable housing is available to meet the needs of all households in Surrey.
- DO24:** Surrey has a strong social infrastructure that supports the needs of its diverse and growing population.
- DO25:** Surrey has a culture of collaboration and innovation to solve complex social problems.
- SD6:** Create, enhance and increase awareness of services that support people with economic barriers.
- SD9:** Facilitate the development of shelter facilities and supportive housing as outlined in the Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surrey.
- SD20:** Foster a culture of collaboration and the generation of new ideas and methods for solving complex social issues.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended that Council:

- Receive this report for information; and
- Approve a contribution of \$15,000 from the Council Initiatives Fund for the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group (SVWG) to support its continued efforts to collaborate on understanding and responding to the needs of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey.

Original signed by
Jean Lamontagne
General Manager, Planning & Development

Original signed by
Kam Grewal, CPA, CMA
General Manager, Finance

Appendix "I" Corporate Report No. R098; 2015

Appendix "II" In Their Own Words: A service and housing needs assessment for vulnerable women and youth in Surrey (2015)

Appendix "III" Briefing Document: Using a Gendered Lens to Understand Homelessness in Surrey (2017)

Appendix "IV" Surrey Women's Resource Card (2018)

Appendix "V" I Never Thought it Would Happen to Me: Opioid Dialogues with Women and Girls in Surrey (2018)

Appendix "VI" Council Initiatives Fund Balance

AM/ss



CORPORATE REPORT

NO: *R098*COUNCIL DATE: **June 15, 2015**

REGULAR COUNCILTO: **Mayor & Council**DATE: **June 10, 2015**FROM: **Crime Reduction Strategy Manager
General Manager, Planning & Development**FILE: **7450-30**SUBJECT: **Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group - Update**

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager's Office and the Planning & Development Department recommend that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to inform Council about the work of the Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group (VWGWG) and its progress in the City of Surrey. A final report from Phase I of the project titled "In Their own Words: A Service and Housing Needs Assessment for Vulnerable Women and Youth in Surrey" is attached as Appendix I.

BACKGROUND

The Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group is a multi-agency group which was formed in 2013 with the goal of taking a proactive approach to supporting vulnerable women and girls in Surrey.

The VWGWG consists of a variety of local social service agencies (Elizabeth Fry Society, Options Community Resources Society, Pacific Community Resources Society, Servants Anonymous Society, Atira Women's Resource Centre, YWCA and Surrey Women's Centre), City of Surrey staff (Crime Reduction and Social Planning), Surrey RCMP, Fraser Health and BC Housing. All community-based agencies who contribute to the working group provide, or have specific programs that provide, support to vulnerable women or girls in the Surrey area.

While the exact number of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey is currently unclear, we know that in the 2014 Homeless Count 149 homeless (street & sheltered) women were identified in Surrey. We do not have estimates of the number of women currently participating in the sex trade on the street in Surrey.

Of particular note is Surrey's large and growing Aboriginal population. In response to the 2011 National Household Survey, 10,955 residents indicated Aboriginal identity (versus 11,945 Vancouver residents). The Surrey School District has the highest number of Aboriginal students of any school district in Metro Vancouver. Since Aboriginal females in Canada tend to be at much higher risk of experiencing violence as compared to non-Aboriginal females, Surrey's demographics indicate a need for projects in this area.

Given the fact that little available research on vulnerable women and girls exists in Surrey, the VWGWG initiated a research project funded by the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society, to develop a better understanding of the service and housing needs of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey. The research project's final report is attached as "Appendix I".

The initial research project involved the following steps:

- **October – November 2014** – Background research including literature review, data collection, development of interview and focus group questions, including a focus group with professionals working in the area in Surrey. This stage was designed to refine the project scope and develop an initial understanding of the issues facing vulnerable women and girls who are homeless or provisionally housed in Surrey, as well as to ensure that the project included all relevant subpopulations to build an adequate understanding of the issues.
- **December 2014 – January 2015** – Focus groups with the target population were conducted with the participants being recommended and invited by service providers in the community. The intent of these focus groups was to receive input on the issues facing vulnerable women and girls and to develop ideas for addressing those issues. Twenty dollar honorariums, a meal, childcare and transit tickets were made available to the participants. The focus groups included women who were identified as being either female youth, Aboriginal women, individuals facing mental health or addiction challenges, sex workers, women who were recently released from prison, and/or women fleeing violence. Where possible, consideration was given for geographic representation in order to allow for representation of women and girls from all areas of the City, as well as women who were seniors, immigrants and/or refugees.
- **January 2015 – April 2015** - Interviews were conducted with formerly vulnerable/homeless women and girls in Surrey in an effort to understand what was working, to determine what factors made the difference in becoming stably housed, and to seek recommendations from service providers. This stage also involved analysis of the input, identification of key indicators and trends, and the development of recommendations for action. Suggestions for service delivery enhancement to design services to meet the needs of vulnerable women and girls as well as to reduce the barriers that prevent women from accessing help were developed and form the basis of the final report.

The final report for the research project (attached as Appendix I) resulted in a wealth of input and ideas from the 50 women and female youth and 12 service providers in Surrey who participated in a focus group or interview from November 2014 to February 2015. The women and youth who participated in the study are either currently living on the street, have recently exited a street engaged life, or have stabilized and are moving on in their lives. The service providers are front-line staff who works with this population.

Key themes that emerged from the research include:

- Stigma;
- Safety;
- Mental health;
- Addictions;
- Housing;
- Aboriginal services;
- Navigating the system;
- Ongoing support;
- Youth transitioning to adulthood; and
- Education and job placement.

DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

There exists in Surrey a range of services for vulnerable populations, however it is clear from our initial research project (which involved interviews with this population group and service providers), that vulnerable girls and women in Surrey are not always accessing the services they need.

Given the strong foundation of work and collaboration developed by the VWGWG and the “In Their Own Words” research report (attached as Appendix I), the City of Surrey applied in January 2015 for funding support from the Province’s Civil Forfeiture funds to support further work in this area. In April of 2015, the Province announced a one-time \$30,000 grant through a contribution from the Civil Forfeiture Office in partnership with Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, Ministry of Justice, Province of British Columbia to the City of Surrey for a project entitled, “Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Project – Enhancing Safety of Women and Girls on the Street”.

The intent of this project is to bring together leaders from key stakeholder organizations in Surrey to address the identified service gaps for vulnerable women and girls in Surrey. These meetings will be convened by Councillors Villeneuve and LeFranc. The project will also be supported and shaped by ongoing input from the target population - vulnerable women and girls.

This project will include three workshop sessions.

1. **Situational Analysis** – In this first session, stakeholder partners will look at what is needed in Surrey by reviewing the VWGWG research project findings (Appendix I) and by identifying current services, the required services and existing gaps.
OUTCOME: Creation of an inventory of services and an initial project concept.

2. **Concept Development** – In this second session, stakeholder partners will determine more precisely what services can be enhanced or better coordinated and integrated, where new services are needed and how to make information more accessible.
OUTCOME: This workshop will create a vision for the project and stakeholder organizations to determine what roles they can support or lead. The following types of services, facilities and approaches will be considered:

- a. Information sharing – Determine how to better share information to the target population and front line workers. For example, dedicated web site, flyers, peer to peer.
 - b. Outreach – Develop/rework strategies, approaches and services to better support and enhance the safety of the target population. For example, a night-time drop-in centre, outreach van, outreach workers, and/or free cell phone program.
 - c. Training opportunities/support for front line workers about how to deal with the vicarious trauma associated with working with people who experience extreme personal violence. Another option is to explore the interest of police and front-line City staff (eg. bylaws officers) in training opportunities to increase knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity of the issues of vulnerable women and girls.
 - d. Development of public education campaigns about combatting violence against vulnerable women.
3. Initiate the Process of Implementation – In this third and final session, stakeholder partners will more precisely define the proposed project(s), begin detailed planning and launch the implementation phase.
- OUTCOME:** A project to enhance the safety of women on the street in Surrey will begin implementation.
- a. Finalizing the Concept – determining what is needed to implement actions, costs associated, etc.
 - b. Identifying partners – The partners who are able to commit to the project at this time are identified.
 - c. Identifying resources – Stakeholder partners commit the required resources for the project
 - d. Identifying measures of success
 - e. Determining the project timeline.

A 'Reference Group' of vulnerable women and female youth will review the work of the key partners and provide input to ensure that the outcomes will be as effective as possible in addressing service needs. The Reference Group will convene prior to each workshop and will provide ongoing feedback. When possible, representatives of the Reference Group will attend the three workshops to present the group's feedback. Members of the Reference Group will be supported by trained front line staff from Surrey Women's organizations.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

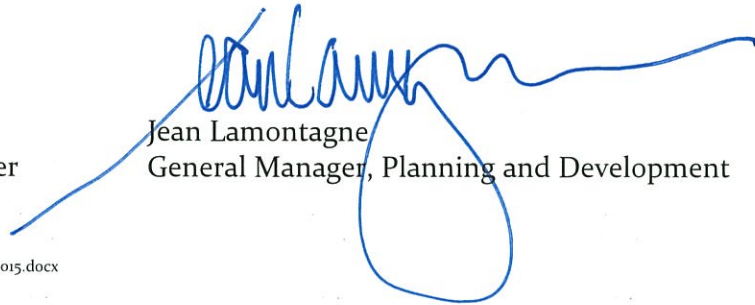
The Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group and the projects which are evolving from it, support action item SC11 in the City's Sustainability Charter which identifies the Crime Reduction Strategy and the Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents as the foundations for building a safe community.

CONCLUSION

There exists a range of services for vulnerable populations, including people with mental illness, addictions, and those experiencing homelessness, however vulnerable girls and women in Surrey are not always accessing the services they need. The VWG WG is well positioned to develop a clear understanding of what vulnerable women and girls in Surrey need to enhance their safety. By working collaboratively to develop the required concept and actions that meet those needs, we will be able to better meet the needs of this vulnerable population in Surrey.



Colleen Kerr
Crime Reduction Strategy Manager



Jean Lamontagne
General Manager, Planning and Development

CK/mc

q:\admin\managers\copies corp reports\2015\vwgwg june 10,2015.docx
MC 6/10/15 1:31 PM

Appendix I – Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Research Project - In Their own Words: A Service and Housing Needs Assessment for Vulnerable Women and Youth in Surrey.

Appendices available upon request

SURREY
VULNERABLE
WOMEN
GIRLS +
RESEARCH
PROJECT

In Their Own Words. A service and housing needs assessment for vulnerable women and youth in Surrey.



Funded by:



Prepared for: The Surrey Vulnerable
Women and Girls Working Group
Prepared by: M. Ninow Consulting

acknowledgements

The Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group would like to thank the women and youth who participated in focus groups for this project. We know that answering our questions and sharing your stories was not always an easy thing to do. We appreciate your willingness to contribute your thoughts and ideas because you want to see conditions for women and girls in Surrey get better. Thank you!

We would also like to thank social service sector professionals and their organizations in Surrey for participating in the project. Your contributions have helped provide a contextual framework for the project. Your support also helped women and youth participate in a safe and effective way in the focus groups.


Finally, this project would not have been possible without financial support from the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society. Thank you for choosing to support this much needed research.



vulnerable

“being susceptible to risk factors and vulnerable populations are those that do not have equitable access to protective factors and societal resources that lead to resiliency”¹

¹ Pruegger, VJ & Richetr-Salamons, S. (2012).

A close-up, profile view of a woman with long brown hair looking out a window. The window has white blinds, and the background shows a blurred view of a building with many windows.

