



**WISH**  
Drop-In Centre Society

# WISH Drop-In Centre Society Annual Report: 2014-2015



*Painting by a 2015 WISH Learning Centre Participant*

# WISH Drop-In Centre Society

## 2014-2015 Board of Directors

Roberta Robertson	<i>Chair</i>	Edwina Houlihan (outgoing)	
Adrienne Lee	<i>Vice Chair</i>	Dagmar Jikeli (outgoing)	
Siobhan McCormick	<i>Secretary</i>	Claudia McMahon (outgoing)	
Sarah Ciarrocchi	<i>Treasurer</i>	Sarah Orr	
Karen D. Berry		Beverley Ranger	
Dee Dee Carrigan		Reann Sousa (outgoing)	
Lindsay Chen		Emma Watkinson	
Tina Desnomies (outgoing)		Kayan Yu	
Christina Entrekin			
Elizabeth Gibson (outgoing)		Kate Gibson	<i>Executive Director (Retired)</i>
Kirsten Heymann (outgoing)		Mebrat Beyene	<i>Executive Director</i>

## About WISH

**WISH Drop-In Centre Society** is a **registered charity** (CRN #87047 5563 RR0001).

The mission of WISH is to improve the health, safety and well-being of self-identified women who are involved in Vancouver's street-based sex trade.

Services at WISH are exclusively for woman-identified sex workers.

WISH puts its mission into action by operating an overnight drop-in centre at 330 Alexander Street that is open seven nights a week.

Some of the services women can access at the WISH Drop-In Centre Society are:

- **Hot, nutritious meals (dinner and breakfast) and healthy snacks**
- **Safe, clean washrooms and showers**
- **Clean clothing and personal care items**
- **Individualized support two nights a week, that is culturally-safe for indigenous participants**
- **Educational activities in an on-site Learning Centre, operated in partnership with Capilano University**
- **Aboriginal cultural activities and culturally-safe programming**
- **Nursing care in an on-site clinic**
- **Overnight street outreach by the Mobile Access Project (MAP) Van**
- **Supported employment and volunteer opportunities**
- **Friendship, conversation, social activities**

WISH is involved in community initiatives that aim to improve the health, safety and well-being of women in the sex trade, including

- **Living in Community**
- **The February 14th Annual Women's Memorial March**
- **Vancouver Sex Work Supports and Exiting Consortium**
- **Vancouver City Task Force on Sex Work & Sexual Exploitation**
- **SisterWatch**
- **Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**
- **Downtown Eastside Literacy Roundtable**

*Our work is funded by donors from **Provincial Government, the City of Vancouver, foundations, corporations, places of worship, community organizations, service clubs and generous individuals.***

## Farewell, Kate Gibson!

It was with heavy hearts that we said good bye to our beloved long-time Executive Director, Kate Gibson this past summer.

Though we miss her very much, we wish her all the best on her next chapter!

When Kate first joined WISH as Executive Director 12 years ago, WISH was in its early stages, though it was still known as a safe, essential point of contact for sex-working women who had nowhere else to go. 5-6 women would drop-in a night, and sandwiches were served on a rolling cart. Volunteers provided non-judgmental support and referrals. Participants had a safe place to go where they knew they could simply be themselves without fear.

Under Kate's leadership, WISH grew into the organization it is today, serving over 500 women annually through a purpose-built drop-in centre that is open overnight, where women can meet their basic needs, receive frontline support and participate in engaging programs. WISH grew exponentially with Kate's guidance, while remaining true to its roots as a rights-based, trans-inclusive, sex-working-women-first organization.

*Thank-you, Kate, for your outstanding service and dedication to WISH. We are grateful!*



*Former WISH Executive Director Kate Gibson (centre), with WISH staff*

## Change in our Backyard

Change in our Backyard was an exciting community-based research project at WISH that culminated in 2015 in a resource booklet by sex-working women, for sex-working women. This booklet explores subjects as diverse as self-care, gender & sexuality, relationships, children, stigma, violence, health care and housing. It contains women's perspectives, stories and experiences along with information about accessible, sex-working-women friendly resources in the DTES.

A core group of sex-working women worked on this project, developing their research skills and interviewing 160+ women along the way. More than 500 booklets were distributed to street-based, sex-working women in the WISH community.

**WISH would like to thank the women who made this project a reality, the staff who facilitated it and the Catherine Donnelly Foundation who made it possible with a very generous grant!**



## Note from the Board Chair

It is with great pride that I am able to reflect on the past year at WISH Drop-In Centre Society in my role as Board Chair. WISH continues to raise the bar year after year in providing caring, compassionate, non-judgmental care to women who are involved in Vancouver's street-based sex trade. I am honoured to play a part in this work.

