

Welcome to Unison eVoice, a monthly bulletin that profiles programs and partners at Unison.

Program Profile **Harm Reduction Program**

Staff Lead: Wayne Duhaney, Harm Reduction Outreach Worker

Wayne first joined Unison’s Harm Reduction Program as a peer outreach worker (“peer”) in 2001. He was inspired to participate after the death of his close friend Paul Watson who had helped the health centre build links with the community during the development of the Harm Reduction program. After several years as a peer and a youth outreach worker in Lawrence Heights, Wayne became Unison’s Harm Reduction Worker. His role has changed, but his passion and commitment to the work remains a decade strong.

Contact Wayne at 416-787-1676 ext. 278.



What is Harm Reduction?

According to Wayne, some people who do drugs want to quit, and some people will never quit. Harm reduction, he says, is a philosophy that is *non-judgmental*. “We are there to ensure that if they are doing drugs, they have safe equipment and the right information to reduce any harm.” Unison’s Harm Reduction program does a lot more than distributing clean needles, condoms and pipes. Every other week, the program runs a kit-making workshop to assemble packages of safe injection and inhalation supplies. Anyone from the public can participate – and earn a \$10 honorarium for helping out! Both drug users and other people come to kit-making to help out and to experience what a harm reduction environment is like. Harm Reduction programs benefit all sectors of the community. Research has shown that when drug users are less marginalized and can safely walk in (or send a friend) for



supplies and information, the number of used needles in public places decreases.

To reach beyond the walls of Unison, the Harm Reduction program has peers (drug users). “I am here 9-5,” says Wayne, “but peers are available around the clock.” Peers reach out where staff can’t go (for example, peers know where the crack houses are). Every Friday, active peers meet to discuss how outreach went, and to gain feedback and support from each other. “For a peer, life is chaotic,” says Wayne, “so a week is a long time. We check in weekly to see where they are at.” As Wayne notes, we never know what kind of trauma or loss may have led someone to using drugs.

Anyone who wants to learn more can stop by the Harm Reduction office and talk to Wayne. Or come by on a Tuesday at 2 pm for a kit-making session.

Unison also has a sister program to Harm Reduction that focuses on Hepatitis C awareness and prevention. Contact Tamara at 416-787-1676 ext. 362 to learn more.

Community Partner Profile

Family Service Toronto

Staff: Abdirahman Sabriye, Community Worker, Community and Neighbourhood Development, Family Service Toronto



Before working with Family Service Toronto, Abdirahman Sabriye worked as Executive Director for the Somali Association of Etobicoke and for a short time as a manager with the Somali multi-service agency *Dejinta Beesha*. In 1998, Sabriye joined FST, where he focused initially on mental wellness concerns (high suicide rates were shocking the Somali community where many had recently escaped civil war). Approaching this sensitive topic through a “skills building for health” approach, and using peer leaders to bring out the community, the project was very successful. Today, Sabriye works primarily with residents in the neighbourhood of Lawrence Heights on skills building and community empowerment initiatives. **Contact Sabriye at 416-586-9777 ext. 426.**

Family Service Toronto (FST) is a city-wide organization that partners with Unison across two of our catchment neighbourhoods. Like Unison, FST serves individuals, families and communities with a commitment to enhancing health, community governance and equity. FST offers a wide variety of programs and services to help people cope more effectively, feel better, improve relationships and strengthen their family life.

In Lawrence Heights, Sabriye Abdirahman of FST works with Unison on the BePart Project. BePart is a research partnership of residents and agency staff. Last year, BePart conducted resident-led fact-finding to learn “How can residents and agencies be more effective partners in addressing needs and services within the community?” You can read about their recommendations at www.bepart.ca. Also in Lawrence Heights, Sabriye supports a grassroots Somali mothers’ group, and partners with North York Community House on the Community Learning Exchange which provides free skills building workshops on stress management, budgeting and more.

In both Lawrence Heights and Bathurst-Finch, various FST staff contribute to the Steering Committees and workgroups/

committees of local interagency networks. Closer to the ground, FST provides funding for a part-time Education Workgroup Coordinator in Lawrence Heights who works with homework clubs and organizes informational and training events for the community. Also, FST’s Connecting Families program will be offered this winter through both Baycrest and Flemington elementary schools. In the Bathurst-Finch neighbourhood, FST supports the organizing efforts of four grassroots groups, and provides services to the Iranian Community.

Contact info for programs mentioned in this article:

BePart: Maria 647-241-0596

Mothers Helping Mothers:

Sabriye 416-586-9777 x426

Hodan 416-789-9579

Community Learning Exchange:

Basra 416-784-0920 x226

Connecting Families:

Gillian 416-595-0307 x230

Bathurst-Finch:

Mandana 416-586-9777 x450

FST also provides other programs at its 700 Lawrence Avenue West site including OPTIONS, Passport, FIT, and Counselling. You can find out more at their web site www.familyserVICEToronto.org