In Their Own Words

This research project has resulted in a wealth of input and ideas from the 50 women and female youth and 12 service providers in Surrey who participated in a focus group or interview from November 2014 to February 2015. The women and youth who participated in the study are either currently living on the street, have recently exited a street engaged life, or have stabilized and are moving on in their lives. The service providers are front-line staff who work with these populations. The findings are presented in detail in the body of the report. The following list of emerging themes has been drawn from the full report and provides a synopsis of the content.

Central Themes

STIGMA

Stigma and discrimination are common barriers for accessing services in Surrey for women and female youth who are street engaged, dealing with addictions and/or mental illness, and participating in the sex trade. Participants report that professional staff in many services in Surrey need more training for working with street engaged populations, especially doctors, nurses, emergency responders, police officers and government ministry workers.

SAFETY

Participants report that life on the streets in Surrey is not safe for vulnerable women and female youth. They suggest that safe, women only drop-ins are needed, especially at night-time in Surrey. Access to free emergency cell phones and more outreach workers and police officers who have received training on how to work with vulnerable women and youth on the street are also needed to improve street safety.

MENTAL HEALTH

Accessing mental health services and trauma counselling is very important for many women and female youth who wish to leave a street engaged life or exit prostitution. Many focus group participants report that childhood trauma and/or ongoing violence and abuse have had a significant and ongoing impact on their lives. Service providers also report high levels of trauma related conditions and mental health concerns in the female street-engaged population. Both participants and service providers feel that the trauma and mental health concerns need to be addressed through counselling and therapy to support positive transformation and stabilization. Unfortunately focus group participants report having great difficulty accessing mental health and counselling services in Surrey in a timely manner. Youth are also finding it very difficult to access free/low cost trauma counselling and mental health services.

Focus group participants and service providers also suggested that mental health services be provided “in community” in more informal settings rather than at the Surrey Mental Health offices. They feel this may help people who recently have been street engaged to access those services more successfully.

ADDICTIONS

There are a range of effective addictions services in Surrey, and many focus group participants report good experiences using these services; however, waitlists and gaps in between services (detox, treatment and recovery) reduce the successes for women who are struggling with addictions. Inadequate or short term housing also creates challenges for women who are attempting to stay clean and sober.

Many of the focus group participants report struggling with both mental illness and addictions. Unfortunately, participants and service providers report concurrent disorder treatment in Surrey is limited, and women are often referred to services outside of the City.

Some unlicensed and unregulated recovery houses in Surrey are unsafe for women and can challenge the recovery process. There are reports of drug sales, the pushing of pharmaceuticals, overcrowding and sexual exploitation in some of these houses. Women report losing a month's rent and being kicked out for minor infractions. Lack of adequate food has also been reported.

HOUSING

For most of the participants housing has been an ongoing challenge for them as they have stabilized their lives. A range of housing options are needed in Surrey including: basic affordable housing for people with low income, transitional housing with basic life skills training for women and learning to live on their own, low barrier housing for women who are still using, drug free environments for women who are clean and sober, and safe and supported housing for women dealing with mental illness and concurrent disorders.

Vulnerable youth in Surrey face even tougher housing challenges. There is one youth safe house in Surrey for youth under 19 years and stays are time limited. Some youth focus group participants who are receiving services in Surrey are living at the safe house in Maple Ridge.

When youth are transitioning out of foster care many do not have the life skills to find and maintain housing. They suggest that transition housing where youth could learn gradually to become independent would be really helpful. Landlords are often hesitant to rent to youth.

ABORIGINAL SERVICES

Aboriginal focus group participants report that Aboriginal services and Aboriginal staff in mainstream organizations can make a significant difference for Aboriginal women who are seeking to transform their lives. Surrey has very limited options for Aboriginal women seeking assistance within their cultural framework. The Aboriginal population in Surrey is growing and the need for this type of service is growing as well.

NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

Both women and youth participants talked about their need for assistance in navigating bureaucratic systems and understanding what their options for service and supports are. They expressed frustration about trying to access information about services, the conditions they may be grappling with (mental health and addictions), and the supports available to them. Providing in person support and also training for accessing information on line would both be helpful.

ONGOING SUPPORT

Developing supportive relationships with peers and support workers is an important part of the healing process for women and youth who are stabilizing. Peer support groups and ongoing support from a counselor, support worker, youth worker or social worker has been essential for most of the participants, especially youth, who have achieved stability in their lives. Building relationships can start at drop-ins and through outreach and continue on through the healing process.

YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

Youth aged 19 – 25 report often getting caught in the gap between youth and adult services. They say they need additional support to navigate the transition to adulthood.

EDUCATION AND JOB PLACEMENT

After leaving a street-engaged life and making positive changes women and youth who would like to maintain their newly found stabilization require education, job training and job placement. Many of the focus group participants talked about their need to finish high school or get some job training before looking for work. Low cost options, financial resources, and ongoing support are needed to make education and job training and placement successful options. Attaining economic stability is a fundamental piece of the process and will help ensure that the positive changes achieved become permanent.

“For most of the participants housing has been an ongoing challenge for them as they have stabilized their lives.”

DEFINITION

For the purpose of this project the term vulnerable has been defined as “being susceptible to risk factors and vulnerable populations are those that do not have equitable access to protective factors and societal resources that lead to resiliency”.¹

The participants selected for the focus groups were from one or more of the following subpopulations:

- ▶ HOMELESS
- ▶ SEX WORKERS
- ▶ DEALING WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS OR UNTREATED TRAUMA
- ▶ DEALING WITH ADDICTION
- ▶ LIVING IN POVERTY
- ▶ FLEEING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (Intimate partner or parental)

¹ Pruegger, VJ & Richetr-Salamons, S. (2012).

Contents

Introduction	7
Project Methodology	7
Definition	6
Research Findings	8
Barriers to Access	8
The Ideal Service	10
Gaps in Service	11
Services Outside of Surrey	15
Housing Needs	16
Staying Safe	18
Turning Points – What made change possible?	19
Successful Transitions – Support for achieving goals and maintaining stability	21
Recommendations	23
Appendix 1	
Focus Group Questions	24
Appendix 2	
Participating Organizations	25
Appendix 3	
Relevant Literature	25

Introduction

The Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls (SVWG) Working Group was formed in 2013 to collaboratively understand and address the needs of vulnerable females in Surrey. For this project Working Group members wanted to understand the housing needs and service gaps of vulnerable women and girls in Surrey. The Working Group sought funding from the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society to conduct a small research project. With funds successfully secured from the Society the Working Group hired social planning consultant, Michelle Ninow to design and conduct the housing needs and service gaps research project.

This report presents the findings from the research project. It focuses primarily on the feedback received from women, female youth, and service providers who work with vulnerable women and girls in Surrey. Their feedback has been organized into central themes and is supported by some contextual information, but hopefully their voices will shine through in the report and provide the reader with a clear understanding of their perceptions and lived experience.

Project Methodology

The research was conducted using a series of focus groups and interviews from November 2014 to February 2015 as indicated in the table below.

PARTICIPANT GROUP	MEETING LOCATION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Women – Focus Group	OWL at Positive Haven (Lookout Society)	8
Women – Focus Group	Cornerstone Drop-In (E. Fry Society)	11
Women – Focus Group	Ellendale (E. Fry Society)	9
Female Youth – Focus Group	Guildford Youth Resource Centre (Pacific Community Resource Society)	8
Women – Focus Group	Whole and Complete Women of Value	14
Social Service Sector Professionals – Focus Group	City of Surrey	10
RCMP - Interview	Surrey RCMP Detachment	1
BC Housing - Interview	Telephone	1
		TOTAL 62

The focus groups were developed by the researcher in co-operation with the host organizations, and the SVWG Working Group. The host organizations contacted the potential participants, reviewed the proposed focus group questions and suggested changes to ensure the participants were respected in the process. Host organization staff also sat in on the focus group to ensure the participants felt comfortable and safe, they provided contextual information and they assisted participants who became emotionally “triggered” when responding to the questions. They were also available for participants after the focus group, in case they needed to debrief.

In total 5 focus groups were held, one of which was for youth. The focus groups were held in locations that participants were familiar with and where they felt comfortable. Participants received a \$20 honorarium for participating in a

focus group. They also received transit tickets and childcare was offered but it was not needed for any of the focus group participants. A meal was served at each focus group as well.

Participants for the professionals focus group were identified by members of the SVWG Working Group. They were asked to suggest potential participants who worked on the frontline in Surrey with vulnerable women and girls.

In April 2015 a follow up session was held to for participants to provide feedback about the report findings. Additional comments from this session have been incorporated into the document.

The focus group questions, a list of the organizations which provided professionals for the focus group and the interviews, and a list of relevant literature can be found in the Appendices.



In Their Own Words

“When staff do not seem to be able to relate to my life experience they can’t really help me.”

– Focus group participant

Research Findings

In this section the experiences, opinions and ideas of women and female youth in Surrey, as shared in the 5 focus groups, are presented. The participants are at a range of places in their stabilization process. Some have exited the sex trade, gone through drug treatment and started a new life years ago. For other participants the process is relatively recent and for others they are just starting the process or still “street engaged”. The variation in perspective will be evident in the comments. Some of the points may even seem to contradict each other and the reader should keep in mind that the differences reflect the individual nature of each participant’s experiences.

The ideas and thoughts that are presented in this report are reflective of what was heard in the focus groups and interviews. In many cases they have been presented verbatim. To provide some context and corroborating information a group of service providers who serve vulnerable women and female youth in Surrey also participated in a focus group. Their comments are woven throughout and they are clearly identified.

The findings are organized according to the general phases of the stabilization process. The first section discusses barriers that the participants have faced accessing service especially coming directly from the street. Second, a brief description of the ideal service based on participants’ comments is presented. The third section presents the gaps in service identified by participants. The fourth section focuses on housing needs in Surrey. Fifth, the participants share their ideas for staying safe in Surrey. Sixth is a section on the services that are accessed by and for vulnerable women and girls. In section seven, participants share the key turning points in their stabilization process. The final section addresses achieving and maintaining stability.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

In the focus groups participants talked about the services they access in Surrey and they also talked about how difficult it is to access some of those services due to the barriers they face on a daily basis. Below is a list of the main barriers they identified.

STIGMA

One of the most prevalent barriers identified by participants is how a vulnerable person is perceived and treated by professionals, such as doctors, nurses, police officers, and government ministry workers, when they access service. Many focus group participants talked about feeling judged, talked down to, discredited, or being treated as second rate or untouchable when they were seeking assistance because they were homeless, addicted, had a mental illness and/or worked in the sex trade. They talked of experiencing bullying, disrespect, leering, and a lack of compassion, empathy, and understanding by staff in a wide range of Surrey organizations. They said in some interactions with service providers they felt faceless or non-existent, like just another number. In some cases they were denied what most people would consider essential service, because of who they were perceived to be.

SERVICE ENVIRONMENT NOT DESIGNED FOR PEOPLE FROM THE STREET

The women and youth talked about their discomfort in seeking services in environments where they do not feel they fit in and from people they feel cannot relate to their street life experience. Women also spoke of the challenges accessing service in a hospital/medical environment where staff does not have the training or experience to be able to effectively assist people from the street. Service provider participants agreed, suggesting that some services, such as mental health, might be better administered in community rather than in an office environment, initially.

WAITLISTS & PRE-REQUIREMENTS TO MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SERVICES

In seeking mental health services in Surrey vulnerable women report waiting for months and years for services such as psychiatric help, counselling and diagnosis. This appeared to be the norm for the women who participated in the focus groups. This is a significant point when one considers that most, if not all, of the women and youth involved in this research project talked about untreated early life trauma as a key contributing factor in their vulnerability. A few clients talked positively about the rapid access for group therapy sessions at Surrey Memorial Hospital, which required only one phone call to access and no wait time to start.