WISH went through an enormous transition this year with the retirement of our long time Executive Director, Kate Gibson. For 12 years, Kate worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the incredible challenges sex-working women face in a society that continually tries to deny them their self-worth, safety and humanity. Under her leadership, WISH blossomed into the powerhouse it is today, serving over 500 women a year and providing a safe community and overnight refuge. WISH will be forever grateful to Kate for her dedication, her hard work and her unwavering commitment to women. On behalf of WISH, I would like to thank Kate for her outstanding service and wish her a happy and fulfilling retirement.



I am pleased to report that WISH hired a new Executive Director, Mebrat Beyene, this past June and we are very excited to benefit from her expertise and experience in non-profit management, most notably as the former Executive Director of Peer Net BC. We are looking forward to this new chapter!

*I would like to thank all of the wonderful WISH participants, donors, supporters, volunteers, board members and staff who make our work possible.* From donating to running for WISH in the annual Scotiabank Charity Challenge to organizing fundraisers in your community or through your place of worship or school to volunteering at the centre, there are so many ways to help. Please feel free to get in touch with us and be a part of our mission to improve the health, safety and well-being of women in the street-based sex trade.

Roberta Robertson—Board Chair

## Note from the Executive Director



For the past twelve years, Kate Gibson's contributions and dedication to WISH have been tremendous.

The scope of WISH's current programs and services and its organizational stability are a testament to her hard work. One of my earliest

jobs when I first moved to Vancouver was as a Program Officer with the BC/Yukon office of Status of Women Canada. As one of Status of Women Canada's funded groups, it was then that I was first introduced to WISH and its programming. Since then, and from the outside, I watched WISH's growth and noted its impeccable reputation as a stalwart proponent of sex workers' rights, and in providing a safe haven for women-identified sex workers in this city. A little over fourteen years later, I am absolutely honoured to join the WISH team as Executive Director, and excited to pick up from where Kate Gibson left off.

I absolutely must highlight the passion, dedication, and skills of the women who work and volunteer at WISH. It is a diverse group of women who come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and whose commitment to this work is unparalleled.

In my first couple of months here, I have been overwhelmingly welcomed and inspired by this group of women who work extremely hard and who care enormously about WISH and the women who access WISH. I would like to thank them

for helping me get oriented, and for making me feel like part of the team.

With such a large transition in leadership, WISH's goals in this coming year are to continue to ensure our financial and operational stability so as to respond to the needs of women in Vancouver's street-based sex trade.

WISH will continue to participate in the various multi-stakeholder committees, roundtables, and consortiums to ensure that the issues of women sex trade workers are properly addressed and considered. Women engaged in the street-based sex trade are among the most marginalized women in Vancouver. Issues of safety; access to full health and mental health care; chronic and cyclical poverty and homelessness; the effects of trauma, stigma, residential schools and systemic discrimination and racism all mean that the women we serve face multiple barriers and challenges that most of us would barely be able to manage.

The programs and services of WISH are much needed and well used, and we are ever grateful to our donors and funders for their commitment to our work and to women we serve.

I look forward to meeting more of our supporters, and urge you to contact us about different ways you can get involved in WISH.

Peace,

Mebrat Beyene



## In Women's Words



“What I like most about the program is the **strong bond** I have with my sisters, **learning together** and from each other, the **laughter** with the girls.”

- 2015 Aboriginal Health & Safety Program participant

"I just want to send my love to everyone at WISH. A few years back I was very down and out and I was working the streets. **WISH gave me a safe place to be, a yummy hot meal and the feeling of acceptance.** I greatly enjoyed some of the events I attended.

**Today I'm clean and sober, I have 2 beautiful sons and a loving boyfriend"**

- Marcie (Former WISH Participant)



*Aboriginal Health & Safety Project  
Coordinator Alexandria Beverly holding up a square of a  
star blanket created by an AHSP participant*

"From this program I have learned that there is a place of **friendship** and **comfort**. I have learned to **trust other women**. I have fun and **laugh** with my **new friends**."

- 2015 Aboriginal Health & Safety Program participant



Collage by a WISH Learning Centre Participant

"I absolutely **love working here!** Working with all these ladies at the drop-in and on the streets is **awesome. Puts a smile on my face.**"

- Peer Safety Patrol (WISH supported-employment program) participant

## WISH Program News 2014/2015

### Aboriginal Health & Safety Project (AHSP)

The Aboriginal Health & Safety Project is developed & delivered by indigenous women for indigenous women. Its purpose is to help indigenous women who are involved in the sex trade **reclaim their culture, receive culturally-safe support and connect with peers.**

This year, women in the program made **drums, moccasins, wall hangings, Cree star blankets and dream catchers.** They also went on several **culturally-relevant outings** and attended workshops on using the **medicine wheel** for healing.



In 2014/2015, the Aboriginal Health & Safety Project was generously supported by BC Civil Forfeiture, Anglican Fund for Healing & Reconciliation, the United Church Healing Fund, RBC Foundation, the Ministry of Aboriginal Children and Women's Services and generous individuals.

