



Exploring Harm Reduction Drop-in Programs Feedback from Drop-in Participants at KAPOW

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Community Harm Reduction Response Team (CHRRRT) Project

December, 2020



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METHODOLOGY

As a part of our CHRRT evaluation process, we wanted to learn more about how participants of Harm Reduction Drop-ins feel about that service. What difference does it make in their lives?

An on-line focus group was conducted participants of KAPOW, a weekly morning drop-in at Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, in partnership with Sistering.

- This two-hour focus group was conducted over Zoom with 8 KAPOW participants
- It was facilitated by Debra and Mity, community researchers and members of the CHRRT Program Resource Group.
- Ray assisted by taking notes.
- All participants provided their consent to participant in the focus group and were paid honoraria of \$30 each.



**PARKDALE
QUEEN WEST**
Community
Health Centre

KAPOW is a Harm Reduction (HR) based, peer supported, and welcomes women-identified people who do sex work and/or use drugs. In the “before times”, KAPOW offered a weekly drop-in that offered a safe, welcoming place to meet, delicious food, compassionate, caring HR staff, workshops and learning opportunities, and recreational activities like movies. Due to COVID19, KAPOW shifted from an in-person drop-in to a weekly online/phone meeting.



WHAT QUESTIONS DID WE WANT TO ANSWER?

1. Why did you come to KAPOW, before the pandemic?
2. What did you like about the drop-in?
3. Do you think it makes a difference to have people from the community (people with lived experience) working in the drop-in.
4. How has KAPOW changed since the pandemic?
5. Please tell us a story of how KAPOW has affected your life? What difference has it made to you to be part of KAPOW?

WHAT IS THE CHRRT PROJECT?

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The Community Harm Reduction Response Teams (CHRRT) project is a 3-year initiative (April 2018 to March 2021) designed to promote low-threshold, Harm Reduction (HR) services in Toronto neighbourhoods in response to the growing opioid crisis.

Funded by the Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) of Health Canada, the project has been designed to mobilize people with lived experience to play leadership roles in community-based Harm Reduction work.

Ten agencies are partnering to train and employ 20 people with lived experience to become Harm Reduction Support Workers in their communities.

A major component of the project is the mobilization of the community's knowledge about this new model for promoting and resourcing effective community responses to the crisis.



FINDINGS

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- The group all praised the stability and consistency of having a place to go Friday morning, to have a wonderful breakfast and catch up with friends in a safe and non-judgmental space.

“Breakfast breakfast breakfast! I came to KAPOW because they offered a warm, wonderful breakfast. And after having a night of partying or week of partying, nothing was better than looking forward to Friday morning breakfast at KAPOW.”

“I miss just coming and being able to talk about the week, and how it went, and knowing that there was no judgement, and feeling safe that we can talk about hard things and other things, good things.”

“... the safe space was really amazing, I really felt comfortable and welcome, the exercise at the beginning was so joyful.”

- KAPOW drop-in Participants



FINDINGS

- 100% of KAPOW participants felt that having peers with lived experience working in the drop-in was beneficial. Harm Reduction workers with lived experience are: less judgmental, more empathetic and knowledgeable, have relevant referrals/resources/advice, and are more trustworthy. Peer workers make drop-in participants feel more comfortable to open up and share.

"I feel safer being more open with people that I know have lived the same experience as me... I feel safe talking about it and I'm not going to be judged..."

"...in my experience of going to get supplies, the advice you can get from someone, who has lived experiences, on what supplies to get, how to use them a certain way. If you're new to using a certain substance, that helps, I know they've done that drug, and they can tell me good advice."

"It comes from a genuine place, and connection. People want that, they don't want someone who is sympathetic, they want someone empathetic."

"People that don't have lived experience often don't get you."



FINDINGS

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- Due to COVID19, KAPOW has been meeting via Zoom. Some are unable to join because they don't own a phone, or don't like virtual meetings. Everyone misses the breakfast and connecting in person.

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“For me as a participant at KAPOW, sometimes it was a place for me to escape, sometimes it was a place for me to go vent and feel safe, sometimes it was a place for me to get educated and learn something, sometimes it was a place for me to go and play. I miss that grounding. I was getting a lot of my needs met. That’s what I really miss.”

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FINDINGS

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- KAPOW is a place to learn and connect with resources.

“Learning things about COVID, last week some people gave me some advice and it eased my mind.”

"I like that once a month we talk to the nurse, I think that's really helpful."

“I enjoyed the workshops we were doing.”

“... it's just for women so it's nice to be in a safe spot, we had a warm meal, we could talk about what's going on, get a Bad Date book, it was a good way to catch up on what's going on on the street.”*

(*a photocopied compilation of undesirable/dangerous clients that sex workers share within their community, to help improve safety and increase control over working conditions.)

One participant remembered volunteering with KAPOW to do community clean up:

“It was nice to be out with my friends, with people who accepted me, and I felt accepted and like I belonged, and I was out cleaning up my community... It was really nice to be part of that. Cleaning up the community, being part of the community, and just being able to give back a little.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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With thanks and gratitude to:

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- Debra and Mitra, community researchers for great work organizing and facilitating a safe, respectful and fun session.
- Ray for her work documenting the session, analyzing the findings, and preparing this report.
- The amazing women at KAPOW! Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us.

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