For a person struggling with addictions there are a range of barriers to accessing detox, treatment and recovery services. It begins with getting put on a wait list when the decision is finally made to seek help. Focus group participants talked about the need to be able to access detox services as soon as they are ready to make a change. A few participants mentioned that they were able to access detox faster if they were referred by the hospital.

The transition from detox services to treatment can also be difficult if treatment beds are not immediately available. Participants speak of feeling very vulnerable after detox. They report that if you have to wait for treatment for any length of time everything can be undone so quickly.

Another barrier to accessing service are the pre-requirements before the needed service could be accessed. These included a three week life skills course prior to doing intake with a mental health worker or quitting smoking before accessing drug treatment because the centres do not allow smoking, or addressing addictions before accessing mental health services. While these pre-requirements may make sense from a service provision perspective, they can be a barrier to access for those face them.

TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES

Another barrier mentioned by participants was lack of transportation options or inability to afford public transportation. Some women said they knew that if they declared their poverty to a bus driver they might get a free ride; some felt uncomfortable doing that publicly. Having services clustered together would be helpful for limiting the amount of transit required. Also some drug treatment facilities and recovery houses are not conveniently located for access using public transportation.

One participant spoke positively about an Early Childhood Development program which she attended with her child at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre. The program provided shuttle bus transportation to and from the Centre. The free transportation made it possible for her to attend the program.

A participant identified the Maxxine Wright Centre as a comprehensive service centre for women with addictions who are pregnant or who have young children. They liked having several key services (doctor, A & D counselling, income assistance worker) located with the housing.

LACK OF CHILD CARE AND SERVICES WHICH INCLUDE CHILDREN

Lack of accessible child care while attending meetings and appointments also created a barrier for women with young children. Women with older children mentioned that there is a distinct lack of programming for women with children older than two. Having older male children can also make it very difficult to find emergency housing.

AVOIDING PEOPLE

Sometimes a troubled relationship with a particular staff person or another client at the service can keep a person from seeking that service. Also, participants said, if a person has gone through treatment and/or recovery it can be challenging to be in an environment where there are people who are currently using (either in a service or housing).

LOCATION OF THE SERVICE PERCEIVED AS UNSAFE OR THE SERVICE ITSELF IS PERCEIVED AS UNSAFE

Youth mentioned that if a service is offered at a location that is perceived as unsafe they might choose not to attend that service.

Recovery houses fill a valuable role for people who have gone through detox and treatment and are seeking to learn how to live a life without drugs or alcohol. Unfortunately recovery houses can become part of the problem if they are unlicensed and unregulated. Participants spoke of the challenges they have faced living in an unsafe recovery house, where prostitution, and even drug selling can occur.

FAMILY DOES NOT SUPPORT ANY CHANGE

Women talked about their husbands and intimate partners not wanting them to access any services. For some it was because their husbands did not want to admit a need for assistance such as welfare or food banks. For others it was because their partner (or pimp) wanted to continue controlling them through an active addiction or an untreated mental illness or by abusing them.



In Their Own Words

“Mental health services in Surrey are inadequate – if you are not actively trying to kill yourself – you won’t get any help – they send you home. They deny service.”

– Focus group participant

THE IDEAL SERVICE

Focus group participants talked about what they would find ideal in a service they were hoping to access. Their ideas have been put together into one description of an ideal service in Surrey:

At the ideal service, focus group participants said, they would be able to connect with staff on a personal level, preferably on an individual basis. Staff would be comfortable working with people who have street experience and ideally have had similar experiences in their past. Staff would be non-judgemental and compassionate. As a new client you would feel immediately listened to. Helpful information would be shared readily and all questions would be answered if possible.



The atmosphere of the service would be casual and the women would feel comfortable being themselves there. They would know that they can arrive right off the street and they will be helped. There would be a guide person to support them through the process and help them navigate the system. This would be especially helpful for youth accessing services. Being a women only service would definitely help women feel more comfortable accessing the service.

At the ideal service there would be little staff turnover and the women and youth would work with the same staff people over time. They would not have to constantly “tell their story” before being helped; they would develop relationships with the people who are assisting them.

There would be no waitlists, pre-requisites or other hoops to jump through to get service. Service delivery would be flexible in order to serve people who are experiencing chaotic lives. The service would be either co-located with other services and/or housing, or easily accessible by transit. Alternatively there would be a ride service or shuttle to make sure clients could get there. If appropriate, some services might also be offered in the community at venues which the women and youth often visit.

The service would be entirely free – no additional service or dispensing fees. Women and youth could continue to receive services for as long as they needed and no one would push them out the door because their allotted time was up. When they were ready to move on they would be connected with supports appropriate for their needs. Former clients would be welcomed back as volunteers and mentors for current clients.

GAPS IN SERVICE

Participants were asked what services they feel are missing or inadequate in Surrey. The discussion was wide ranging and the key ideas have been organized into themes.

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Many of the focus group participants spoke about their ongoing challenges with mental illness and getting access to the services they need. They spoke about how difficult it is to find information about mental health services and then how difficult it is to access the service once you know about it. Some women expressed tremendous frustration about trying to get access to mental health services. Some felt they were being actively denied service. Some said they were willing to try faking a psychotic breakdown or suicide to get service. Focus group participants talked about waiting years to access service. Even youth spoke about waiting several months for assistance, with suicide attempts in the interim. They identified the need for free or low cost trauma counsellors in Surrey.

Service providers agree that high risk clients wait too long for mental health services in Surrey. While crisis intervention in Surrey is good, they say getting access to services before the crisis point is difficult. They also emphasize that the need for counselling, and treatment for mental health conditions, especially Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is high in the street engaged population and may grow as the City grows and the problems compound.

Continuing treatment can also be challenging. One professional said “Once in a mental health program, it can be difficult for clients to make it to all of their appointments in the office environment. The professional model doesn’t work especially when they are unwell”. If they are still relatively unstable it may be difficult to keep track of time and be organized enough to go to a meeting. If clients miss appointments they get a phone call and a letter and then that is it there is no other follow up. The length of time between appointments can also be problematic.

Focus group participants talked of their discomfort in accessing mental health services at the Surrey Mental Health Building. Not only is the building a glass office tower, which they identified as very alienating, it is located next to a neighbourhood which presents many triggers and temptations.

Focus group participants who have stabilized feel that having an undiagnosed or misdiagnosed mental illness or not having access to adequate counselling and treatment for mental illness and/or trauma slowed down and hindered their stabilization process. One participant, in her 40’s, talked about the liberating experience of having a lifelong mental illness recently diagnosed and receiving the proper medication for the first time in her life. She only wished it could have happened earlier in her life. Several other participants talked about having their mental illness misdiagnosed. Some attributed this misdiagnosis to a lack of a regular general practitioner and having to access medical assistance through walk in clinics with rotating doctors and short visit times. They also said they were more likely to receive a prescription for a pharmaceutical to address their mental illness than to receive regular counselling and therapy.

CONCURRENT DISORDERS TREATMENT

Women identified that they need concurrent disorder services in Surrey. Some women talked about their mental illnesses as a barrier to accessing addictions treatment. Some women who have stabilized identified concurrent disorder treatment as key to their transition.

Service providers were also clear that more concurrent disorder treatment options should be available in Surrey. Presently they are referring clients to the Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addiction.

ADDICTIONS SUPPORTS AND HOUSING

Participants identified several organizations providing a range of addictions services in Surrey. They spoke positively about several of the specific services that they are using, or have used in the past. These services include Ellendale, the Sobering Centre, the Daytox at Creekside, Phoenix, and AA and NA meetings. Unfortunately waitlists and time lapses in between detox, treatment and recovery services reduce the successes for women who are trying to overcome addictions.

Some participants mentioned that when dealing with an addiction you need a safe place to live with no time limits. Housing instability can be a barrier to successfully dealing with an addiction. Service providers agree that more housing stability is required for women who are going through drug treatment. They need to know that there will be housing options pre and post treatment.

Participants discussed the need for more licensed/regulated recovery houses for women; most are currently for men. Youth also identified the need for more licensed/regulated recovery houses for youth; there are only 2 in the region and one of them is currently shut down. Youth also spoke about the need for unisex rooms in recovery houses. They reported that currently one of the recovery houses has co-ed rooms, when numbers require it. The female youth reported that this coed sharing of rooms makes them feel uncomfortable. According to youth participants, detox and treatment are provided at Peak House in Vancouver and Portage in Keremeos but stays are limited to 10 weeks. They would like to have more options for detox closer to Surrey.

“Waiting – I had a two month wait for detox – I was pregnant and homeless; in the end I miscarried.”

Focus group participant

Continued on next page



In Their Own Words

“Aboriginal women need their own people to talk to – it really makes a difference – it was important for me to have that personal connection with an Aboriginal woman before I could start working on my stuff.”

– Focus group participant

ADDICTIONS SUPPORTS AND HOUSING

CONTINUED

Service providers also have concerns about unlicensed recovery houses in Surrey, which they feel put women at risk. They report that the houses are not well monitored and there are regular reports of women being assaulted in the recovery houses. Licensed/regulated recovery houses have long wait lists.

Women also spoke about needing safe drug free environments once they have gone through detox, treatment and recovery. They report still feeling like their sobriety was fragile and it would not take much to cause a relapse. Addictions counselling is much more difficult to find once a person is out of the treatment system for 6 months or a year; participants report still needing support at that point in their process. Some participants mentioned AA and NA as being really valuable for the ongoing long term support they provide.

Service providers report that women, who are using drugs on the street, are regularly incarcerated. This does not help them to consider addressing their addictions. Service providers report that women who are leaving prison or jail often get back into addictions because it is what they know. Release from prison, however, does provide a unique opportunity to begin work on staying clean, if everything is lined up for them. An alternative to incarceration, providing a more supportive response to the addiction, might get more women deciding to begin working on getting clean.

A final service gap in addictions that participants identified is related to the families of women and youth dealing with addictions. Families need counselling to deal with the trauma of having a member who is struggling with addiction. They need a family support system.

ACCESSIBLE MEDICAL SERVICE FOR THE STREET ENGAGED

Focus group participants talked about their experiences as street involved women seeking medical services at Surrey Memorial Hospital, local clinics and doctors' offices. For the most part service access was difficult. There were several stories about going to the emergency room repeatedly to get assistance with a medical condition and being turned away, labelled as drug seeking, or otherwise deterred. In some cases the diagnosis was eventually determined to be quite serious, but treatment was delayed because of the reception these women and youth received.

Youth focus group participants stated that they would like to be able to access more youth clinics. While there are currently youth clinics in Surrey, Langley, New Westminster and Pitt Meadows – they all have very limited hours.

Focus group participants did talk about positive experiences at some local health centres such as the Jim Pattison Outpatient Care and Surgery Centre (free shuttles) and the Alliance Clinic (assigned one doctor who knows your whole story).

Oak Tree Clinic in Vancouver was also mentioned positively – as a place where people with addictions are understood and where trauma counselling is available. They also spoke very positively of the nursing care available through the Nightshift bus.

Several women who were recovering addicts talked about being prescribed medications to which they eventually became addicted. It appears that their doctors were unaware of the impacts of prescribing certain medications to recovering addicts.



DROP-INS

Some participants spoke positively about the drop-ins in Surrey that they currently visit such as the Cornerstone (E. Fry), Positive Haven (Lookout), Surrey Urban Mission and the Front Room (Lookout). Both women and youth identified the need for more women only drop-ins and drop-ins which are open at night in Surrey. Women talked about the need for a women only place in Surrey to have a shower, do laundry, and store their stuff in a locker. They spoke about the facility that WISH runs in Vancouver. Service providers agree that this type of facility is needed in Surrey. A service provider also reported that many of the women she works with do not feel safe going to the Front Room to receive services. These women have had negative experiences with some of the other clients at the Front Room. In addition, if a woman is trying to stay clean it is not the best environment for her.