### Peer Volunteer Program

The Peer Volunteer Program provides opportunities for women in the WISH community to **volunteer at the WISH Drop-In Centre**, with the support of staff.

This past year, over 30 women in the program volunteered in the kitchen, **preparing meals** and in the donations room sorting items and **assisting their peers.**



Thank-you to all the Peer Volunteers for your awesome contributions to the centre this past year!

### WISH Drop-In Centre

The WISH Drop-In Centre is the heart and soul of our organization and our community. In 2014/2015, the WISH Drop-In Centre served:

- 48,626 meals
- 7,739 sandwiches
- 11,062 bowls of soup
- 10,478 snacks (plus 7,947 distributed through the MAP Van)

In addition, WISH made 2,030 referrals that resulted in women receiving emergency shelter.

Nurses in the WISH clinic made 722 medical referrals.

37 women were referred to detox and treatment

Over 600 individual women came through our doors!

In 2014/2015, the WISH Drop-In Centre was supported by Green Shield Canada, Play It Forward Productions Society, the 1988 Foundation, Chimp Foundation, Rotary Women's Association, ILWU Local 500 (Longshoremen), The Lillian and Nick Chepil Legacy Fund, Telus Corporation, The Andrew Mahon Foundation, St. Mary's Kerrisdale, Investors' Group Financial Services Inc., Richform Construction Supply Co., The Kingsgate Chorus, West Vancouver United Church Women, Highlands United Church, Canada Gives, Houssian Family Foundation, MacDonald's Prescriptions Ltd. and Lantic Inc as well as over 500 individual supporters. **THANK-YOU ALL!**

### Aboriginal Women's Button Blanket Group

In 2014/2015, WISH was delighted to introduce a new program: The Aboriginal Women's Button Blanket Group was started to give indigenous women from the WISH community opportunities to learn button-blanket making.



Women created beautiful projects and the program was a success. In fact, in the fall of 2015, the work of participants is due to be shown at an exhibition at Gallery Gachet. Make sure you are following us on social media for updates. We are so proud of all involved in this wonderful project!

## WISH Program News 2014/2015

### Volunteers

#### What would we do without volunteers?

In 2014/2015 over 80 volunteers helped make the WISH Drop-In Centre the caring and compassionate place that it is.

Would you like to know more about volunteering at WISH? We'd love to hear from you! Please email [wishvolunteers@shaw.ca](mailto:wishvolunteers@shaw.ca) for more information.



### MAP Van

The MAP Van is a unique **street outreach** initiative. Seven days a week, from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., the van is on the road, **distributing harm reduction supplies, providing crisis intervention, referrals and non-judgmental support** to women on the streets, many of whom do not access any other services.



### Peer Safety Patrol

The Peer Safety Patrol is a **supported-employment** initiative that **trains, employs and supports** women to **provide security** for the WISH Drop-In Centre.

Peer Safety Patrollers do a fantastic job keeping the area around the centre **safe and orderly** for participants, staff and volunteers. They are also a **trusted presence** on the streets, providing compassionate peer outreach.

Going forward into the new year, WISH has added **resume writing workshops, personal money management refresher courses, one-on-one goal setting sessions and basic computer training** at the Vancouver Public Library to the program.



In 2014/2015 the Peer Safety Patrol program was generously supported by the Sprott Foundation, Face the World Foundation, Vancity Community Grants, Ivanhoe Cambridge (Metropolis at Metrotown), the BC Masonic Foundation, the Leon Judah Blackmore Foundation, the Lohn Foundation, the runners/walkers and wheelers in the 2014 Scotiabank Charity Challenge and generous individuals.

Thanks to the **MAC AIDS Fund** and a generous bequest from an anonymous donor, WISH was able to purchase and customize a brand new vehicle in 2014/2015. It is on the road and staff and participants are benefiting greatly from it!

In 2014/15, the MAP Van was supported by the City of Vancouver, the Province of BC (Victims Services and Crime Prevention Division), the MAC AIDS Fund, Rent Cheque, Cat Signs and Decals & generous individuals.

### WISH Learning Centre

The WISH Learning Centre is located within the WISH Drop-In Centre. At the centre, women can practice **literacy and math**, expand their **communication skills**, learn **computer basics** and get **tutoring** help with GED programs. The centre is a partnership between WISH and Capilano University.

In 2014/2015, instructors from the Learning Centre took 10 participants on a **fun and educational trip to the Sunshine Coast** where they got to experience culture at the Sechelt Museum and spend time in nature.



In 2014/15, the WISH Learning Centre continued to operate with the support and partnership of Capilano University. It was also supported by generous individuals including those who supported our crowdfunding campaign!





WISH is a registered Canadian Charity #87047 5563 RR0001.

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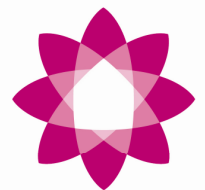
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*Thank-you for your support!*



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