Other women talked about wanting a women only community centre or a “Carnegie Centre type facility”. Finally, participants identified the need for breakfast time drop-ins with food. Meal options in the morning are limited in Surrey.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Youth participants talked about the importance of being able to find information when they need it and being able to have that information in plain language. Having a neutral helper to assist with accessing information and making decisions would be really helpful.

Both the youth and women talked about wanting to have the information they need more readily available. This would include information about the conditions (mental illness, chronic illnesses and addictions) they might have along with the service details. Focus group participants suggested that information about mental health, addictions, dealing with abuse, working in the sex trade should be more widely available to all people. One participant suggested that the City have a mental health page on its website. Others suggested that information on the topics listed above be available at the doctor's

offices, in schools and grocery stores. Service providers agreed that Surrey needs a service manual that lists all of the organizations in the City and what they offer.

Some participants talked about the need for training in how to look for services and information on line. This would be especially helpful for some older women who are not comfortable accessing information online. Participants also said that sometimes what they really need is another human being to speak with. Not voice mail options or online information and forms.

Women identified the need for an online and a physical notice board for communicating with one another and sharing information. They felt that this would help them find suitable roommates.

ABORIGINAL SERVICES

Aboriginal women who participated in the focus groups spoke about the value they place on being able to access Aboriginal service providers. They said having an Aboriginal woman to speak with and work with on their issues has made a real difference to them. They also spoke of the benefits of the women's sweat lodges at Cweningitel and the traditional healing circles at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre. They would like to be able to work with more Aboriginal staff and participate in more cultural activities.

Service providers agree that more services for vulnerable Aboriginal women in Surrey are needed, such as an Aboriginal women's shelter. Service providers report that when Aboriginal women leave more northerly and rural reserves and end up in Surrey they are not always accustomed to functioning solely in the mainstream society. They need culturally safe places to go to. Their needs are unique and they need more Aboriginal based support. At the moment there is only one Aboriginal counsellor and two support workers in Surrey. There are no Aboriginal women's organizations in Surrey. Service providers suggest that a service like the Helping Spirit Lodge in Vancouver is needed urgently in Surrey.



In Their Own Words

“If your history includes homelessness, drug addiction or mental health issues – they (ER nurses) will have a mistrust of you.”

– Focus group participant

YOUTH SERVICES

Most focus group participants agreed that services for female youth are lacking in Surrey and they are desperately needed. The women spoke about seeing female youth on the street and recognizing how vulnerable they are to predators – because they have had a similar experience when they were young. They felt that the young don't always know where to go and there are not as many options for them because they cannot access adult services.

Youth participants identified the ASTRA counsellors at PCRS, the Family Connection Centre at Sources, the Stop Exploiting Youth (SEY) program, and the PCRS Youth Centres in Surrey as being very helpful. In all cases they noted the staff as being really effective.

Older youth between the ages of 19 – 25 spoke about their need for continuing some of the supports they received as a younger person in foster/government care. They spoke about not having all of the skills to support themselves like an adult – especially because if they have grown up estranged in state care. Service providers say that more is needed in Surrey for youth transitioning into adulthood. Basic life skills and finding a place to live are essential to youth; otherwise they may easily slip through the cracks searching for housing.

In terms of prevention, participants talked about the need for more low cost activities and recreation opportunities for youth in the City.

NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

Focus group participants raised several examples of the frustrations they face in navigating the service system. Youth talk about being at a safe house and feeling the expectation to move on but having no idea where to go next and not receiving any helpful direction. Participants talk about going through each stage of dealing with their addiction and not knowing how long they will wait between services and fearing that they will not be able to hang on until there is a spot. Youth talked about the need for more help to get into school and developing skills to find work.

Many focus group participants talked about a desire to have a person who could help guide them through the system and assist them with decision making. Youth identified the need for more outreach workers and Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) social workers. They feel that currently MCFD social workers are overloaded with clients.

Service providers identified the need for outreach workers to reach out to women in the sex trade on the street. These outreach workers could begin to build relationships and trust with the women. The outreach workers could potentially assist these women with a number of challenging steps in the stabilization process. Assisting with finding housing could be a key piece of the work.

Service providers also identified a need for a sex worker lead organization in Surrey. The organization could provide opportunities for peer groups to meet as well as advocate, provide information, and educate the community.

WOMEN ONLY SERVICES

Virtually all participants spoke of the importance of having some women only services in Surrey. The women who participated in the focus groups have all had negative, if not traumatic experiences with men; abuse and exploitation being the norm in those relationships. Providing women only services allows women to feel safe enough to consider making positive changes in their lives.



FAMILY-FRIENDLY SERVICES

Some participants said that it would be helpful to have more services that welcome women with families. Women spoke about the value of the Maxxine Wright Centre in serving women with addictions who have young children. Women did say that if they have older children it becomes increasingly difficult to access services. Emergency housing for women with older male children is particularly difficult to access.

Some women also spoke about needing services to deal with abuse that include the partner. They would like to see their whole family healed from abuse.

SERVICES FOR ELDERLY WOMEN

Service providers report that there are limited resources for elderly women who are vulnerable in Surrey. A shelter that provides beds specifically for elderly women would begin to fill a growing gap and more housing like Atira's transition house for women 55+ is needed.

SERVICES OUTSIDE OF SURREY

The women and youth who participated in the focus groups mentioned using the following services in other communities:

NA and AA meetings in New Westminister – they are always available – “New Westminister is a real recovery city”.

Insite in Vancouver

ACT Team in Prince George

Cedar project for users in Prince George

Union Gospel Mission in New Westminister & Vancouver

Church in New Westminister for breakfast

E. Fry outreach in New Westminister

Psych ward at VGH – “the best in the region”

Langley Family Place, a great place to drop in with kids

Tri-Cities Resources for Victim's assistance and legal help

Kettle Friendship Centre in Vancouver (drop- in, mental health and addictions services, advocates, housing, provide lunch and dinner, classes) – “everything is in one place”. - Stepping Stones in Langley is similar

When asked about accessing services outside Surrey for their clients, professionals who work with vulnerable women and girls in Surrey mentioned the following services:

Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addictions

Housing placement outside Surrey

Deal with police departments throughout the region

Regional transit

Mental health unit in Corrections

Ministry of Children and Family Development provincial and regional

Transitional houses if nothing is available in Surrey

Oak Tree Clinic in Vancouver

Outreach services in Vancouver

These lists identify some of the services that vulnerable women and service providers are seeking outside of Surrey and they may highlight the need for more of these services in Surrey.



In Their Own Words

“For women - affordable housing in suites in houses often seems to come with the expectation of sex with the landlord. I have been propositioned by the landlord while his wife is sitting upstairs...It is really stressful. Young girls who have just left home – may not know how to deal with this.”

– Focus group participant



HOUSING NEEDS

Participants had a great deal to say about housing and what is needed in Surrey for vulnerable women and youth. Women who have stabilized agree that housing is a key component to successful transition from vulnerability. It bolsters self-esteem to have your own place; it is a mark of success. It is also a difficult piece of the puzzle to sort out. Affordable housing in Surrey is hard to find when you are single. Many women leave abusive partners, boyfriends and pimps as part of their stabilization process. Learning to live without the support of that man, even if it comes with abuse and exploitation, is difficult and often requires a learning process as well as support.

Focus group participants identified several challenges they have faced when looking for and securing housing in Surrey. First, some landlords seem hesitant to accept tenants who are on welfare. Other landlords are willing to provide housing for more affordable rent but women find they sometimes seek other forms of payment such as sex.

“Transition to adulthood houses – youth who have been in care oftentimes don’t have the life skills needed to transition – they don’t prepare you when you turn 19 but expect you to figure it out by yourself.”

Focus group participant



When you are looking for a place – Welfare makes you wait 3 ½ days for the cheque for the landlord, most landlords won't wait that long – only the slumlords will wait, then they can inflict their terrorism and abuse again.”

Focus group participant

OTHER HOUSING NEEDS THAT WERE IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS INCLUDE:

More affordable rental housing close to resources and public transit

More shelters and transition houses for women with children

Affordable housing with in-house daycare

Subsidized housing for larger families

Supportive housing for people coming out of recovery – where support is provided to integrate back into society

More shelter and safe house options in Surrey

Youth-friendly affordable housing which might include some support in learning the life skills needed to live independently

A short-term rental subsidy to help women get on their feet and get settled as they learn to become self-sufficient

Women only housing, especially for mental health clients and those recovering from addictions. Some youth are also interested in female only housing

Need housing for families that includes men and provides support to the family for learning how to become healthy and break the cycle of violence; and,

More wheelchair friendly housing options

Service providers agree that more affordable housing for women with children is needed. Also we need more transition housing in Surrey for women that is low barrier. A service provider reported that women often return (sometimes several times) to Shimai because it is the only low barrier transition house option in Surrey.

Service providers point out that we also need to be careful about which populations are being housed together in the same building or in close proximity and also where the housing is located in Surrey. Some of the high risk housing in Surrey is located in areas with a high prevalence of drug use – this can be problematic, especially for people who have recently become sober and clean.

Housing locations for people dealing with mental illness, people dealing with addictions and those with concurrent disorders needs to be carefully thought out. Each of these populations has their own vulnerabilities which need to be taken into consideration.

Service providers also report that more housing start up kits with basic household supplies are needed for the newly housed. In addition, free furniture services are also very limited for women who starting a new home.

In Their Own Words

“Women need safe places to go with men for dates (selling sex). I almost got run over by a guy when he pushed me out of his truck after we were done. He tried to get away without paying me. When I tried to climb back in the window I got thrown and he just missed me when he drove off.”

– Focus group participant

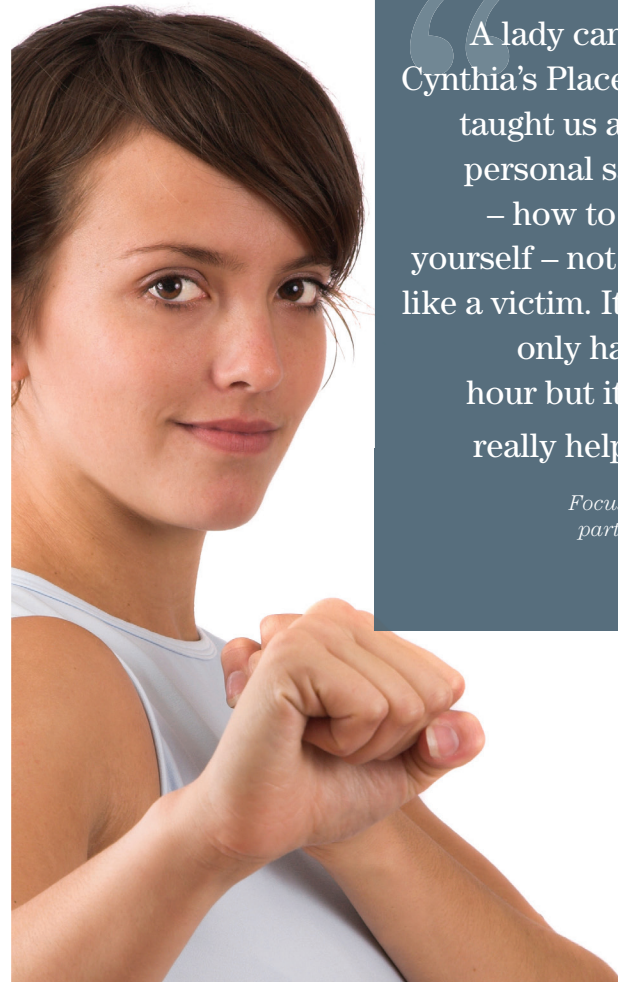
STAYING SAFE

For vulnerable women and girls in Surrey staying safe is a daily challenge. Most of the focus group participants had ideas about what would help them and other women stay safer. Things that women could do to stay safer include:

- Learn martial arts
- Learn about body language and the messages conveyed by how we carry ourselves; need to learn not to have a “victim profile” - focus on body language.
- Learn how to be aware of your surroundings all the time when you are out
- Try to go out with other women – there is a safety in numbers
- Educate young girls in school about how to keep safe, respect themselves, and for those who have low self-esteem – it’s not currently being done enough in schools
- Focus Group participants also had ideas for what the City and other organizations could do to improve the safety of vulnerable women and children:
 - Women need safe places to go at night in high risk areas. They ideally need a place every few blocks in those high risk areas. Develop a place that’s open 24 hours – just to hang out in the middle of the night.
 - Install payphones in high risk areas or provide women on the street with free cell phones so they can call 911 (done in Vancouver through Community policing).
 - Provide free transportation at night - you should be able to get a bus anywhere you need free of charge. A safe ride van (like in Vancouver) would be helpful too.
 - More police patrols at night – where the working girls are. Participants feel strongly that area is ripe for violence – there are no lights or any other safety features at the moment.
 - More sobering centres. The one we have in Surrey is really helpful.
 - More public awareness about violence ahead of time (before it occurs); need a marketing campaign to reach women wherever they go.
 - More undercover RCMP watching or even cameras around the city, more bike patrols
 - More outreach workers

“If you call “help” no one will come – you need to call “fire” instead.”

Focus group participant



“A lady came to Cynthia’s Place and taught us about personal safety – how to hold yourself – not look like a victim. It was only half an hour but it was really helpful.”

Focus group participant

- If a girl is found by the RCMP to be concealing a weapon – she should not be punished for trying to protect herself. It may be all she has to keep herself safe.
- The word gay gets tossed around a lot – teachers should be taught to be more aware and supportive
- Women need to feel part of a bigger caring community
- Youth participants talked about the need for more RCMP in Surrey. They would like to see the RCMP be more sensitive to women’s situations
- Service providers identified the need to provide services to the whole family so that all members of the household can learn how to live violence free. Male teenagers who have lived in a violent household can often become disrespectful and violent towards their mothers; the mother can be equally vulnerable to these teenagers and their abusive partner.
- Service providers suggest that the RCMP provide training to members on how to work with vulnerable women. They referenced the Vancouver Police Department which has provided training on sensitivity to vulnerable women and information on violence against women.
- A service provider suggested launching a “Ring the Bell” campaign, like the one started in India to help combat domestic violence against women through community awareness.

TURNING POINTS – WHAT MADE CHANGE POSSIBLE?

Focus group participants were asked to identify the point in their life when they began their positive change and they talked openly about their early transformation processes. Participants identified the following moments in their lives and the organizations that helped. For some it might have been a positive interaction with a caring person and for others it might have been a very negative experience:

- I had to hit bottom first and then I was willing to accept help
- I had to get to a safe place first – out of isolation
- I got incarcerated and that was good – I was court ordered to Servants Anonymous Society (SAS) for my safety (to protect me from my pimp)
- Having someone that’s a continuous support for you, someone that believes in you and doesn’t give up on you
- Respectful staff who have patience
- Being able to try again
- Professionals and doctors who care and listen
- Having a health crisis
- Not being turned aside
- Having a genuine connection with staff
- Learning that my brain can change and heal itself – it has neuroplasticity
- Truth was the turning point
- Surviving the death sentence of cancer
- Giving back – volunteering what was freely given to me
- Sometimes you have to hit rock bottom first and then you start making changes
- Being loaded on the job – realizing that I was threatening other people’s lives
- I had a miscarriage while I was using
- My daughters called the Police – because they couldn’t find me
- I was in Creekside and I had nowhere to go after I left

In Their Own Words

“I was sliced up and left for dead on the street – I survived and that started a slow journey of recovery for me I am clean most of the time now and I am giving back – I like to help others.”

– Focus group participant

TURNING POINTS CONTINUED

- My mom told me to put a gun in my mouth and get it over with faster
- The desire to become a better person
- The Stop Exploiting Youth program at PCRS – having that person to talk to who could listen and move forward with you
- First it was fun and games, then soon after I realized I had hit my rock bottom. I went to rehab and now I'm back in school, I also started to build a relationship with my father.
- Hitting a low point in life then meeting a friend who is going through the same thing
- Cynthia's Place and their staff
- E Fry – outreach – a real connection
- Newton Advocacy – knowledge and resources
- Group Therapy Services at Surrey Memorial
- AA works for me – I can relate to the others – they are only a phone call away – I have had my sponsor for 5 years
- The counsellor at Ellendale (E. Fry) was empowering and open
- I got into a SAS recovery house
- I got diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes
- I got into a Safe House and got away from the abuse
- At SAS I learned to be vulnerable – their counsellors are very educated
- I moved out of the province and did my recovery in a different province in a healthier environment for me
- Getting into Ellendale
- You have to be willing to drop everything in the material world to deal with your issues
- My boyfriend and I went to different recovery houses – I went to a women's recovery house
- I was chronically homeless – I needed 2 years to stabilize
- I was entrenched and exploited – I hit bottom and then went into recovery, I grieved for all that I lost – alone and then I started running and now I am physically fit

“At SAS I learned how to have relationships with women – I realized not everyone is trying to steal from me or pick my pockets.”



“ I did whatever I could to seize opportunities when I was getting on my feet – I went to every workshop they offered, I took all of the free food, I got any certificate possible and I volunteered as much as I could to get experience – it looks good on your resume.”

Focus Group Participant

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS – SUPPORT FOR ACHIEVING GOALS AND MAINTAINING STABILITY

Participants were asked what would help them achieve their transformation goals, or if they have already achieved stability what had made the difference. Most participants mentioned the value of having support and guidance through their transformation. Having a person who could help them navigate the system and think through decisions is very important. Most of the participants talked about their frustrations trying to access information about services and programs and an outreach worker, social worker, counsellor or support worker who can help with this. One participant said “We need Big Brothers and Sisters for adults; we need companionship for achieving goals – like the NA/AA sponsorship.”

For most, being able to access the life basics such as housing, food, transportation and staying safe were very important but not always easy to secure. Learning life skills can be a key component to maintaining stability. For some, they never had the chance to learn the basics of cooking, cleaning, maintaining a household, paying bills and taking care of themselves. Having some support to gain these skills with early housing opportunities can be very helpful.

Stability and security are also conditions that are helpful for moving forward. Being away from the drug scene and dealers is important for people who are in recovery. Also being able to access free or low cost counselling for trauma is a key component to continuing the transformation.

The women who have successfully stabilized speak about part of that process being the transition from the isolation of addiction, untreated mental illnesses, abusive relationships and petty crime to developing healthy and supportive relationships with peers. They spoke of the importance of having friendships with other women.

Some women also talked about being able to re-establish connections with their families as they stabilized. This was a positive experience for many, but not for all the women. For many of the women, the dysfunction in their family was one of the contributing factors to their vulnerability. For some the possibility of regaining custody of their children was a key motivator to get healthy, but for others it was not enough to remain clean.

Women who have stabilized also talked about the learning process they went through to learn how to socialize. Making small talk and conversing with acquaintances were all skills that had to be learned. It was part of becoming socially engaged.

For women who are stabilizing the path to economic stability can be difficult. These women find themselves clean and ready to begin re-engaging in regular society. They would like to find employment. Unfortunately they may have not completed high school, have little formal education or job training. Taking the time for education or training and affording it are all real barriers to maintaining stability. Relearning all of the basic skills needed to pursue education and training such as doing homework regularly and attending classes takes time and financial resources. Funding for going back to school (transit and living costs); career training and continuing education is needed. One participant suggested that an education grant for women who have stabilized would be helpful.

For some basic education such as completing grade 12 and learning life skills in a safe and accessible environment is the first step. Programs such as the SAS program in Surrey or the WISH program in Vancouver are examples that participants provided. For others, who have completed high school and even post-secondary education or training, the education and employment needs will be different.



In Their Own Words

“I was in the Ellendale program – they have 24 hour support counselling which was key for me. I would wake up in the middle of the night and need to talk and there was someone there for me. We often talked for hours at night time. I could be totally honest with her. I was at the program for 3 months – that support helped to open the door for me – I was vulnerable and angry.”

– Focus group participant

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS CONTINUED

Two other programs that have been quite helpful for stabilizing women are:

- The A Step course – three weeks – empowering – through BC Works
- Women’s Empowerment at Sources – 6 months – financial literacy, food, transit/gas

Some of the participants who have achieved and maintained stability spoke about their growing desire for justice - to pursue legal action against their former pimp. However, they fear that the legal system will let them down and they believe that if their former pimp finds out about the legal action they may find a way to harm or kill them. One participant stated “I am thinking of reporting my old pimp. It has been 10 years since I got out and up until recently I was way too scared of him. But he got me when I was a teenager – he ruined my life and I know he is doing that to others now”.

Stability is hard to achieve and just as hard to maintain for women coming off the streets, exiting the sex trade and getting clean. Challenges often arise in the attempt to maintain the hard won stability. As one service provider put it “once you have been through life experiences like these women – your edges get frayed – you don’t have a lot of buffer when things go wrong”.

Women who have achieved stability and are working to maintain it have identified the following as helpful to maintain that stability:

- Ongoing help to navigate government regulations regarding welfare, disability, income assistance (Sources has been identified as being helpful in this regard)
- Extra assistance with rent payment, especially when first establishing a home
- The Food Bank helps women to manage their limited incomes
- Finding a suitable roommate to share housing costs
- A support group for women who have exited sexual exploitation

“Doing small talk and chit chat was really former junkie – I could just talk about I couldn’t believe it at first when people on the bus when I was a junkie and now I am learning how to blend in to regular self - doubt that gets in the way of

Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided by a group of participants who have achieved stability in their lives. They were asked “If you had to make ONE RECOMMENDATION to “powers that be” as to what needs to happen in Surrey, in order for women to get to where you have gotten to what would it be?”

- 1** Make mental health services and trauma counselling more available. Provide more of these services in community rather than in professional offices.

- 2** Ensure that job training for women who are stabilizing is directly connected to job placement opportunities.

- 3** Ensure that there are job training and job experience opportunities that are manageable for women with limited income and education.

- 4** Develop a range of affordable housing options for women and youth.

- 5** Provide more support to at-risk youth.

- 6** Create more low barrier housing options for women with addictions.

- 7** Create supports, such as drop-ins and peer groups for women who are getting clean and also for women who want to maintain their stability.

- 8** Develop more resources for women who are victims of violence. There would be more women who felt comfortable coming forward to report what has been done to them if they felt they would be supported and protected. If we report our pimps –they will find us and kill us.

- 9** Most John’s think women do sex work by choice – we need more public education about the fact that while some women do sex work by choice, many women and youth in the sex trade are exploited.

hard – but I realized that I didn’t have to go into every situation as a the weather and the hockey game. I don’t have to dwell in the past. talked to me on the bus – when I was clean. I used to have trouble getting people want to talk about the book I am reading. society. It is good for my self-esteem. I do carry around this seed of communicating.” *Focus group participant*

APPENDIX 1 FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What services do you find really helpful in the community?
2. What makes you want to access a service?
3. What will keep you and other women away from a service – even if it is offering something that you need?
4. Are you able to access the health care services in Surrey that you need? (E.g. doctors, specialists, mental health services, addictions treatment and recovery).
5. What kinds of services are not available but needed for women and female youth in Surrey?
6. Have you used services in other communities that you really liked? Can you tell us about them?
7. Have you had trouble finding a place to live in Surrey? If yes, what is keeping you from finding housing?
8. Do we need more housing for women and female youth in Surrey? If yes, what do you think it should be like? How would it look? Where would it be? How would it feel to live there?
9. Let's talk about safety. What helps women and female youth on the street in Surrey stay safe? How could things be improved? How can we make things safer?
10. Think about what you are doing to change or improve your life. What would help you achieve your goals?
11. If you have achieved a positive change in your life – what was the turning point for you? What made it possible?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS – WOMEN WHO HAVE STABILIZED

The purpose of this focus group is to speak with women who have transitioned from a life of vulnerability on the street to a more stable and economically independent lifestyle. We would like to find out what made the difference for women as they sought to make those positive changes in their lives.

1. In your transition – what kinds of things had to happen first, before anything else could change?
2. The feedback we have collected in this project shows that women in survival poverty need direct access to affordable housing. How specifically did that work for you in breaking the cycle of survival poverty and becoming economically independent as you are now? How did you “find” and/or access affordable housing?
3. Women speak about the economic necessity of having to stay in abusive relationships in order to afford a place to live? Was this the case for you? If so, how did you escape this pattern and get out on your own?
4. Did access to medical services make a significant difference in your transformation? (This includes physical and mental health services and addictions services). If yes, please explain.
5. Some women find themselves trapped in addiction because of the lifelong cycles of poverty and surviving on the street. If this was the case for you - what specific resources really made it possible for you to get clean and then stay clean?
6. How about mental health services, has getting adequate trauma counselling, psychiatric treatment, group therapy or seeing a psychologist been significant in your transformation?
7. What has slowed down your progress or challenged your decision to change your life?
8. Have relationships been an important factor? Have you had regular contact with a counsellor/outreach worker/ peer/ friend or other person who has provided ongoing support and advice? (If not – would it have helped?)
9. How important was it for you to retain or re-establish connections with the people you call family? Did getting custody of your children have a part to play in getting “off the street” and into treatment?
10. Have you found it helpful to access women only services?
11. What has worked for you to build your economic stability? Was formal education or employment training involved?
12. What services, if any, do you rely on now to ensure you can maintain this lifestyle free from survival poverty?
13. If you had to make ONE RECOMMENDATION to “powers that be” as to what needs to happen in Surrey, in order for women to get to where you have gotten to what would it be?

THANK YOU

APPENDIX 2 PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations participated in a focus group or interview for the research project:

Atira – Shimai	Fraser Health Authority – Blood Borne Pathogen Unit
Atira - Aboriginal Outreach	Fraser Health Authority Regional Harm Reduction
Fraser Health Authority Youth Substance Use Outreach Counsellor	E. Fry Society
RCMP Mental Health Liaison	Surrey Women's Centre
Pacific Community Resource Society	Whole and Complete Women of Value
Aboriginal Friendship Centre - Homeless Outreach	City of Surrey
	BC Housing

APPENDIX 3 RELEVANT LITERATURE

MASTER PLAN FOR HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS IN SURREY

Prepared for the City of Surrey by City Spaces Consulting (2013)

The City of Surrey developed the Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in partnership with BC Housing and Fraser Health in 2013. Other government and non-profit agencies, the business community, and homelessness task forces and committees in Surrey all contributed their knowledge and perspectives.

The Plan aims to identify and respond to the needs for long-term housing and support services for people who are homeless, or at-risk of becoming homeless. Additionally, this initiative focuses on the need for emergency shelters and related services.

The project partners initiated the project as a way to ensure future actions to address homelessness in Surrey are coordinated and strategic. In this way, the available resources can be made available to respond to identified priorities and are used to maximum effect. This Plan is also intended to assist the City of Surrey and local non-profit organizations to proactively respond to partnership opportunities with the Province and other funders. The Plan identifies the following population groups to be in particular need of supportive housing:

- Individuals with mental health and/or substance abuse issues;
- Women and women with children;
- Youth, and;
- Aboriginal people.

Surrey's Master Plan for Housing the Homeless focuses on the provision of additional supportive housing units as a response to the homelessness situation. However, it also highlights the need for improvements to the emergency shelters that currently work with certain at-risk groups, namely women, women with children, youth, and Aboriginal people. Specifically, it outlines the following priorities:

- Creation of an additional 450 units of transitional and supported housing for people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.
- Replacement of the Gateway emergency shelter in Whalley with a new purpose-built facility that also incorporates transitional housing units.
- Enhancement of supportive housing, shelter and drop-in services that focus on vulnerable population groups with unique needs.
- Continuing to strengthen partnerships and collaboration with BC Housing, Fraser Health Authority, Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society, and other government Funders and foundations.

THE HOMELESS AND VULNERABLY HOUSED IN SURREY

Produced by The Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning and Engagement (CIR: CLE) at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (2014).

The report defines “vulnerably housed” as people who are facing a number of problematic living situations associated with substandard, overcrowded, non-affordable, and illegal housing. The vulnerably housed are not included in regional homeless counts which means that relatively little is known about this segment of homeless people in Surrey. Concern over this knowledge gap prompted this research project, which focuses on people who are at risk of homelessness in Surrey. The project involved a survey of 102 people who were homeless or vulnerably housed in Surrey. The report contains the following recommendations:

- **In general, there are more similarities than differences between those considered homeless and those who are vulnerably housed. This suggests the need for broad policies in the area of housing and homelessness so that people who are homeless and people who are vulnerably housed are not treated as two distinct groups with very different problems.**
- **A large proportion of the survey respondents reported shifting between being homeless and renting, often in relatively short periods of time. This finding suggests that policy initiatives should focus both on finding the homeless affordable and livable housing as well as helping those who are at-risk of homelessness maintain their housing.**
- **Currently renting respondents were significantly more likely than homeless respondents to report relying on a free meal service or food bank at least once in the past 12 months. Estimates based on the results also indicate that participants who were currently renting had, on average, \$270 to \$400 left each month after paying their rent to put toward food and other basic needs. Together these findings suggest that access to adequate food is a major issue for many low income renters. It is recommended that policies, programs and funding address this important need.**
- **A sizeable proportion of current and past renters reported major problems with the structure and/or major systems of their rental buildings (e.g., plumbing, electrical) as well as the general habitability of their premises. These findings suggest that accessing good quality accommodations is an issue confronting low income renters across all types of rental housing. A review of strategies to provide adequate housing along the entire continuum of rental housing options should be considered by policy makers.**
- **Drop-in or community centres were used within the past 12 months by more than half of all the respondents and the frequency of reported use during this time period was very high. Such centres may serve to foster social connections among people who are vulnerable to social isolation. In addition, the high frequency of visits to drop-in centres and free meal providers indicates these places may be good locations to situate efforts to connect people to other help and services they need.**

2014 METRO VANCOUVER HOMELESS COUNT

Produced by the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (2014)

The 2014 homeless count is a 24-hour snapshot of people who were homeless in the Metro Vancouver region on March 12, 2014. It included people staying overnight in homeless shelters including transition houses for women fleeing violence and youth safe houses, people with No Fixed Address (NFA) staying temporarily in hospitals, jails and detox facilities, homeless people living outside, and others who were staying temporarily with others (couch surfing) and using homelessness services on the day of the count.

In Surrey there were 403 homeless people counted in 2014. Of this number 37% or 149 homeless women were counted. In the region the largest number of unsheltered homeless people was found in the City of Vancouver with 538 people, followed by Surrey where 140 unsheltered people were identified. The largest number of sheltered homeless people was found in the City of Vancouver with 1,260 people, followed by Surrey with 263 people. In Surrey there were 52 youth counted with 27 unsheltered and 25 sheltered. Homeless youth in Surrey made up 13% of all youth homeless counted in 2014 in Metro Vancouver, while in Vancouver youth make up 63% of the Metro Vancouver total.

STREET BASED SEX WORKERS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Produced by Street Health and the Regent Park Community Health Centre (2014)

This report provides the responses received to a needs assessment survey that was conducted with sex workers in Toronto, Barrie and Oshawa, Ontario. The sample size was 100. The needs assessment report contains the following recommendations:

- 1.** Increase access to health services for street based sex workers and provide non-judgemental/non-discriminatory services
- 2.** Develop a coalition to advocate for street based sex workers
- 3.** Employ more peer workers to help sex workers access services
- 4.** Increase awareness about harm reduction and provide harm reduction services to sex workers
- 5.** Strengthen and expand the “bad date” coalition
- 6.** Improve access to affordable and supportive housing for street based sex workers
- 7.** Increase access to safe spaces
- 8.** Develop services specifically for street based sex workers
- 9.** Develop alternatives for sex workers planning to exit sex work

GETTING TO THE ROOTS: EXPLORING SYSTEMATIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE OF VANCOUVER

Produced for The Women’s Coalition by Jill Chettiar (2014)

This report is the result of a safety audit which was developed by the Women’s Coalition in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES). The project used a participatory action research approach supported by qualitative and quantitative data collection to achieve the following objectives:

- 1.** Define what safety means to women in the DTES
- 2.** Identify who is responsible for creating and maintaining a sense of safety in the DTES
- 3.** Who is accountable for failing to provide safety for women in the DTES
- 4.** Engage in a critical analysis of service provision in the DTES and investigate how current norms facilitate or act as barriers to access for women.

Report recommendations include:

- 1.** Increase violence prevention programming and training for women
- 2.** Develop specific initiatives to support sex workers’ safety
- 3.** Increase the amount and diversity of programming for indigenous women
- 4.** Prevent further displacement of low income housing spaces, and other negative impacts of gentrification
- 5.** Raise awareness of cultural safety and encourage organizations to incorporate it into the programming and practices
- 6.** Increase the level of peer involvement/engagement in all programming

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to Janice Shore. Janice died at the age of 45 years on February 18, 2013, after being found badly beaten in a vacant lot in Whalley. Her tragic death mobilized the City of Surrey and community agencies to come together to form the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group – a group committed to improving the lives of girls and women whose lives are impacted by violence, mental illness, addictions, poverty and homelessness. Janice Shore was a beloved mother, sister and friend. She was also the woman who inspired our work.

The Surrey Vulnerable Women's and Girls Working Group would like to thank the following organizations for their support during this project.

- **Lookout Emergency Aid Society**
- **Elizabeth Fry Society**
- **Pacific Community Resource Society**
- **Women of Value**

BRIEFING DOCUMENT: USING A GENDERED LENS TO UNDERSTAND HOMELESSNESS IN SURREY

In the fall and winter of 2016, the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls (SVWG) Working Group conducted a series of interviews and a focus group with outreach workers and shelter managers in Surrey. The purpose of the consultation was to get an update on how homelessness is impacting women and girls in the community. It was also an opportunity to hear about what service providers think is needed in Surrey to serve women and girls better.

The content for this briefing document is based primarily on comments from service providers and reflects their perspectives from working on the front line. Homeless Count data, limited as it is, is included to support the commentary.

HOMELESS COUNT NUMBERS

Gender based data for Surrey for the 2017 Homeless Count is not yet available. It is expected in the summer. Here is what we know so far:

- According to the preliminary 2017 Homeless Count report 607 women who are experiencing homelessness and answered this question on the survey were enumerated in Metro Vancouver on Count Day. This represents 27% of the total number of homeless people in the region.
- 602 people experiencing homelessness were counted in Surrey in 2017.
- In 2014, 37% (150) of the 403 people who were counted during the Homeless Count in Surrey were female.
- Keep in mind that the Homeless Count is always an undercount and it is really identifying the minimum number of people who are homeless at a given point in time. Women, in particular are often undercounted in Homeless Counts because they do not present in the same way as men.

CURRENT TRENDS AND EMERGING ISSUES

Service providers report that the number of women and female youth they are seeing on the street in Surrey is increasing and most existing services for people who are homeless are “bursting at the seams”. This reflects the overall increase in homelessness in Surrey and also a shifting proportion. Service providers report that women and female youth seem to be making up an increasing proportion of the homeless population. They are also saying that:

- Women on the street appear to be suffering more acute health issues, such as addiction, chronic illness and mental illness than their male counterparts.

- The 135A Street tent city is being used increasingly by women and female youth. This may be partly because it is perceived as a safe place (safety in numbers) and partly because there are fewer rules than at a shelter.
- Women seem to be banding together more and social media is a key way for them to stay connected.
- Street drugs are increasingly stronger and the violence is worse than ever for women on the street. Service providers who work with women in Surrey believe that these two factors are directly related.
- The pay for street level sex work is currently very low. As a result, a woman who works on the street may agree to more dangerous situations to make more money, especially if she has drug dealer debts.
- “The Strip” is now everywhere in Surrey – not just 135 A Street; this means that vulnerable women are often living and working on the street in isolated areas of Surrey.

Service providers describe women who are experiencing homelessness:

- They can be more difficult to engage in service, partly because they may be looking after others and sometimes because of the severity of their addiction(s).
- The number of Indigenous women, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, presenting with children is on the increase.
- Generally women will ask for what they need, especially if they have children, as opposed to men who will often not ask for what they need.
- Women generally tend to have more belongings than men.
- There are more women who are older on the streets than in the past. This may be the result of increased health among women experiencing chronic homelessness – they are living longer. It may also be the result of more senior women becoming homeless due to the housing crisis in the region.

Service providers talked about how violence affects the lives of women and female youth:

- Indigenous women who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, have often experienced high levels of violence.
- At women-serving organizations staff members are seeing increasing numbers of immigrant women who are choosing to leave their husbands because of domestic violence.
- Severely addicted women in the street level sex trade are experiencing increasing levels of violence.

Service providers reported on vulnerable and homeless female youth in Surrey:

- Sexual exploitation of female youth is occurring more indoors, in Surrey hotels, rather than on the street.
- Some younger women are self-organizing their sex work.
- With the current opioid crisis, overdosing is becoming normalized for young people. It has not become a disincentive for drug use.
- Younger women do not access service as readily as older women.

THE RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ASSAULT AND VICTIMIZATION

Service providers in Surrey report that the current response to sexual assault and victimization of homeless women and girls in Surrey is not adequate. Police response varies, depending on the officer. There are reports of competent and supportive assistance as well as reports of victim blaming and lack of knowledge and training demonstrated by RCMP officers in Surrey. In addition, service providers report that Victim's Services can be slow in responding. The process for reporting is complex and often traumatizes the woman who has been assaulted even further. For the victim, the result is often not worth the effort required for reporting.

WHAT SERVICES DO WE NEED FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SURREY?

There are some excellent services for women and girls in Surrey but there are still many unmet needs in the community. Service providers recommend that the following services and projects be developed for women and girls who are experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of homelessness, in Surrey:

1. Shelter beds for women that are open during the day.
2. Mobile services for health and safety – for women on the streets throughout the city. (*Surrey Women's Centre is currently seeking funding to develop a mobile service van for sex workers in Surrey*).
3. A 24-hour women-only drop-in.
4. Enhanced Victim's Services with wrap around services.
5. Opportunities for ongoing training for outreach workers and shelter staff in: understanding sexual assault, exploitation, and victimization; safety planning for women who are fleeing violence; cultural safety, and trauma informed care.
6. Specifically for youth: A safe house for youth who are younger (13- 15); a house for girls and young women exiting exploitation and addiction with wrap around services - counselling and mental health workers on site; an intervention team (Yankee team) for sexually exploited and at-risk youth in Surrey - with RCMP, youth and trauma counselling, and a nurse involved; more

supports for youth aging out of care; and, more focus on communicating with vulnerable youth on social media.

7. Continued efforts to employ shelter staff and outreach workers who are Indigenous and/or who have lived experience.
8. More options for women's addictions treatment including second stage housing with recovery for women.
9. More accessible mental health services for women and youth.
10. More affordable transportation options, especially for those with children.
11. Public toilets and women-only bathrooms, showers and laundry facilities.
12. Free women's products (e.g. tampons) and harm reduction supplies (e.g. condoms, clean needles).
13. Implementing a "no wrong door" approach to service access.
14. Increasing public awareness of women and girls who are experiencing homelessness and ongoing anti-stigma publicity.

NEXT STEPS:

The SVWG Working Group will actively support the non-profit sector and government to address the service gaps for women and girls listed above. We will also continue to dialogue with women and girls with lived street experience to inform these projects and services as they are developed.

About the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group

The Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls (SVWG) Working Group formed in 2012 to collaboratively understand the challenges and needs of vulnerable females in Surrey and find workable solutions. In 2014/2015 the working-group undertook "**In Their Own Words**" a research project about the challenges/barriers vulnerable women and youth experienced and the services and housing they need.

The following organizations are represented on the SVWG Working Group: Atira Women's Services, BC Housing, City of Surrey – Public Safety & Social Planning, DIVERSEcity, Elizabeth Fry Society, Fraser Health Authority – Surrey Mental Health and Substance Use Services, Lookout Emergency Aid Society, MCFD, Nightshift Ministries, Options Community Services, Pacific Community Resources Society, Public Safety Canada, Surrey RCMP, Surrey Women's Centre, and the YWCA.

For more information about the SVWG Working Group contact Co-Chairs Michelle Shaw at MShaw@pcrs.ca and Bonnie Moriarty at Bonnie.Moriarty@elizabethfry.com.

SURREY WOMEN'S Resource Card

info

about services
and housing
for women in
Surrey

**If you are IN DANGER CALL 911 for
RCMP, Fire and/or Ambulance.**

EMERGENCY CRISIS CONTACTS

Surrey Mobile Assault Response

Team (Surrey Women's Centre)	604 583-1295
MCFD After Hours	604 660-4927
Police Victim's Services	1 877 869-0720
Fraser Health Crisis Line	604 951-8855
Victim Link BC	1 800 563-0808
Women Against Violence Against Women	604 255-6344
Battered Women Support Services	604 687-1867
Health Link BC	811
BC211 (Comprehensive Service Listing)	211
SMART Van	778 386-2149

Transition Houses

Shimai (low barrier)	604 581-9100
Ama House (55+)	604 542-5992
Virginia Sam	604 572-5116
Evergreen	604 584-3301
Durrant – White Rock	604 531-4430
Azure Place – Delta	604 957-1556

Provincial transition houses: www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/women-fleeing-violence/transition-houses-safe-homes

"The turning point for me:
I got into a women-only
recovery house."

*Surrey woman
overcoming substance use*

Second Stage Transition

Maxxine Wright (expectant/new mothers)	604 582-2121
Koomseh (women & children)	604 501-9294
Harmony House (immigrant women/children)	604 596-7722
Arbour House (women & children)	604 597-4952
Eva's House	604 640-7549
Nisa Home (immigrant, refugee, Muslim)	1 888 456-8043

Emergency Housing

E. Fry Women's Shelters	604 582-2456
Maxxine Wright Shelter (women & children)	604 580-2915
Guildford Shelter (couples)	778 293-0889

Supportive Housing

Alder Gardens (women & children)	604 597-8528
----------------------------------	--------------

“... life basics such as housing, food, transportation and staying safe were very important but not always easy to secure.”

Surrey woman who experienced homelessness

Supportive Recovery

Ellendale (women only) 604 583-2502

Ellendale Cradle (women and children) 604 583-2502

Outreach

Atira Housing Outreach Support 604 315-4613

Waban Outreach Support to First Nations, Metis and Inuit Women 604 836-7280

Options Housing Outreach 604 765-6751

Counselling/Support

Surrey Women's Centre 604 583-1295

Substance Use Services Surrey 604 580-4950

Surrey Mental Health Centre 604 953-4900

Other Women's Lives (Positive Haven) 604 588-9004

Selah (NightShift Ministries) 604 953-1114

Legal Services Society 1 866 577-2525

PCRS Community Counselling Clinic (free) 604 592-6200

Moving Forward 778 321-3054

Sources Rent Bank:

www.sourcesbc.ca/our-services/sources-rent-bank/

Indigenous Services

Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre 604 595-1170

Native Court Workers –Surrey (criminal) 604 985-5355

Indian Residential School Survivors Support 1 866 925-4419

Indigenous Community Legal Clinic 1 888 684-7874

Services for Youth

All Nations Youth Safe House 604 584-2625

Guildford Youth Resource Centre 604 587-8100

Newton Youth Resource Centre 604 592-6200

The Daughters and Sisters

Program (substance use treatment) 604 218-6473

Growing Together 604 613-8435

Services for Women and Children

Maxxine Wright Community Health Centre 604 584-7597

Women's Place Resource Centre 604 536-9611 ext 1801

Multicultural Services

DIVERSEcity Community Resources 604 547-1202

Multicultural Women Stopping the Violence 604 547-1202

Threshold Multicultural Outreach 604 572-5883

Services for Seniors

Senior Abuse and Information Line 1 866 437-1940



**I never thought
it would happen
to me.**

**OPIOID DIALOGUES
WITH WOMEN AND GIRLS
IN SURREY**

April 2018

About the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group

The Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls (SVWG) Working Group formed in 2012 to collaboratively understand the challenges and needs of vulnerable females in Surrey and find workable solutions. In 2014/2015 the Working Group undertook “In Their Own Words” a research project about the challenges and barriers vulnerable women and youth experience and the services and housing they need. For more information about the SVWG Working Group, visit surrey.ca/socialplanning.

The following organizations are represented on the SVWG Working Group:

- Atira Women’s Resource Society
- BC Housing
- City of Surrey – Public Safety & Social Planning
- DIVERSEcity
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Fraser Health Authority – Surrey Mental Health and Substance Use Services
- Lookout Housing and Health Society
- BC Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Nightshift Ministries
- Options Community Services
- Pacific Community Resources Society
- Public Safety Canada
- Surrey RCMP
- Surrey Women’s Centre
- YWCA

Acknowledgements

Michelle Ninow, M. Ninow Consulting, conducted the dialogues and prepared the report for the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group.

Funding for this project was provided by the BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

The design and printing of the report was supported by the City of Surrey and Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society.



Table of Contents

The Opioid Dialogues	3
The Start of Substance Use	5
The Experience of Substance Use	7
The End of Substance Use	11
What is Needed?	13
Their Words	17

People ask what is wrong
with me that I got addicted.

But I was stuck
and it was so hard to stop.

**I did not wake up
one day and say “Hey,
I want to be an addict.”**
This was never my life plan.

Dialogue participant

The Opioid Dialogues

In Winter 2017/2018 the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls (SVWG) Working Group hosted a series of four dialogue sessions with women and girls, which focused on substance use and the current opioid crisis.

During each of the facilitated sessions the participants responded to questions about substance use and discussed their experiences. The women and girls were contacted to participate through established service providers in Surrey. The participants varied in age and circumstance. Most of the women and girls had experience using opioids, while a few had regularly used alcohol, cocaine and crystal methamphetamine. Some of the participants were youth under 19 and some were pregnant or new mothers. One group of women was still actively using while the rest were going through recovery and treatment.

What follows is a synopsis of the four dialogue sessions written using the women and girl's words and ideas.



The Start of Substance Use

I started using when I was fresh out of high school; I was young and dumb – got a prescription from my doctor, which made me think the drugs are “safe”.

Dialogue participant

Several of the women described the onset of their substance use. One common experience was becoming addicted to prescription painkillers, initially prescribed by their doctors. When the prescriptions ended or their doctor cut them off they would turn to street drugs, usually heroin. It was often not clear at first what was happening – but they said it didn't take long to become addicted. Some said that if they had been gradually weaned off of the prescription opioids rather than abruptly cut off they might not have turned to street drugs. Other participants talked about how common substance use is in their social circles and how this had led to their own problems with addiction.

**Men sell drugs,
women sell themselves.**

This affects women's
mental well-being and is
emotionally damaging.
Men do bad things but they
are not selling themselves.

Dialogue participant

The Experience of Substance Use

I couldn't feel worse about myself. I sold myself and hurt people. I thought - who cares?

Dialogue participant

The women and girls talked openly about their experiences of substance use and the opioid crisis. These experiences included drug overdoses, watching friends die, homelessness, being cut off from family, sex work to support their substance use, and desperation. All of the women talked about how substance use is/was having a negative impact on their lives. They mentioned overdoses and how they supported their friends who overdosed. For some, the overdoses have become normalized. They also talked of losing friends and dealing with that loss – sometimes by increasing their own drug use.

The dialogue participants talked about how the substance use experience is often different for women than for men, in part because of the social expectations placed on women. This is especially the case when speaking with women who are marginalized and have few options available. They spoke about how women are judged more for their addictions, partly because of their roles as mothers. People think that they are bringing their children into bad situations. They may lose their children to child protection services because they are using drugs and alcohol.

Sex Work

To afford their substance use habit, women are often forced into sex work if they have no other financial options. Men with limited options, they say, often resort to crime, sell drugs, and panhandle. Women do not often sell drugs, although there were two women in the dialogue series who had chosen to deal drugs rather than get involved in sex work. Most of the dialogue participants felt that men would not sell themselves, at least not as often as women do.

Violence

Many of the participants talked about how women are more at risk for violence.

Both the women who participated in the dialogues and the service providers talked about the increased violence that women are experiencing on the streets. Some attributed this to the strength of the drugs that are currently available. They say that the addiction is so strong that the women will tolerate more risky situations in their sex work to pay for drugs. They say a bad date is better than no date. These risky situations are leading to more violent assaults on women.

Homelessness

When women stay outside due to homelessness they risk rape. Women will try not to sleep outside on the street because of the fear of being assaulted or kidnapped. Women will take street drugs such as crystal meth to help them stay awake for as long as possible.

“I would rather die than live like that again.”

Dialogue participant

Participants also described how women get preyed upon. When they are homeless they will go with a guy, so they finally have a place to sleep. They will sleep really deeply because they have not really slept in days, or because they have been drugged. When they finally wake it is to the reality that they have been sexually assaulted while they were sleeping. Staying indoors in such precarious situations is often not any safer than the street.

Fentanyl

The women talked about how drugs they are using can be very unpredictable now because of fentanyl. Contamination can occur when the dealer does not clean the tools used for measuring and dispensing the drugs. As a result fentanyl is showing up in a range of street drugs. They cautioned that you cannot experiment with drugs without risking your life. They also talked about purposeful contamination and that they have heard about this happening occasionally in Surrey.

Addiction

The women talked about the physical and mental dependence that comes with an addiction, and how it will drive a person to do things that they would have never done before their substance use started. Addiction can also have an emotional component where the guilt and shame spiral. They also talked about how hard it is to stop using.





This crisis
is so frickin big
we need everybody
on board.

Dialogue participant

The End of Substance Use

Guys think they are invincible – they are big and nothing can really hurt them. They isolate themselves when they OD. Women are caretakers – we need to stay alive.

Dialogue participant

Community

A number of the women credited their families and friends for not giving up hope. It was their family's hope and support that eventually got them into treatment or in some cases back into treatment. They talked about their whole family suffering when they were sick and addicted.

Preparing for Recovery

Preparing for recovery and treatment can be daunting. The women talked about how they had to plan ahead when they were going through treatment, to think about all of the steps, not just getting clean. They were aware of having to change their entire life. They couldn't go back to their old lives, they needed a housing plan, new friends, connections to recreation centres, gyms, child minding, churches, and community resources.

Support for Women

The women feel that there are more resources and support available for men who are using substances or who want to quit. They say there are fewer options available for women with substance use issues, especially for those who have kids.

They talked about having more to lose than men because they are caretakers, they are responsible for their kids, and they have attachments. Women fear their children will be taken away by the provincial Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) so they keep their drug use a secret.

Women who are pregnant for the first time may not know about getting support and they will remain isolated.

Participants feel that there is not a good understanding of substance use for women because the statistics and data are not available. This reality keeps women on the street.



What is Needed?

I had to sell my ass for drugs. Men don't have to do that. I put myself in dangerous situations for drugs – sacrificed my self-worth and self-esteem.

Dialogue participant

During the dialogues the women talked about what they felt was needed to deal more effectively with the opioid crisis and substance use for women in particular.

Harm Reduction

For those who are still using, the women said that drug testing strips should be more widely available. Naloxone should continue to be widely available. They thought Safe Point, a safe consumption site in Surrey, was a very good facility and they felt there should be more safe consumption sites.

During the dialogue sessions there was often debate between the women who found opioid agonists such as methadone and suboxone helpful in dealing with their substance use and those who did not and felt that it was simply replacing one drug with another. For those who supported the use of opioid agonists they wanted to see methadone and suboxone more easily and widely available. Others were proponents of detox and abstinence, and wanted more easily available detox services.

Prevention & Education

Prevention was a topic that the women discussed enthusiastically, especially in regards to youth.

They feel it is important to prevent opioid use through more education in schools as early as possible. They emphasized that the education in high school needs to be real, suggesting that even showing people going through detox might be a deterrent for students. Having substance use counselling

in school would also be helpful. Youth also need other options so they don't try drugs simply because they are bored.

They also supported awareness raising throughout the community and trying to address the stigma associated with drug use.

For the women who are parents who participated in the dialogues, they are keenly aware that their kids may mirror their habits. They are fearful for their kids and they are hoping for better resources for youth.

Women-only Services

Many of the women who participated in the dialogues were emphatic that women-only services are essential for making substance use treatment and recovery accessible for many females. They said that there are not enough women-only recovery houses.

“I can't talk with a guy about the fact that I was on the verge of selling my body to get drugs – that is how desperate I was - especially if he is living in the same facility as me.”

Dialogue participant

Women-only services also provide women-only support groups and counselling. The dialogue participants discussed the value of talking with other women in their circumstances -there is an understanding that they share. Some women said that could not have gotten well without a women- only recovery facility.

Support for Women with Children

For women with substance use issues who are pregnant or who have young children, specific services are very important.

Maxxine Wright Health Care Centre and Ellendale Cradle program provide valuable services for this population in Surrey. The women talked of several cases where they were able to work on their substance use issues and also keep their children.

Treatment & Recovery

The participants talked about the importance of being able to access treatment when they were ready and not having to wait.

Treatment should follow detox immediately with no gap. Also treatment should come with fewer stipulations, such as “no smoking.”

The women talked about the value of the recovery experience and the importance of not rushing that phase. They identified the need for a longer recovery process (beyond the usual 30 – 60 days) and were thankful for the facilities where this was possible.

They also mentioned the need for a maintenance phase after recovery. Second stage recovery was identified as valuable and some participants talked about the need for family second stage, once both partners have gone through their individual recovery.

“I need connection with others who have had the same experience as me. I used to be anti-meeting. Now I like them. I pick up helpful messages.”

Dialogue participant

They mentioned that there are recovery houses which are unstructured and seem to enable peoples’ addictions rather than help them. Some provide better service than others and they should all be reviewed, especially those receiving government funding.

Counselling & Support

The women identified the value of counselling and therapeutic support, including grief support, in their recovery process. They feel that more counselling supports for women are needed. Counselling supports provide an opportunity to rediscover oneself after being lost in addiction, deal with the issues that may have led to the addiction and change thinking processes. Unfortunately, existing services are often full.

“We need to raise awareness. I was hanging out with my 15 year old nephew at the skate park and his friends were joking about taking heroin. I told them about my experience and what it is really like. They were shocked – they apologized.”

Dialogue participant

Housing

Housing is an important part of the equation. The women talked about the need for low barrier housing and day jobs so they can avoid some of the risks associated with substance use such as survival sex work and couch surfing because of homelessness. Unfortunately, finding housing as a substance user is very difficult.

People who are going through treatment need to have their housing lined up so they can have somewhere to go when they are finished. If women end up back on the street, it can be difficult to maintain sobriety.

Friendship

A few of the women talked about how sobriety provided a path for developing new friendships with women. They talked about when they were using, they viewed women as competition – for drugs and “boyfriends.” Once sober, they found women friends who were supportive and who could understand what they had been through.



LANDER

DVK

TRUG NO NOTS

ARTS

NASS

You are the first person
to come here and ask us
about our situation instead
of telling us what we need
– thank you.

Dialogue participant

Their Words

The women and girls were pleased to be asked about their thoughts and opinions about substance use and their own experiences. They expressed enthusiasm for getting involved in public education and helping people maintain their new found sobriety. They also wanted to speak with high school students about their experiences. They were pretty keen to help out in any way that could support women who are dealing with substance use. Some said they felt “useless” while they were using so now they are embracing the opportunity to do something valuable and help others.

The girls and women in the study were asked what messages they would like to share with the community. These are their words:

Please Don't Judge

- “Don't be rude or judgemental to street people; it could be your kid out there one day.”
- “We need less judgement and more compassion.”
- “Judgement is for the uneducated.”
- “Stigma equals judgement without real knowledge.”

It Can Happen to Anyone

- “Addiction can happen to anyone – it is not based on your socio-economic status.”
- “It could be your son or daughter using harm reduction supplies instead of a dirty rig– so don't tell us we should not be distributing harm reduction supplies.”

Be Informed

- “Getting clean is not easy.”
- “Everyone should learn about drugs.”

The Power of Kindness

- “We are not bad people – we are just struggling. Do not push us away.”
- “As kids we were rejected, beat up, and bullied in school.”
- “We should help lift each other up.”
- “Remember we are all human beings.”
- “Be kind to us. We feel lonely.”




**2018 FINANCIAL PLAN
COUNCIL INITIATIVES**

Description	Amount	Allocation to date	Remaining
Carried Forward from Prior Year			
adjusted for amounts not utilized	600		
2018 Adopted Budget	260,000		\$ 260,600
2018 Sponsor Appreciation Event		10,000	
All Aboard Wanderlust - JustKids Program		2,500	
Young Agrarians Land Matching		10,000	
SFU President's Surrey Gala		5,000	
Foam Free Vaisakhi Initiative		5,000	
Indo-Canadian Dental Association		2,500	
Darpan Extraordinary Achievement Awards		7,000	
Canucks Autism Network (CAN) 2018		5,000	
Youth Helping Youth Society		250	
Canada India Networking Initiative 2018		2,000	
100 Year Journey Gala		6,500	
West Coast Kings Field Hockey Society		3,500	
2018 Surrey Social Innovation Summit		70,000	
Surrey Women's Centre 25th Anniversary		1,000	
Agriculture Week - Pie in the Plaza		30,000	
Crescent Beach Concours d' Elegance		2,000	
Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association		3,500	
Federation of Canadian Municipalities Special Advocacy Fund		20,685	
Arts4All Festival		20,000	
Gadhri Memorial Mela		6,000	
11th Annual Red FM Charity Walk (Proposed)		5,000	
Drishti Awards Gala (Proposed)		1,200	
Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group (Proposed)		15,000	
Surrey City Orchestra (Proposed)		10,000	
Allocations for 2018		\$ 243,635	\$ 16,965